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# “La poesia dopo la fine della poesia”: Visionary Realism and the Ethics of Playful Care in Aldo Nove’s Twenty-First-Century Poetry

Danila Cannamela

Tutto è così presente da essere perduto.  
Tutto è così remoto da essere imminente.

[Everything is so present to be lost.  
Everything is so remote to be imminent.]

Milo De Angelis<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Aldo Nove, a successful novelist who gained visibility in the 1990s in the midst of the *Giovani cannibali* controversial success, is also a prolific poet. He debuted in 1989 with *Tornando nel tuo sangue*, later included in the collection *Fuoco su Babilonia!* (2003). This second volume gathers the author’s poetic production from 1984 to 1996, featuring a mix of autobiographic realism and psychotic distortion of reality that resonates with Nove’s pulp narrative fiction. In 2001, along with Raul Montanari and Tiziano Scarpa, he published *Nelle galassie oggi come oggi. Covers*. In this volume, the three writers perform “poetic covers” of a number of music hits, spanning rock, techno, punk, and pop songs. Six years later, Nove engaged again in the practice of creative reuse with *Maria* (2007), a poetry collection that narrates the Virgin Mary’s life, innovating the long-standing tradition of Marian hymnology.

More recently, in *A schemi di costellazioni* (2010) and *Addio mio Novecento* (2014), the poet has explored a peculiar time in which a Proustian-like intimate *durée* commingles with geological history. This article argues that the material “texture” of Nove’s hybrid time is the one of the Anthropocene, the unit of geological time that marks both the end of the Holocene and the beginning of a new epoch (or a new stratum) in which human agency emerges as a major transformative force on earth.<sup>2</sup> In this epoch, human history has literally engraved geological matter and terrestrial life: human past, stories, and emotions have interacted—and intra-acted—with rocks, celestial bodies, millenarian plants, and zoological quasi-phoenixes, like the self-regenerating jellyfish *Torritopsis nutricula*.<sup>3</sup> This is why Nove’s cosmological poetry represents our memory as a material stratification, as a sediment hybridized with remote and contemporary narratives of nonhuman agents. On the page, this intermixed *material time* takes the shape of free

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<sup>1</sup> Milo De Angelis, “Che cosa è la poesia?,” in *Tutte le poesie 1969–2015* (Milan: Mondadori, 2017), 405–17, 414.

<sup>2</sup> Atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer independently introduced the notion of Anthropocene in 2000. While the Working Group on the Anthropocene recommended the formalization of the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch in August 2016, the Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy, the International Commission on Stratigraphy, and the Union of Geological Sciences have not yet voted on this issue.

<sup>3</sup> This jellyfish is featured in the poem “La medusa che vive all’infinito,” in *A schemi di costellazioni* (Turin: Einaudi), 98; see also “Nota dell’autore,” 103. Henceforth, quotations from this collection (*AS*) will be provided in-text.

verse combining in “segmenti auto-aggreganti, quasi intercambiabili” [“auto-aggregating, quasi-interchangeable segments”], as Bianca Garavelli states in her review of *Addio mio Novecento*.<sup>4</sup> Moving from this premise, I contend that Nove’s recent collections neither mark a radical shift from the author’s multifaceted realist poetics nor mourn the end of human memory in the epoch of artificial intelligence.<sup>5</sup> Rather, these two volumes testify to Nove’s continued interest in an experimental realism that, in the twenty-first century, reflects on a sense of the past, while, at the same time, facing the pressing challenge of retelling the present through what Garavelli defines as “le tracce di una memoria cosmica nascosta sotto la nostra forma umana” [“the traces of a cosmic memory hidden under our human form”]. By “narrating”—or, rather, by letting matter narrate—the stories of an epoch in which the *anthropos* has inscribed its history on the surface of earth, Nove raises awareness of a gap in our collective memory. The western world has invasively traced its past on the terrestrial strata, yet it has customarily “forgotten” to acknowledge that this material story is a co-agentic “storied matter”<sup>6</sup> that, while exceeding human intentionality, creates a rippling network of interactions and meanings.

As we will see, Nove’s verses problematize the amnesia that affected western culture throughout the twentieth century, and is still affecting it now, already two decades into the twenty-first century. *A schemi di costellazioni* and *Addio mio Novecento* portray the revelatory, yet disorienting, “multiple time” of the Anthropocene, a time where past and present come together—“siamo stati stelle noi” [“stars, we were stars”]<sup>7</sup> reads the poem “Il tempo”—and simultaneously shape our future.<sup>8</sup> Thinking of time as a site of material accumulation generates the puzzling realization that we live in an epoch in which everything has become *remotely imminent*. Yet—and this is the challenge Nove explores in his poetry—how can we still make sense of our history through the decentered geo-perspective of the Anthropocene and re-envision our existence on earth as a living continuum unfolding across time? What if, in order to deal with this troubling temporality, we have to abandon our adult divisive view (human versus nonhuman, culture versus nature, mind versus body) and recover the panoptic and playful vision of childhood? And, finally, how can poetry deploy an innovative language, able to express this inclusive perspective?

Examining these interrelated questions, I begin by briefly contextualizing Nove’s poetics of the Anthropocene as a new phase of the author’s multifaceted experimentation with realism. The second section situates Nove’s poetry within the scholarly debate on the Anthropocene, focusing on theoretical proposals that have unexpectedly suggested playful strategies of collaborative survival.<sup>9</sup> In a similar fashion, Nove’s twenty-first-century poetics engages an ethics of care, founded on the notion of childhood playfulness, to elaborate on a possible path of co-survival. In doing so, the author guides his readers through an infantile *nostos*, a return to the lost time of

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<sup>4</sup> Bianca Garavelli, “Nove e la ruota del passato come pulviscolo di galassia,” review of *Addio mio Novecento*, by Aldo Nove. *Avvenire*, October 24, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> This perspective emerges, for example, in the radio review of Roberto Galaverni, “Aldo Nove, *Addio mio Novecento*”: <<https://www.rsi.ch/rete-due/programmi/cultura/il-segnalibro/Aldo-Nove-Addio-mio-Novecento-Einaudi-3268410.html>> (accessed on February 7, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Serpil Oppermann, “From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism: Creative Materiality and Narrative Agency,” in *Material Ecocriticism*, eds. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 21–36, 21.

<sup>7</sup> When not otherwise indicated, all translations from the Italian original are mine.

<sup>8</sup> Aldo Nove, *Addio mio Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 2014), 13, l. 45. Henceforth, quotations from this collection (*AN*) will be provided in-text.

<sup>9</sup> I am borrowing the expression “collaborative survival” from Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 2.

childhood, which unfolds key allegorical meanings. As Romano Luperini explains, allegory implies a diachronic process of interpretation, as its rich significance “si dispone in un *continuum*, e quindi si scioglie nella successione storica, aspira alla narratività” [“places itself in a continuum, and therefore releases itself in the historical duration, it strives for narrativity”].<sup>10</sup> Nove’s allegorical use of childhood aims to “narrate” overlooked stories casting doubts on the dominant discourses of enlightenment and socio-economic development that have informed western society throughout the centuries.<sup>11</sup> The return to childhood becomes the image of a pre-modern time outside “adult history” and its binaries, in which it is still possible to experience a privileged undividedness with nature—“sarebbe arrivata la storia e allora ci saremmo / separati” [“history would come and then we would be / separated”] (“Prima dell’infanzia,” *AN* 16, ll. 5–6). Infancy also serves as a figuration of the (surprisingly) non-anthropocentric “childhood” of western thought that, beginning with the Milesian School in the sixth century B.C., posited the primal source of life and meaning in the creative agency of natural elements.<sup>12</sup> This double allegory reconnecting childhood with the non-anthropocentric roots of western thought is the leading thread of Nove’s twenty-first-century cosmological realism.

In the third part of the article, I use close reading to show how Nove, in *A schemi di costellazioni* and *Addio mio Novecento*, gives shape to a living stratigraphy in which human and nonhuman stories, spiritual wonder for vital immanence, and material reality accumulate and “speak” together. The last section draws from Nove’s lecture “La poesia dopo la fine della poesia,” examining how, at a meta-literary level, the author’s farewell to the twentieth century is an intriguing attempt to balance the tension between the avant-garde politicized distortion of reality of the 1960s and 1990s, and the mythical evasion from the real, featured by the 1970s poetics of the “parola innamorata” [“enamored word”].<sup>13</sup> In his recent collections, Nove is not dismissing these *modi poetandi*, but rather bending them to new literary, ethical, and environmental purposes.

By discussing *A schemi di costellazioni* and *Addio mio Novecento*, my goal is to analyze contemporary Italian poetry as a transdisciplinary territory of inquiry that reflects an up-to-date, yet also millennia-old, perspective on collaborative survival in the Anthropocene.

### A New Visionary-Realist Poetics

Before exploring Nove’s twenty-first-century diptych as a realistic, yet also visionary and “infantile” representation of Anthropocene temporality, I will provide a brief overview of the author’s realism, from his poetic debut to his most recent work. Neo-avant-garde poet Elio Pagliarani, introducing *Fuoco su Babilonia!*, finds the common denominator of Nove’s early poetics in a visionary realism that, similarly to pop art, turns everyday concrete images into

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<sup>10</sup> Romano Luperini, “Note sull’allegorismo novecentesco. Il caso di Montale,” in *L’allegorismo del moderno: saggi sull’allegorismo come forma artistica del moderno e come metodo di conoscenza* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1990), 279–98, 280.

<sup>11</sup> On the function of allegory, see also Angelo Petrella, ed., *Gruppo 93: l’antologia poetica* (Lavagna: Zona, 2010), 10.

<sup>12</sup> In this article, I am not discussing pre-Socratic philosophy in depth, but rather using it as a poetic image. For an overview of this philosophical thought, see Catherine Osborne, *Pre-Socratic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Carlo Diano, *Studi e saggi di filosofia antica* (Padua: Antenore, 1973).

<sup>13</sup> See Gemma Gaetani’s afterward to *Fuoco su Babilonia! Poesie 1984–1996*, by Aldo Nove, ed. Gemma Gaetani (Milan: Crocetti, 2003), 137–41, 140.

allegorical “explosions” of meaning.<sup>14</sup> To exemplify this, we might recall the poem “Bolletta dell’Enel.” In this text, a July 1988 energy bill predictably stands as an allegory of an “infernal” time of routine and impending duties. Yet the invoice unexpectedly leads the poetic persona to an inner place where dominant logic can still be challenged and transformed into creative counter-action, as the enigmatic *adunaton* of the conclusion suggests, “il deserto è una goccia / che dall’infanzia prorompe / in questa cucina” [“the desert is a drop / that from childhood, gushes out / in this kitchen”].<sup>15</sup> It is perhaps for the latent presence of this counter-action that poet Lello Voce has defined Nove’s poetry as “la cronaca di uno strazio e insieme delle ragioni per continuare a resistergli” [“the account of a torture, and along with that, of the reasons to continue to resist”].<sup>16</sup> Resistance to a nonsense that is often masked as the dominant logic is one of the common themes of Nove’s realism.

Citing critic Walter Pedullà, Pagliarani argues that it is precisely through this combination of real account and sudden evocation of unforeseen images that Nove is a “realista visionario [...] [che] vince sul tempo” [“visionary realist [who] [...] wins over time”].<sup>17</sup> In the afterword to the volume, editor Gemma Gaetani further examines the question of Nove’s “realismo alterato” [“altered realism”], defining the author’s poetry as an experimental laboratory probing a reality that, although familiar, “è, sinteticamente, l’Altro” [“is, synthetically, the Other”].<sup>18</sup>

Nove’s eclectic exploration of the alterity of the real is further revised in *Maria*, a collection in which the poet retells the episodes of the Virgin Mary’s life—from the mystical wonder of the annunciation to the tragic pathos of Jesus’ crucifixion—creating a style that mixes delicate tones with the lively dramatic poetry of Jacopone da Todi. Yet, rewriting the past eventually leads Nove to encounter his own present and, emulating Dante and Petrarch, he closes this Marian book with a hyper-realist invocation to the Virgin, taking place during rush hour in the outskirts of Milan:

tra i gas dei camion, gli occhi, la scintilla  
degli occhi tuoi, Madre, prima che taccia  
la sera madre abbracciami ...

[amidst the gas emissions of trucks, the eyes, the sparkle  
of your eyes, Mother, before the night  
quiets, mother, hug me...].<sup>19</sup>

Realism offers a lens, or a deforming lens, to observe, interpret, and reinterpret reality through time.

If realism—although a quintessentially visionary one—is the unifying trait of Nove’s poetry from the 1980s to the early twenty-first century, in the diptych *A schemi di costellazioni* and *Addio mio Novecento*, recognizable personae and geographies rarefy, and the very notion of the

<sup>14</sup> See Elio Pagliarani, Introduction to *Fuoco su Babilonia!*, 7–11, in particular 7–8, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Nove, *Fuoco su Babilonia!*, 33, ll. 14–16.

<sup>16</sup> Lello Voce, review of Aldo Nove, *Fuoco su Babilonia!*, <http://www.lellovoce.it/Aldo-Nove-Fuoco-su-Babilonia>.

<sup>17</sup> Pagliarani, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Gaetani, 139.

<sup>19</sup> Nove, “Madre di Clivio e di Gerusalemme,” in *Maria* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007), 37. The poem was originally published in *Fuoco su Babilonia!* with the title “Madre di Dio,” 123–24, ll. 12–14.

present dissolves into a deranged time of “thick simultaneity,”<sup>20</sup> that is, a material temporality dotted with childhood memories and marked by the rhythm of a vibrant cosmos. Past and future, local and global history, ancient philosophy of original elements and quantum physics chaotically converge into “due fiumi che si sciogliono nel mare / da cui veniamo” [“two rivers that melt in the sea / we come from”] (“Notte,” *AN* 86). We may wonder whether this is the acknowledgment of the end of a linear time that postmodern relativism had already undermined, or—as I propose here—the faithful representation of an epoch that has thrown our alleged agency over time and memory into disarray.

Nove’s recent poetry is a belated poetic farewell to the author’s “earthy realism,” in all its prosaic and poetic shades, from the collective delirium of 1990s consumerism to the social denunciation he voiced in *Mi chiamo Roberta, ho 40 anni, guadagno 250 euro al mese...* (2006), a dossier on “precarariato” [job precariousness] in Italy. And yet, in *A schemi di costellazioni* and *Addio mio Novecento*, Nove is not properly ending or abandoning his “earthy realism” but recasting it. Put differently, he is forging a new form of materialist and visionary realism that would turn the multiple temporality of the Anthropocene and its human-nonhuman assemblages into tangible allegories. Nove is, then, a “visionary realist who wins over time” as he succeeds in crafting a new poetics that portrays the twenty-first century as the epoch of a lively—yet also tragic—awareness of our overlooked entanglement with nonhuman life: the time in which we have finally realized that

ci fa paura quando dicono  
le pietre cosa siamo ancora prima  
di noi

[we are afraid when  
the stones tell us what we are even before  
we do] (“Universo 2010 I,” *AS* 20, ll. 1–3).

### **The Multiple Temporality and Playful Coexistence of the Anthropocene**

As a theoretical platform, the Anthropocene has extended its meaning far beyond its geological context; it has in fact been used to theorize, across disciplines, a rich variety of proposals that address social and environmental concerns at a planetary scale, “notably climate change, ocean acidification, effects of overpopulation, deforestation, soil erosion, overfishing and the general and accelerating degradation of ecosystems.”<sup>21</sup> The dominant narrative of the Anthropocene predictably focuses either on a rhetoric of apocalyptic mass extinction or on a crusade to “save the planet.” However, “apocalypse,” in its original ancient Greek meaning and biblical adoption, also designates a transformative time of revelation; furthermore, in archaic Roman culture, the apocalyptic ritual of the *mundus patet* marked the cyclical regenerative emergence of the occult

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<sup>20</sup> In using the expression “thick simultaneity,” I am referring to Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 2.

world of the dead.<sup>22</sup> The motif of renewal resonates with a number of reflections that have stressed the need to engage with a new playful attitude and creative vision to face the challenges of a present time that is “ripe for sensing precarity.”<sup>23</sup> It is precisely within this discourse on playful ethics that we can situate Nove’s cosmological poetry: through its return to childhood, this poetry explores the potential of joyful care and shared inventiveness as an alternative to the widespread logic of “progress-as-expansion.”

Undoubtedly, the disorienting temporality of the Anthropocene has provoked, as Timothy Clark argues, a “derangement of scale,” causing a shifting in our sense of time and place. Our human perspective, Clark continues, must adjust to the realization that “if our agency has increased, our perspective has become less relevant to judge the [global] aftermath of our action.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, one of the main issues that this new geo-temporality posits is precisely the difficulty of seeing the “whole picture” of the Anthropocene—a multifaceted picture that has been forming across centuries—through our limited view. A further problem is to temper a too-human vision and rethink, as Claire Colebrook suggests, the “world *as image* (as referential) but not referential *for any body*.”<sup>25</sup>

Geologist Jan Zalasiewicz has addressed the problematic aspect of visualizing the Anthropocene through an artistic comparison: were we to look at one of Seurat’s Pointillist paintings and focus on one particular section at a time, it would take a lot of observation to grasp the coherence of the entire work.<sup>26</sup> Yet, even the few glimpses of the “Anthropocene picture” we can currently grasp force us to acknowledge that major environmental transformations have occurred during the human past, starting from the Industrial Revolution in the late nineteenth century or, much earlier, with the introduction of agriculture, or more recently, in the aftermath of WWII, with the atomic contamination of the soil and the later acceleration of industry. Thus, at present, while trying to reconstruct an intricate “picture,” we should envision non-anthropocentric mental cartographies along with socio-economic routes that would reinvent both the logic of late-capitalism and classic Marxist tradition. This is, at its core, the multifaceted struggle that the Anthropocene presents us with, while its own name echoes an additional series of issues. For example, who is the *anthropos* of the epoch that bears its name? And, is “Anthropocene” a suitable name, or should we rather speak, as Jason W. Moore argues, of the Capitalocene to account for the role that economic exploitation and accelerated industrialization has played in the environmental crisis?<sup>27</sup> Finally, how can humans learn to conceive of themselves as a homogeneous species while simultaneously recognizing embodied discourses of racial, gender, and class differences?

As previously mentioned, rethinking human existence in the Anthropocene has entailed exploring new strategies of interspecies coexistence as well as new notions of scalability that

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<sup>22</sup> See Niccolò Scaffai, “Mondi sconosciuti: il tema apocalittico e le forme della narrazione,” in *Letteratura e ecologia. Forme e temi di una relazione narrativa* (Rome: Carocci, 2017), 101–37, 101–102.

<sup>23</sup> Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Claire Colebrook, “Introduction. Framing the End of the Species: Images Without Bodies” in *Death of the PostHuman. Essays on Extinction*, Vol. 1 (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2014), 28.

<sup>26</sup> See Jan Zalasiewicz, “The Extraordinary Strata of the Anthropocene,” in *Environmental Humanities: Voices from the Anthropocene*, eds. Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino (London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 115–32, 116.

<sup>27</sup> On the notion of Capitalocene, see in particular Jason W. Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press), 2016; and “The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of our Ecological Crisis,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44/3 (2017): 594–630.

surprisingly share a common interest in a renewed sense of playfulness. In *Dark Ecology* (2016), Timothy Morton has argued that to live as co-agents we need to recast human cognition—and time, we might add—as a loop, namely, as a circular process of contingent interconnectedness rather than a linear system of stark divisions. Ecological awareness, or acknowledging that we are, think, and act in a reality that, like a Möbius strip, has only one side and one boundary, may turn a moment of crisis into new joyful modes of coexistence. As Morton provocatively explains, the coexistence he envisions is founded on the practice of (re)learning how to make and play with toys, two basic creative activities that human and nonhuman animals share.

Making toys becomes a suitable metaphor to designate new “meaningful collaborations between the arts, the humanities, and engineering”<sup>28</sup> to develop new strategies of survival. Morton’s idea of making alliances through toys resonates with Rosi Braidotti’s understanding of *zoe*—a vital immanent force that includes human life—in relation to technology. As the posthuman theorist affirms, *zoe* can engage in a “playful and pleasure-prone relationship to technology that is not based on functionalism,”<sup>29</sup> shifting the hegemonic alliance between human and machine outside the capitalistic rules of the game and its highly-polluting industrial methods. It is through this provocative ethics of collaborative “toy-making” that the dark times of the ecological crisis might turn into a process of self-awareness and positive change.

Donna Haraway has similarly used a playful metaphor to describe the troubled time we are witnessing. In *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), she compares a game of string figures to the multi-agentic involvement that characterizes the temporality of what she dubs Chthulucene, rather than Anthropocene. In coining the term “Chthulucene,” she is referring to a spider native of California that immediately brings to mind the octopus head of Lovecraft’s Cthulhu. For Haraway, this epoch has ushered in a “tentacular” time in which “conventional pasts, presents, or futures” are no longer suitable divisive categories; rather, they interweave like strings that shape new forms, creating a “thick, ongoing presence, with hyphae infusing all sorts of temporalities and materialities.”<sup>30</sup> The intricateness of Haraway’s chthonian geo-time recalls Morton’s “archelitic,” an epoch of close relatedness between humans and nonhumans, which has been overshadowed by the modern productive time of “agrilogistics.” Once again, we see that the emphasis of this discourse is not so much on the ethics of sacrifice but on a renewed sense of co-belonging in which humans are redefined as co-players or as strings shaping new forms with other strings.

Another form of playful—and truly intriguing—ethics of co-belonging has inspired the activism of ecosexual artists Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle. For example, their documentary *Goodbye Gauley Mountain: An Ecosexual Love Story* (2015) “braids together three main themes—the joys of ecosexuality (or, reconceiving Earth as a lover rather than a mother), the destruction of MTR [Mountain Top Removal], and Beth’s upbringing in the heart of a West Virginia coal mining family.”<sup>31</sup> The goal of the documentary, and of ecosexual activism more broadly, is to build a more aware yet also more love-driven community that mobilizes LGBTQI groups along with environmentalists of any sexuality and gender. As the “Ecosex Manifesto” reads, the members of this community feel united by their shared “promise to love, honor and

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<sup>28</sup> Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 142.

<sup>29</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013), 91.

<sup>30</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, “Goodbye Gauley Mountain: An Ecosexual Love Story,” *Sexecology.org*, <http://sexecology.org/projects/goodbye-gauley-mountain-an-ecosexual-coming-out-story/#> (accessed February 6, 2019).



cherish you Earth, until death bring us closer together forever.”<sup>32</sup> The open provocation of Stephens and Sprinkle’s proposal relies on the idea that sexualizing nature into a lover might foster mutual pleasure, trust, and care not only among diverse communities of people but also between human and nonhuman agents, whether they be animate or inanimate.

Asserting the ethics of care and love to foster horizontal collaborations is a central theme in the discourse of theologian and ecologist Leonardo Boff, who, in the book *Essential Care* (2008), has tied both the essence of humanity and the principle for “a new paradigm of living together” to a renewed care for “plants, animals, landscapes.”<sup>33</sup> Introducing this ethos of compassion—from the Latin *compator*, to suffer or to endure together—Boff advances a critique of the Tamagotchi, an electronic game in which players care for a virtual pet, which was quite popular in late 1990s–early 2000s, when Boff’s book was originally published in Brazil. While the theologian sees in Tamagotchi an implosion of human care into a self-centered virtual game, we could also see how the “Tamagotchi ethos” offers an unselfish practice of care in which human, technology, and animal are united by a playful system of mutual relationships. If we focus on the game, disregarding for a moment the production system behind it, it is indeed striking that the Tamagotchi network of care is ultimately based on the playful idea that caring for someone or something is an enjoyable activity.

Nove’s farewell to the twentieth century echoes all these theoretical perspectives that, while acknowledging the disquieting “derangement of scale” provoked by the Anthropocene, have responded to this troubling temporality by reimagining humans as collaborative and playful agents. In *A schemi di costellazioni* and *Addio mio novecento*, Nove not only criticizes an exclusively human vision of time and space that overlooks inhuman complexity, but also suggests a possible new genealogy of western thought, founded on a renewed original connection between human and nonhuman, a connection that ultimately coincides with a return to the playful attitude of childhood.

The poet’s embracement of the child’s gaze might be compared to Charles Baudelaire’s perspective in “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863). The essay links the genius of the artist to a “deep and joyful curiosity” that allows him to be a “lover of life [who] makes the whole world his family” and enjoys the “immense reservoir of [its] electrical energy.”<sup>34</sup> In Baudelaire’s text, the child’s gaze is oriented towards the flickering multitude of the modern “great city,” and the endeavor of the child-artist relies on transferring such a dynamic world into his work, so that “[t]he phantasmagoria [is] distilled from nature” and “raw materials [...] are put in order, ranged and harmonized” (12). In this context, the child’s view fosters the modern divide between human-mediated beauty and nature; in contrast, Nove—who, we should recall, has an academic background in philosophy—adopts the motif of childhood memories as an allegory for the non-anthropocentric unity that characterized the “infancy” of western thought. In his twenty-first-century collections, he poetically engages with the cosmological investigation of the Milesian School (the triad Thales, Anaximenes, Anaximander), and with pre-Socratic philosophy more generally. This ancient lineage of Greek philosophy places the *arche*, the origin or the principle of life, in natural elements, including water, air, the indistinctness of original matter, earth, or

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<sup>32</sup> Sprinkle and Stephens “Ecosex Manifesto,” *Sexecology.org*: <http://sexecology.org/research-writing/ecosex-manifesto/> (accessed February 6, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Essential Care: An Ethics of Human Nature*, trans. Alexandre Guilherme (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), xi.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays by Charles Baudelaire*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon Press, 1965), 1–40, 8–9.

fire. Unlike later philosophers, who focused their speculation on the human, the pre-Socratics embraced a hylozoistic approach that identifies nature as immanence pervaded by living, and even divine, forces. Thus, while Baudelaire affirms that the child-artist would be rightfully bestowed with “the title of philosopher [...] if his excessive love of visible, tangible things [...] did not arouse in him a certain repugnance for the things that form the impalpable kingdom of the metaphysician” (9), Nove’s child draws from a philosophy that does tie matter with a more-than-human principle. His adoption of this line of thought as a poetic image is particularly interesting as many posthuman theorists, such as Braidotti, have proposed an alternative framework to the human/nonhuman paradigm of modernity by recovering and re-adapting Spinoza’s substance monism—a deterministic type of monism based on one infinite substance, God or nature, which contains all possible attributes.

Nove takes a further step back and retraces “the structural Other of modernity”<sup>35</sup> to its very origins—to its childhood, we might say—in western philosophy, putting into verse a speculative thought that is surprisingly rooted in a monistic ecophilosophy *ante litteram*. In his poetry, he turns to a long-lasting tradition of philosophy of life, philosophy of biology, and philosophy of nature, in which notions such as autonomy and freedom are understood in ontological terms, as properties embedded in living matter, be it human or nonhuman. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests, this tradition, “initiated to some extent by the pre-Socratics, but fully elaborated primarily in the nineteenth century through the texts of Darwin, Nietzsche, and Bergson,” constitutes an alternative to the discourse of historical materialism, which irremediably ties freedom and autonomy to “the functioning and deprivatory power of the (oppressive or dominant) other.”<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, in Nove’s writing, the capacity of things to affect and be affected—which is their ultimate meaning and an essential aspect of lyrical poetry reception—is engrained in their vibrant being. As he writes in “Essere la ferita,”

tutto ha senso indifferentemente  
 da qualunque punto lo si consideri,  
 siano oceani o parole che ne trasmettano  
 l’urto sulle terre

[everything has a meaning indifferently  
 from any point one considers it,  
 be they oceans or words that infuse  
 its impact on the lands] (*AS* 10, ll. 43–46).

In this vitalist poetic framework, returning to childhood—“sal[ire] / le scale dell’infanzia” “[to] climb / the stairs of infancy”] (*AS* 10, ll. 57–58)—becomes a way to reconnect with an original meaning that, as the title of the poem suggests, has turned into a divide or a wound. Nove’s writing identifies childhood with a developmental phase of undividedness, freedom, and playful intellectual fascination towards the environment that reconnects human nature to both the origin of life and its intrinsic meaning. He effectively summarizes this infantile wisdom in *Tutta la luce del mondo* (2014), a novel that retells the life of Saint Francis through the eyes of his young

<sup>35</sup> I am borrowing the notion of the structural Other of modernity from Braidotti. See in particular *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and *The Posthuman*.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, “Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 139–57, 140, 139.

nephew, Piccardo. In this work, the author retraces the charismatic energy of the “ecologist” saint in the same living force that animates children and shapes their wondrous attitude towards the world:

quella volontà di onorare la vita ogni istante, semplicemente perché è la vita [...]. Allora ci si industria in ogni modo e poi è facile, basta semplicemente lasciarla scorrere, vederla scorrere e assecondarla, entrandovi dentro, così che i suoi flutti non s’infrangano con l’ossessione umana di convogliarne la forza.

[that will to honor life at each moment, simply because it’s life [...]. So, one tries hard, in every possible way and then it’s easy, one only needs to let life flow, see it flow and indulge it, by participating in it, so that its waves don’t crash against the human obsession to funnel the force of life.]<sup>37</sup>

Overall, childhood, broadly viewed as an alternative path to “the human obsession to funnel the force of life,” becomes the foundational allegory of Nove’s revised visionary realism. Nove’s allegorical use of pre-Socratic ideas, as both the non-anthropocentric origin of western philosophy and an image of the undividedness that resides in our human *nature*, addresses the mingled reality of the Anthropocene, while tracing new possible rescue paths for co-survival.

Saying goodbye to the predominant twentieth-century view of history and memory as exclusive anthropogenic spaces does not imply solely a detrimental flattening of the past in a flow of easily-accessible information.<sup>38</sup> Rather, welcoming a “flat understanding” of history as a stratification of human and nonhuman narratives can involve a re-evaluation of history as a co-participative “storied matter” in which humans are one of the many players. Nove’s poetry departs from the still pervasive misconception that it is possible to separate human history from the time of *geos*. As the poetic narrator of “Addio mio Novecento (IX)”<sup>39</sup> affirms, we were cheating ourselves—“infilavamo la matita nella storia / per bloccarne gli ingranaggi” [“we inserted the pencil in history / to block its gears”] (*AN* 87, ll. 16–17)<sup>40</sup>—when we assumed a reassuring dominance over a fixed conception of time and matter. By contrast, the “gears” of reality can be neither stopped nor ignored. Like in the spherical “earth-like” sculptures of Arnaldo Pomodoro, the dedicatee of *A schemi di costellazioni*, the polished round surface of earth exhibits a crack, revealing a complex system of interconnected mechanisms. In his twenty-first-century diptych, Nove realistically represents how our “adult,” “polished” approach to making sense of things eventually clashed with the undeniable presence of hidden interconnected gears, multiple temporalities, and feelings of vulnerability that, in the epoch of the Anthropocene, far exceed human scale and representability—at least, in a traditional sense of mimesis of the real.

The issue with accepting the “derangement of scale” that the end of the twentieth century brought about, is that adults have dismissed the playful creativeness of infancy and have begun

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<sup>37</sup> Nove, *Tutta la luce del mondo* (Milan: Bompiani, 2014), Chap. 10, Kindle.

<sup>38</sup> On the relation between late twentieth-century poetry and loss of memory, see Petrella, *Gruppo 93*, 89.

<sup>39</sup> *Addio mio Novecento* features nine poems entitled “Addio mio Novecento”; to distinguish between these texts I am adding Roman numerals in parenthesis.

<sup>40</sup> Here I am using the translation of Nicola Morea, available online at Poetry International Web:

<http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poem/item/27751/auto/0/GOODBYE-MY-TWENTIETH-CENTURY-II> (accessed February 7, 2019).

to perform the role of “Bambini poliziotti,” as one of the poems in *Addio mio Novecento* is titled. These grown-up western children are intransigent rulers:

controllano le foglie  
recidono i tronchi  
guardano se scorre  
la linfa

[check the leaves  
cut the trunks  
look if the lymph  
flows] (*AN* 67, ll. 12–15).

They pay special attention to not betray their own fear of this role-play game that identifies rational humans with the possibility of estranging and controlling nature. Yet, pressing concerns about sustainability and survival make us wonder how long “il gioco dell’occlusione, / la definizione dei confini” [“the game of occlusion, / the definition of boundaries”] (*AN* 68, ll. 31–32) can endure or if it is necessary to elaborate on alternative playful collaborations. Envisioning the issues and potential of these collaborations, Nove has experimented with a realism that puts Anthropocene narratives in verse.

### **Anthropocene Entanglements in Verse**

“Dall’abito linguistico dell’acqua,” the poem that opens *Addio mio Novecento*, includes a number of central themes of Nove’s cosmological poetry. This text is a good example of the author’s reflection on time, history, and memory, and his endorsement of an ethics of horizontal coexistence that pivots on infantile playfulness and undividedness with nature. Additionally, the poem illustrates how Nove has blended neo-avant-garde materialism with an atemporal mythical storytelling, creating a realist-visionary poetry that effectively re-imagines the material yet hardly perceivable entanglements of the Anthropocene.

“Dall’abito linguistico dell’acqua” adopts a type of *trobar clus* that, while featuring a series of natural elements (water, milk, stone, wind), assembles these tangible objects into a poetic riddle. As typical of avant-garde writing, Nove’s poetry charges words with unexpected meanings and pushes ordinary language to the limits of intelligibility. This clearly emerges in the first few stanzas of the poem:

*Dall’abito, linguistico, dell’acqua  
nel corpo innumerevole del dentro  
capovolto alle stagioni, con la febbre erosa  
dal cuore dentro, la materia o,*

*Generazione su generazione,  
in latte e pietra e vento, di guerra,  
di selce o, silicio vuoto,  
vuoto che si ampia a dismisura*

*di campi, del cuore, dentro la materia  
a dismisura si ampia, il colloquio  
fittissimo delle lingue o, la strage della memoria  
nel corpo, innumerevole, del dentro*

*[From the, linguistic, form of water  
in the countless body of the inside  
upside down to the seasons, with the fever eroded  
by the heart, inside, matter or,*

*Generation by generation,  
of milk, stone, and wind, of war  
of flint or, empty silicon,  
emptiness that extends disproportionately*

*of fields, of heart, inside matter  
the very thick dialogue of languages  
widens disproportionately or,  
the massacre of memory,  
in the body, in the countless body, of the inside] (AN, 3–4, ll. 4–12, ital. original).*

Echoing Edoardo Sanguineti's opening of *Laborintus*, Nove's text elaborates on the element of water, which, we should recall, according to Thales' philosophy, is the original substance underlying any form of life. Water is also the original element in the Genesis: at the beginning of time, "earth was formless and empty [...] and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gn 1:1–2). In his text, Nove is connecting Sanguineti's considerations of the agency that material reality exerts on the individual—"le condizioni esterne è evidente esistono realmente queste condizioni" ["the external conditions, is evident, these conditions actually exist"]<sup>41</sup>—with an environmentalist perspective, which is filtered through pre-Socratic philosophies of nature or, more broadly, through a pre-modern imagery. The conditions Sanguineti highlights do not pertain only to the socio-economic structure and its effect on individual action. These conditions, like in Haraway's image of string figures, are embedded in the material intermixing of *bios* and *geos*—"the countless body of the inside"—that deeply affects the external and internal shape of human reality, and is in turn affected by our actions on the environment.

By stating that the slippery "linguistic form of water" shapes our inner matter, Nove moves beyond a dialectic understanding that, in Sanguineti's text, proceeds through dualistic oppositions: original matter versus socio-economic order, individual desire versus "external conditions," body versus mind. The poet envisions an alternative and more complex relational system, which he dubs "thick dialogue of languages." Through this material discourse, human sociality and biological matter unfold a polyphonic dialogue, creating a shared territory that, again recalling Sanguineti, is made of "composte terre" ["compound lands"] (73, ll. 1). Nove explains this dialogic process of the social and material stratigraphy of many "voices" in "Il cibo che i miei genitori." The food of his family, through a complex "metabolic" process, eventually transformed into his own compound body and, then again, into:

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<sup>41</sup> Edoardo Sanguineti, *Laborintus di Edoardo Sanguineti: Testo e commento*, ed. Erminio Risso (San Cesario di Lecce: Manni, 2006), 73, l. 14.

altro  
cibo

inglobato, associato  
alla coscienza che mangia  
il creato che mi ha generato

[other  
food

absorbed, linked  
to the consciousness that eats  
the universe that generated me] (*AN* 14, ll. 4–8).

By engaging in a meta-literary and theoretical reflection, Nove is, in his cosmological poetry, rewriting neo-avant-garde materialism—including its very critical stance against bourgeois ideology and praxis—through pre-modern monism. In *Laborintus*, the notion of generative matter is associated, in line with Jungian psychoanalytical theories, with the *nigredo*, an alchemic status of undefined chaos that stands for the darkness of the unconscious. By contrast, in the opening text of *Addio mio Novecento* and in *A schemi di costellazioni*, Nove retraces the origin residing

dentro ogni parola  
all'inizio di ogni parola  
prima del linguaggio

[inside each word  
at the beginning of each word  
before language] (*AS* 12, ll. 36–38)

in a vital bodily matter that, unlike Sanguineti's text, does not represent a descent into an irrational chaos. While the neo-avant-garde poem personifies the original chaos with Ellie, a feminine character who emerges from the swamp (the "Palus Putredinis") of the unconscious, in Nove's poetry, matter is a gravitational center of binding unity, a "*madre assolutamente / centro*" [*mother absolutely / center*] ("Dall'abito linguistico dell'acqua," *AN* 5, ll. 35–36).

The poet had already proposed an association between female nature and (pro)creative intelligence in the poem *Maria*, in which the "madre di tutto il creato" ["mother of all creation"]<sup>42</sup> is the embodiment of the living immanence of the universe in which God manifests itself:

Così che tutto in te miracoloso  
fosse compreso, e tutto fosse sposo  
di te che eri soltanto una bambina  
che ha per confine dove si sconfinava

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<sup>42</sup> Nove, *Maria*, 19, l. 2.

[So that everything miraculous in you  
was comprised, and everything was spouse  
of you who were only a little girl  
everything that has its boundary where one crosses the boundary] (*AN* 9, ll. 1–4).

Mary, innocent child and welcoming mother, human being and incarnation of a miracle shared by any creature on earth, is another figure of openness to the mystery of life, as already seen for St. Francis. In her divine groundedness, she inspires an ecological ethics that “must be based on acceptance of both sides of [the] dilemma of humanness, [namely] both the way we represent the growing edge of what is ‘not yet’ of greater awareness and benignity, and also our organic mortality, which we share with the plants and animals.”<sup>43</sup> Nature, as both our own balancing center and more-than-human boundary, is in Nove’s poetry the notion linking natural monism and the Christian image of motherhood. This all-encompassing perspective inverts the dualistic division between irrational matter and human reasoning, inscribing both in the same creative movement across time. As Nove writes in “Un matrimonio,”

il movimento, è  
noi per sempre  
che ne siamo parte,  
ciò che diventa,  
è il tempo

[movement, is  
us forever  
who are part of it,  
what it becomes,  
is time] (*AN* 104, ll. 10–14).

The opening text of *Addio mio Novecento* explores the notion of time, maintaining the bifocal lens of neo-avant-garde materialism and natural monism. Nove borrows from epic tradition—we can think, for example, of epic poet Hesiod—the idea that human generations are named after and identified by natural elements. He reworks this *topos* with Sanguineti’s image of the generations shaped and determined by the time in which they live—“noi che riceviamo la qualità dai tempi” [“we who receive our quality from time”].<sup>44</sup> Here the avant-garde poet was repurposing a verse from Foscolo that, contrarily, emphasized creative individualism. Nove engages in a parallel meta-poetic operation: revising Hesiod’s and Sanguineti’s images of the human generations affected by their natural and economic times, he suggests that the quality of our current generation—a generation that he later identifies as “Plastic people” (*AN* 88)—resides in having erased a fundamental material relationship from our memory. That is, we can be humans only “dentro la materia,” *inside* matter. The “massacre of memory” to which Nove alludes in this cryptic opening text might then be interpreted as the destruction of our earliest memory of interconnectedness with and primal dependence on the environment. In “Il cibo che i

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<sup>43</sup> See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: Harper, 1992), 31.

<sup>44</sup> Sanguineti, *Laborintus*, 73.

miei genitori,” the poetic persona indeed finds an alternative to the oppressive chain of social “metabolism” in a sudden rediscovery of his own origin:

Sono  
e sono stato  
una nuvola, un prato

[I am  
and I was  
a cloud, a meadow] (*AN* 14, ll. 10–12).

The issue with memory that affected the twentieth century, as Nove suggests in “Addio mio Novecento (V),” arises from two erroneous assumptions: the idea that time is a human property—“Ed era nostro il tempo / vivibile” [“And the livable time was / ours”] (*AN* 60)—and the certainty that boundaries between life and nonlife, *bios* and *geos*, human and animal were solid:

I confini erano netti  
c’era la vita,  
e poi la morte. Credevamo a questo

[The boundaries were neat  
there was life,  
and then death. We believed this] (*AN* 60, ll. 10–12).

Yet, in *A schemi di costellazioni*, Persephone, the Greek goddess of the underworld who is also the divinity of the cyclical growth of flora and fauna, appears to reveal our forgetfulness in disconnecting human history from the many other stories engraved into nature: she states,

E la mia storia  
l’avete dimenticata  
avete  
dimenticato la storia,  
le storie tutte, ne siete  
brandelli di stoffa nel tempo

[And my story  
you forgot it  
you forgot history  
all the stories  
you are  
its scraps of cloth scattered in time] (“Parla Persefone,” *AS* 46, ll. 9–14).

Thus, although we live in a time in which the “parole / degli alberi [sono] zittite dalla prassi” [“words / of trees [are] silenced by praxis”] (“Universo 2010, II,” *AS* 21, ll. 2–3), this time, Nove reminds us, “non è nostro [...] e noi scorriamo a tratti insieme a lui” [“is not ours ... and we



flow, at times, along with it”] (*AN* 21, ll. 13–15). Recalling Heraclitus’ thought, time is the flow of unity in change, a process of becoming that cannot be reduced to a seemingly linear progress manipulated by a few humans.

As Nove’s poetry shows, the divisive attitude based on the epistemological mindset that dominated the twentieth century cannot nourish a sustainable future. The poet projects this dominant framework into a post-Anthropocene time. From this apocalyptic future, we can hear the echo of legends about a world “con nessuno dentro, ma pieno di progresso” [“with nobody inside, but full of progress”] (“Addio mio Novecento (II),” *AN* 39, l. 8). The inhuman poet-bards of this revelatory future are the rocks that, in the poem “Il tempo,” launch a terrifying warning scream:

E lo sappiamo che non è  
futuro e non ha  
sangue non ha passato gridano  
più forte le rocce  
più vive di sangue di noi  
gridano mentre  
l’uomo dai capelli bianchi  
nega gli alberi  
l’uomo i fiori  
li cancella

[And we know that it is not future and it has  
not blood it has not past, the rocks  
scream louder,  
more alive with blood than us  
they scream while  
the man with white hair  
denies trees  
the man erases them  
the flowers] (*AN* 13, ll. 35–44).

However, Nove’s material realism is a visionary one not only because he attempts to render a mingled multiple temporality that humans can envision but not quite grasp, but also because he develops a mythical discourse about infancy from his reflection on tangible matter. Infancy is extrapolated from our linear or developmental view of time and becomes an allegory of a possible synchrony with and sympathy for nature. To the image of the old male who uses his own agency to deny flowers, the poet opposes a virtually atemporal notion of being subjects-at-play with nature. This playful attitude is described as a daring entrance into a fairytale-like forest that emerges from childhood memories, a “foresta che s’inoltra azzurra nel sogno” [“forest that, light blue, ventures into the dream”] (*AN* 25). As the poet continues in “Addio mio Novecento (I),”

Lì è che andavo da bambino,  
in quell’entrare dentro me di alberi e oceani, scompigliando le foglie  
e i pesci

[There I was going as a child,  
in that entering inside myself of trees and oceans, creating disarray of leaves  
and fish] (*AN* 25, ll. 2–5).

In Nove’s poetry, being (or rather becoming again) playful subjects entails throwing adult divides into disarray. Engaging with Jane Bennett’s reflections on material vitalism, we can see that the cross-temporal notion of infancy penned by Nove seeks to render “a childhood sense of the world as filled with all sorts of animate beings, some human, some not, some organic, some not.”<sup>45</sup> This peculiar fascination with life “draws attention to an efficacy of objects in excess of the human meanings, designs, or purposes they express or serve. Thing-power may thus be a good starting point for thinking beyond the life-matter binary, the dominant organizational principle of adult experience” (20). This is Nove’s core proposition in the poem “Mito,” in which the children who play with sand on the shore can move “da questo mondo a quello” [“from this world to another”] (*AN* 15, l. 8), living the richness of a time that unfolds a tight web of human-nonhuman relationships. Ultimately, playing with the nonhuman still makes us subjects, yet horizontal

soggetti come  
conchiglie come  
sabbia  
come

d’ossigeno è il cielo,  
la madre, dei pellicani, le ossa,  
del legno, i colori

[subjects like  
seashells like  
sand  
like  
of oxygen the sky is made  
the mother, of pelicans, the bones,  
of wood, the colors] (“Il mare,” *AN* 10, ll. 22–28).

By affirming a horizontal ethics of playful care, Nove rehabilitates childhood as a mythical temporality in which the human mind—like the mind of early philosophers—was driven by an unrestricted curiosity for reality. One of the few sudden apparitions of a poetic “I” in *A schemi di costellazioni* expresses a mixed feeling in which wonder towards nature is combined with a desire to learn from nonhuman agents:

E se gridano gli alberi, se i monti  
ci parlano questo vorrei imparare:  
e ascoltare senza interpretare.  
Altra pietà non c’è, non c’è pregare

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<sup>45</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 20.

[And if trees scream, if mountains  
speak to us, this I'd like to learn:  
and to listen to it without interpreting.  
No other pity exists, no other prayer] (“Universo 2010 XIV,” *AS* 33, ll. 1–4).

Nove counterpoises the wonder of infancy with the praxis of adulthood—that same praxis that in his pulp novels turns everyday life into a collective nightmare of consumerism—and denounces the fact that meaningful words, like the words of trees, have been erased by our merciless lifestyle, “dal nostro non conoscere pietà” [“by our not knowing compassion”] (“Universo 2010 II,” *AS* 21). According to his ethics of playful coexistence, the human original “sin” is not one of knowledge, but of forgetfulness and ignorance. We prefer to disregard the worlds that exist along with our world, and this is indeed

la nostra colpa: non vederli,  
non sentirli  
*non volerli vedere*  
*non volerli sentire*

[our fault: not seeing them,  
not hearing them  
*not wanting to see them*  
*not wanting to hear them*] (“Essere la ferita,” *AS* 9, ll. 7–10).

Recovering the mythical time of childhood allows for the possibility of playing with other “worlds”—or of caring for these worlds with lively curiosity and enjoyment—while recognizing that, in the epoch of the Anthropocene, human beings are returning to dialogue with human and nonhuman languages that have shaped our history since its very origin.

### **“Poetry at the End of Poetry,” or When Allegories Encounter Myth**

Nove’s playful ethics and creation of a dialogue between the human and the nonhuman mirrors, at a meta-literary level, an attempt to recover two poetics of his recent past, the neo- (and neo-neo-)avant-garde and the enamored word. Thus, rather than departing from the twentieth-century tradition, Nove, through his “farewell,” tries to mend the tears of two seemingly divergent poetics that between the 1960s and 1990s both failed to effectively mediate an encounter with reality. His materialistic-visionary realism contaminates the critical and expressionist realism of the 1960s and 1990s avant-gardes with the mythical imagery of 1970s anti-realistic poetry. This combination creates a new type of referential poetic language, simultaneously able to represent the intricate material relations of the world and envision unexplored imaginative territories of co-survival.

Our starting point in examining how Nove achieves a rewriting of his twentieth-century literary past is a talk entitled “La poesia dopo la fine della poesia: tradizione letteraria e happening, Baci Perugina e rap” [“Poetry after the End of Poetry: Literary Tradition and Happening, Baci Perugina, and Rap”] which the poet delivered in December 2000 during a

seminar at the Scuola Holden, in Milan.<sup>46</sup> In this lecture, Nove assesses post-1950s Italian poetry and the publishing industry, using select movements and books as milestones to reconstruct the panorama of Italian culture at the end of the twentieth century.

The poet focuses in particular on the 1978 anthology *La parola innamorata*, edited by Enzo Di Mauro and Giancarlo Pontiggia. As he explains, this collection was born as a reaction against the neo-avant-garde poetics, with the intention of proposing a new poetic style “assolutamente soggettivo, impalpabile e indefinibile come l’innamoramento, contrapposto alla parola estremamente ideologizzata della poesia nata fra gli anni ’60 e i ’70” [“absolutely subjective, impalpable and undefinable like falling in love, counterpoised to the extremely ideologized word of the poetry born between the ’60s and the ’70s”]. Nevertheless, according to Nove, the neo-avant-garde and the enamored poetry ended up featuring the same problematic relationship between poetry and reality. In both cases, their poetry was detached from any immediate referential or emotional context. This is why, at the end of the twentieth century, the public found poetry in trivial consumer experiences, like unwrapping a Bacio Perugina and reading the quote packaged in that piece of chocolate, often famous lines of love poetry from classic to modern times. The marketing “poetics” of Bacio Perugina succeeded in creating what high-brow poetry could not deliver, namely an authentic moment of intense presence and re-enchantment, “un contesto magico di recupero di referenzialità” [“a magic context for the recovering of the referential function”]. This poetic immediacy, Nove concludes, ceases to exist when poetry, broadly speaking, becomes an institution, limited by rules and codes; yet while this institutionalization is unavoidable, it does not mark a definitive end, as what dies “rinasce, perché non muore mai nulla, si trasforma semplicemente, e questo accade anche in poesia” [“is reborn, because nothing ever dies, but simply transforms itself, and this also happens in poetry”].

The challenge to recover a lost referential immediacy is indeed what Nove pursues in his cosmological twentieth-century poetry, a poetry that acknowledges the end of a recent literary past and, at the same time, repurposes the end, and *ends*, of such a past. Yet, what is Nove exactly abandoning and what is he aiming to recuperate from the twentieth century? I argue that through his idiosyncratic realism—materialist, visionary, yet also transformative or “alchemic”—Nove revitalizes the disturbing counter-culture of Gruppo 63 and 93 while redeploying Milo De Angelis’ view of the myth as a place where we have already been, despite the fact that the memory now seems to be lost.

Neo-avant-garde realism, spanning from the infernal landscapes of *Laborintus* to the alienated factory of Pagliarani’s long poem *La ragazza Carla*, channeled a politicized critique of bourgeois cultural hegemony by dislodging the very processes of the construction of meaning that enables capitalist culture. As Alfredo Giuliani writes in the 2003 foreword of the reprint of the anthology *I novissimi* (originally published in 1961), Gruppo 63 was interested in “sbugiardare il mondo degli umani, sempre più dissestato e alienato” [“belying the world of humans, a world always more ruined and alienated”].<sup>47</sup> In order to expropriate the literary discourse of the bourgeois mechanisms of power and reification, these poets were turning the traditional poetic “I” into a critical and antagonist subject, and any harmonic view of capitalist

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<sup>46</sup> Nove’s talk was published by the website [sparajurij.com](http://www.sparajurij.com) and is available at: <http://www.sparajurij.com/tapes/deviazioni/AldoNove/HASCRITTOholden.htm> (accessed on February 6, 2019). All quotations in the following paragraph are from Nove’s talk.

<sup>47</sup> Alfredo Giuliani, 2003 Introduction to *I novissimi: Poesie per gli anni ’60*, ed. Alfredo Giuliani (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), v–viii, vi. See also the recent translation of this work, *I Novissimi. Poetry for the Sixties*, ed. Alfredo Giuliani, Luigi Ballerini and Federica Santini (New York: Agincourt Press, 2017).

reality into a “visione schizomorfa” [“schizomorphic vision”].<sup>48</sup> As Giuliani had already clarified in his 1965 foreword, the neo-avant-garde was not interested in representing reality according to the “visione ‘piana’, discorrevole” [“‘plain’ and discursive view”] of naturalism or, in other words, “[l]a vita vive, la letteratura ‘rappresenta’” [“life lives, literature ‘represents’”].<sup>49</sup> Poetry did not aim to reproduce the “representation” that life was already providing; rather, it wanted to “forzare la vita a risciversi, a scompigliare e rimontare segni memoriali in nessi inediti, spingerla a liberarsi dai feticismi della rappresentazione in visioni che ‘traversano’ [...] il linguaggio della vita e quello dell’arte” [“force life to rewrite itself, to throw its inedited memorial signs into disarray and reassemble them, to push life to free itself from the fetishisms of representation through visions that ‘traverse’ [...] the language of life and that of art”] (12).

Nove clearly borrows from the 1960s-avant-garde wave the idea of criticizing capitalist reality and its system of hierarchical divides through a polemical deformation of its own language and praxis. Daily language, expropriated from the dominating anthropocentric—yet also capitalist—logic of the human-master comes to narrate a mongrel, a hybrid cosmos, of collectivized human-nonhuman “memories.”

Nove is also in debt to the neo-avant-garde, or Gruppo 93, the movement that ends the twentieth-century avant-garde wave. “Per un’ipotesi di scrittura materialistica” (1981), a manifesto published in *Quaderni di critica*, can be considered a precursor to the anti-postmodernist debate that led to the development of Gruppo 93. The text proposes “a conflictual hypothesis [of literature] based [...] on clear-cut choices, the material substance of the text, a sense of politics ‘mediated’ by linguistic, pragmatic, and cognitive functions.”<sup>50</sup> One of the main strategies of Gruppo 93—especially of the subgroup that gathered around the journal *Baldus* and embraced a critical postmodernism rather than an actual counter-culture—was to cultivate “a sense of beauty and engagement with humanity and nature that is alternative and in contradiction to the hedonistic, narcissistic, and consumeristic attitude prominent everywhere else in culture” (164). The use of allegory then became a central technique to achieve this alternative sense of beauty; as the authors of the manifesto of Gruppo 93 affirm, allegory expresses the polysemic possibility of language to simultaneously signify other things. Unlike the symbol, which is univocal and one-sided, the allegory unfolds a complex and stratified world of different and, always relative, meanings. Ultimately, for Gruppo 93, the allegory reveals, in its textual complexity, the impossibility of a bourgeois humanity “gratificata dalla certezza ideologica di uno sviluppo positivo e di una appropriazione progressiva della realtà” [“gratified by the ideological certainty of positive development and a progressive appropriation of reality”].<sup>51</sup>

Nove readapts the use of allegory from Gruppo 93 as a stratification of a plurality of meanings and counter-narratives. In his cosmological poetry, this stratification acquires a literal material meaning, as it illustrates the polysemic intertwining of discourses embedded in anthropocentric “storied matter,” a story in which different timeframes are present, being imminent—and immanent—and yet remote. This is why, in Nove’s twenty-first-century poetry, humans share their bodily presence with stars, rocks, and ancient geological epochs, while simultaneously living modern life.

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<sup>48</sup> Giuliani, Introduction [2003], viii.

<sup>49</sup> Giuliani, Introduction [1965], 3–12, 11.

<sup>50</sup> I am using Gianluca Rizzo’s translation of the manifesto, in “What’s Left of 1963: Mariano Bano and the Avant-Garde with Two ‘Nei,’” *Forum Italicum*, 52/1 (2018), 153–80, 157.

<sup>51</sup> Redazione [“Editorial board”] di *Quaderni di critica*, “Per un’ipotesi di scrittura materialista,” in *Gruppo ’93: La recente avventura del dibattito letterario in Italia*, ed. Filippo Bettini and Francesco Muzzioli (San Cesario di Lecce: Manni, 1990), 20–24, 24.

The poetics of Gruppo 93 expressed, in turn, the response of the avant-garde to the lineage of the enamored poetry, which sought to achieve an intuitive poetic art that aimed neither to unveil any uncomfortable social or moral message nor to foster illusions.<sup>52</sup> As Di Mauro and Pontiggia affirm, poetry is not about reality, “[i]nvece la poesia è il segno che si cerca, e si scopre allontanato in un viaggio straniero, dilatato nel gioco” [“rather, poetry is the sign one looks for, and discovers, distanced in a foreign voyage, extended in the experience of play”] (15). The main strategy was then to create an artificial regression into mythical worlds and fairy-tale universes by generating a distancing from the real world that would lead readers to the “lingua dell’origine” [language of origins] (11), to “another” locus that—at a pre-logical or intuitive level—we have all experienced.

Among the poets collected in “La parola innamorata,” De Angelis is certainly the one that had the greatest influence on Nove’s writing, in particular in the strong connection between childhood and myth featured in his poetry. Infancy is a distinct theme of De Angelis’ work that can be linked to the overarching *topos* of the return. De Angelis, in the essay “Che cosa è la poesia?” retraces the very essence of poetry to the mythical archetype of recognition: “la poesia rivela qualcosa che già c’era prima di noi” [“poetry reveals something that was already there before us”], he maintains.<sup>53</sup> Through poetry, the author continues, we eventually recognize mysterious places as familiar, as the poetic lines generate an immediacy that condenses the instant of the epiphany and the duration of an ineffable something destined to remain with us. In marking this temporality of *kairòs* (καιρός)—the right or critical moment—poetry does not unfold a material praxis, but rather a creative time typical of feasts, sacred performances, and games.

From the twentieth-century tradition of the enamored poets Nove reworks a notion of poetry as the revelation of something that has been with us all along, something that, for Nove, is rooted in our infantile familiarity with original matter. Then, in his writing, the *kairòs* is the moment in which a new genealogy manifests itself:

Non è stato, prima, il  
linguaggio e non è dato  
dirlo

[Language  
did not come first  
and this cannot be  
said] (“La rete,” *AS* 63, ll. 1–3).

This *kairòs* is what reconnects the human “word” to a place where we have all already been:

Ma siamo stati stelle noi  
siamo esplosi  
eravamo alberi e oceano  
e ancora prima la pressione  
inaudita del cosmo

<sup>52</sup> See Enzo Di Mauro and Giancarlo Pontiggia, “La statua vuota,” in *La parola innamorata: I poeti nuovi 1976–1978*, ed. Enzo Di Mauro and Giancarlo Pontiggia (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978), 9–17, 10–11.

<sup>53</sup> De Angelis, 407.

[But we were stars  
we exploded  
we were trees and ocean  
and even earlier, we were the inconceivable  
pressure of the cosmos] (“Il tempo,” *AN* 13, ll. 45–49).

This primal (re-)connection, which dominant modern rationality has long denied, re-emerges through the playful, creative time of poetry, through its engagement with a non-anthropocentric thinking that is the source of western philosophy and not, as commonly believed, its opposite.

To further contextualize Nove’s theoretical and meta-literary operation of farewell and creative “rebirth,” it is important to recall that ancient philosophers were more like epic poets than our contemporary view of scholars and researchers: they used to write in verses about tangible elements of reality, yet their “poems” are far from the logical rigor that characterizes modern philosophy.<sup>54</sup> As Nove remarks in a 2015 interview with Gilda Policastro, “[i]n versi ha scritto Parmenide, diverse lettere di Mozart sono in versi e Cartesio ha paragonato ‘l’illuminazione’ poetica a quella scientifica” [“Parmenides wrote in verses, many letters of Mozart are in verses, and Descartes compared poetic ‘enlightenment’ to scientific enlightenment”].

Moving from this notion of poetry as a means of both philosophical inquiry into reality and creative “poiesis,” Nove crafts a realist poetry that enacts a process of historical and mythical “regeneration.” In the interview, the poet explicitly references De Angelis’ statement that “[l]e storie vengono da un luogo lontano, dove eravamo già stati” [“stories come from a far-away place where we had already been”]. Myths are collections of “words” that have informed and modified our culture through a flow of stories that are continuity in movement, like Heraclitus’ notion of becoming, the circadian rhythm, our breath, or the Hindu notion of the self. Thus, myths are important for Nove because they seal the collective acknowledgement of our living continuity, a continuity that, through its never-ending process of becoming, generates and regenerates culture. We might add, though, that this continuous becoming is also what informs the transformative essence of *natura naturans*. Yet, this is the issue: is culture able to regenerate its narratives as nature does? Touching upon this question in the interview, Nove cites a line of Sanguineti: “volti la pagina e ci sono i soldi, voltì ancora la pagina e non c’è niente” [“turn the page and there is money, turn the page again and there is nothing”]. Switching from a reflection about stories to a reflection about history, the poet comments on this verse and explains that if the narrative of capitalism—or rather, the idea that capitalism is the only possible “mythical” narrative of human progress—has proved to be a history about to end, other narratives and future histories will inevitably emerge.

The *open end* of Nove’s visionary realism is to express, from an innovative de-centered perspective, the inexhaustible polysemy of the real and its continued mythical “poiesis”: “attraverso le grate del tempo la materia / ci dice il nostro nome lo racconta” [“through the gratings of time matter / tells us our name, matter tells us about it”] (“Il nome di tutti,” *AS* 34, ll. 3–4).

## Conclusion

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<sup>54</sup> See Nove, “Le storie più belle sono quelle senza senso. Un’intervista ad Aldo Nove,” interview by Gilda Policastro, *Le parole e le cose* (originally published in the issue 23 of the magazine *Reportage*): <http://www.leparoleelecose.it/?p=20164> (accessed on February 7, 2019). The following quotations are from Nove’s interview.

*A schemi di costellazioni* and *Addio mio Novecento* mark a further stage—not a gap—in Nove’s blending of visionary and material realism. The vitalism of matter featured in these two collections could be viewed as an open invitation to retrace and re-envision our story within geological memories, while embracing playful ethics of non-hierarchical coexistence with nonhuman agents. This perspective offers an alternative to the dividing paradigm of “modern adulthood” and ties us back to the oft-forgotten origin of western thought, which is surprisingly rooted in the recognition of nature as the generative principle of life and meaning.

Nove’s cosmological poetry, in addition to unfolding non-anthropocentric narratives of time and space, says farewell to the twentieth-century tradition by revising its *ends*. The author’s visionary realism converts Gruppo 63’s revelatory deformation of capitalist society and Gruppo 93’s use of the allegory into new strategies that undermine the linear narrative of human progress and disclose the inner complexity of our current geo-reality. Nove has also reworked the notion of myth fostered by the enamored word, in particular by Milo De Angelis. In *A schemi di costellazioni* and *Addio mio Novecento*, accessing mythical narrations does not necessarily mean delving into the realm of fantasy, but rather returning to a material “earthy” place we have always belonged to.

The two collections, while creating a meta-literary dialogue with twentieth-century tradition and ushering in a new stage of the author’s experimental realism, can also foresee new tendencies in Italian poetry. These trends were discussed in a 2001 article, in which editor Vincenzo Bagnoli included Nove in a group of authors born in the 1960s who have introduced “l’immaginario e il sistema culturale di una diversa generazione, quella del baby boom, che in Italia non ha ancora ricevuto molta attenzione” [“the imagery and cultural system of a different generation, the one of the baby boomers, that in Italy has not received a lot attention yet”].<sup>55</sup> Perhaps this generation of writers, having witnessed the aftermath of the Italian “economic miracle,” is now in charge of finding a renewed approach to reality, one that accounts for history and problematizes its material, cultural, and environmental impact more critically.

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<sup>55</sup> Vincenzo Bagnoli, “La poesia italiana alla svolta di secolo,” *L’informazione bibliografica* 17/ 4 (2001): 201–12, 505.