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ARTICLE

Translations Interrupted: Italian Neorural Revivals and the Neodialect Poetics of Nonscalability

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Abstract

Translation is key to the political economy of neorural revival in contemporary Italy. Drawing on fieldwork with neorural farmers, I show how translations across semiotic domains and displays of linguistic and pragmatic untranslatability simultaneously produce capitalist value and temporary disruptions of the subsumption of life under capital. To understand this apparent paradox, I analyze the complex relationship between contemporary neorural revivalists and mid-twentieth-century neodialect poets. Driven by a reaction against the post-war encompassment of regional linguistic varieties within a national standard, the metapragmatics of untranslatability developed by the neodialect literary movement has indirectly provided contemporary neoruralists with semiotic resources to conjure profitable forms of agrolinguistic incommensurability. However, unlike the poets' nostalgic and anticapitalist sabotage of the collusion between centripetal linguistic standardization and intensive agribusiness scalability, the farmers' interactional disruptions of pragmatic regimentation and seamless intertranslatability are both a project of capitalist valorization and an exit strategy from unfulfilling wage-labor arrangements.

Keywords: (non)scalability; capitalism; central Italy; linguistic standardization; poetry; pragmatic regimentation

Introduction: on capitalist scalability and poetic interruptions

Epitomized by the plantation economy or by the franchising business model, capitalist scalability relies on the material and ideological erasure of context-specific dynamics and interdependence relations. Drawing on a notion originally introduced by Mintz (1985) in his work on the European colonial sugarcane plantations, Tsing (2012, 2013, 2015) defines scalability as a mode of organizing labor and resource management through the creation of highly replicable units that can be extended to greater scales, without changing the business model. In this article, I propose a linguistic approach to this mode of capitalist valorization. I explore the nexus between translation and

scalability and describe how projects of scalable expansion may be disbanded by poetic interruptions, that is, literary gestures and interactional practices whereby ideologies of untranslatability are mobilized as alternatives to intensive agriculture and as temporary disruptions of the hierarchical encompassment of regional parlance under a national linguistic standard.[1] I draw on fieldwork in central Italy (Le Marche region) among neorural farmers (i.e., people formerly employed in industrial and service jobs who choose to undertake agroecological ventures) and on literary analysis to discuss how my interlocutors perform displays of untranslatability to achieve nostalgic *and* economically viable reenactments of vanishing agrolinguistic worlds.

Driven by fantasies of unlimited copycat replication, scalability hinges on presuppositions of perfect commensurability, seamless interchangeability, and on the standardization (and ideological erasure) "of cultural and biological diversity" (Tsing 2012, 507).[2] In this sense, scalability, as a politicoeconomic process of valorization, underwrites a paradox: it is a specific "scale-making ideology" (Irvine 2016, 224) based on the operational denial of "scale" (Carr and Lempert 2016a, 2016b); put differently, it operates as if differences in size and context did not exist.[3] From a linguistic standpoint, scalability relies on three aspirations: (i) maximal translatability, which implies perfect equivalence and interchangeability between source text and target text; (ii) total portability, produced through pragmatic automation and massive circulation of decontextualized discursive protocols and textual artifacts; (iii) standardization, understood as the centripetal homogenization of linguistic variation, whereby the dissemination of an hegemonic linguistic variant (deemed as the "national standard") is combined with the ideological encompassment of divergent regional forms within such standard (Gal 2012, 29; Irvine 2016; Gal and Irvine 2019, 133–134).[4]

Like any project, "scalability is never complete" (Tsing 2012, 510) and always requires a "huge amount of work" (Tsing 2015, 294). Indeed, scalability demands constant organizational efforts aimed at standardizing the workflow through the

[1] At the risk of stating the obvious, I understand nonscalability and untranslatability not as ontological entities, but as acts of ideological representation.

[2] "If the world is still diverse and dynamic," claims Tsing (2012, 510), "it is because scalability never fulfills its own promises."

[3] With their edited volume, Carr and Lempert (2016a) inaugurated a linguistic anthropological reflection on "scale" and "scaling" (or "scale-making"), understood as semiotic processes whereby social actors produce connections between different mensual and spatiotemporal relations. As Carr and Lempert (2016b) point out, scale is a language-mediated "relational and comparative endeavor" aimed at "drawing distinctions" and establishing "analogies" between entities of different sizes positioned in different spatiotemporal frameworks (Carr and Lempert 2016a; Pritzker and Perrino 2021; Perrino 2024). In advocating for a perspectival approach to scale, Carr and Lempert's (2016b) intent is to deontologize "scalar perspectives" and show that scales and scalar distinctions are not given but always made through ideological and semiotic work. As is well apparent in their reference to Tsing (2012, 56, 2015, 15), Carr and Lempert (2016b) treat "scalarity" and "scalability" as interchangeable terms. I believe, instead, that the two notions should not be conflated.

[4] Standardization is both a set of homogenizing policies and an "ideological project […] of hierarchical ordering" (Gal 2012, 29). As Gal and Irvine (2019) suggest, semiotic processes of standardization pivot on a relation of encompassment and on an axis of differentiation whereby a variety identified as "the standard" is imagined as linguistically homogeneous, socially superior, and geographically placed above "dialects," which, in turn, are imagined as linguistically incorrect and inconsistent, socially inferior, regionally diverse, and at the same time encompassed within (and translatable into) the national standard.

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regimentation of linguistic conduct and labor practices. Its goal is expansion through copycat replication variously achieved via varied processes, which range from discursive entextualization to botanical cloning.[5] While the former technology concerns the circulation of portable procedural templates and textual artifacts that can be easily detached from their original context and transplanted into a new institutional environment (Park and Bucholtz 2009; Donzelli 2023), the latter entails the creation of new plants from a single ancestor by means of replanting cuttings, as was the case for the sugarcane plantations discussed by Mintz (1985). Scalability also requires a series of semiotic operations, such as the erasure of scalar distinctions, the incorporation (through token-type regimentation) of specific elements into general categories, and the production of an "axis of differentiation," that is, a schema for the typification and contrastive organization of complementary qualities (Gal 2012, 22; Gal and Irvine 2019, 19). Scalability is, thus, always pitted against alternative projects and divergent centrifugal forces (Tsing 2012).

Drawing on fieldwork in central Italy, this article focuses on a specific language-based configuration of the interplay between scalable and nonscalable elements: namely, the processes of agrolinguistic scalability started after the Second World War and the contemporary spread of neorural livelihoods and niche agri-food markets, which rely on displays of nonscalability mediated by the deployment of regional linguistic variants. To do so, I focus on the complex relationship between two apparently unrelated phenomena: the contemporary back-to-the-land movement, whereby an increasing number of individuals from different social and professional backgrounds seek to reconnect with land-based livelihoods (Istat 2010, 2020; Coldiretti 2017; Coldiretti/Censis 2024) and neodialect poetry, a composite and multigenerational field of literary production—begun in the 1940s and continued through the new millennium—made of poets who elected regional languages (conventionally called "dialects") as their primary medium of poetic expression (Bonaffini and Serrao 2001; Brevini 1987, 1990; Dell'Arco and Pasolini 1952; Contini 1943, 1968; Mengaldo 1978; Pasolini 1955).[6]

Combining fieldwork among Marchesan neorural farmers with the analysis of poems and metalinguistic theories developed by neodialect poets since the half of the twentieth century, my aim is to highlight the connection between translation and scalability and describe how performances and ideologies of untranslatability may produce poetic and economic rearticulations of two parallel processes: the encompassment of regional parlance under a national linguistic standard and the subsumption of labor under capital.[7] I argue that the analytical juxtaposition of the metapragmatics

[5] As discussed more in detail in the introduction to this special issue, entextualization—understood as a semiotic process whereby speech can be extracted from its original context of production and made portable and text-like (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Kuipers 1990, 4; Silverstein and Urban 1996)—greatly enhances circulation and is a key device of scalability.

[6] The label "neodialect" (Brevini 1990) is convenient, but controversial. First, the term dialect is ideologically charged and inadequate to refer to linguistic variants that are often closer to fully-fledged languages. Second, neodialect poets rarely confine their poetic production within one single linguistic variant and generally shift back and forth from standard Italian to vernacular languages.

[7] There is a strong link between standardization and subsumption. Originally developed by logicians and law scholars, the notion of subsumption entails a process whereby a particular token becomes incorporated

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of untranslatability enacted by neorural farmers and neodialect poets may shed light on the political economy of language in contemporary Italy and thus illuminate the centrality of language within capitalist transformations in Italy and beyond.

In a short treatise titled *Irreductions*, Latour ([1984] 1993, 158; 1.1.1 and 1.1.3) claims that "Nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else." Because, continues Latour ([1984] 1993, 62; 1.2.1), "nothing is, by itself, the same as or different from anything else.That is, there are no equivalents, only translations." Equivalents, thus, are not given but need to be produced and (according to Latour [1984] 1993, 170) without equivalences there is no market. Translation across languages and semiotic fields makes market possible and is a key dispositive of scalability and value production. In her study of supply chain capitalism, Tsing (2013, 2015) foregrounds the role of translation as a main infrastructure for the rearticulation of contemporary capitalist modes of production, which are based on control over inventory rather than labor. In line with this special issue's goal, this article is an invitation to take on Latour ([1984] 1993) and Tsing's (2013, 2015) insights and examine more closely (and more literally) the role of translation within capitalist worldmaking (Gal 2015). By looking at the minutiae of specific acts of translation and at situated performances of untranslatability, we may achieve an understanding of how subjects participate in successful forms of capitalist valorization and simultaneously devise exit strategies from conventional wage labor arrangements, perceived as exploitative and unfulfilling.

Methodology: charting neorural and neodialect intersections

As Gal (2012, 26), drawing on Agnew (1986), has masterfully outlined, that between poetry and market is a foundational opposition within Euro-American intellectual history. In what follows, I reflect on how the intersection between translatability and scalability (and their antonyms) produces specific articulations of this opposition. My methodology is somewhat unconventional: I combine traditional linguistic anthropological fieldwork among neorurals with an ethnographically informed reading of the neodialect poems and critical essays. I draw on conversations I had and on the audiovisual data I collected during six years (2018–2024) of intermittent fieldwork in central Italy and on the reading, performed jointly with my Marchesan interlocutors, of neodialect poems.

The analysis of linguistic interactions occurring during farming and marketing activities reveals how informal economic spaces are produced through displays of pragmatic unscriptedness and acts of semantic untranslatability whereby neorural farmers simultaneously produce capitalist value and temporary disruptions of the subsumption of life under capital. These outcomes are related to the literary efforts and ideological work of neodialect poets. I argue that poets such as Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975), Andrea Zanzotto (1921–2011), Raffaello Baldini (1924–2005), Franco Scataglini (1930–1994), Franco Loi (1930–2021), Emilio Rentocchini (b. 1949), and

within, or placed under, a general category,see Murray (2016) for a review. Unlike earlier philosophical formulations, Marx's (1992, 646, 944, 1019–1025) subsumption reveals the power dynamics underlying the process.

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Gian Mario Villalta (b. 1959), to name only a few, foreshadowed an axis of differentiation around which a series of ontological, politicoeconomic, moral, and aesthetic contrasts have become organized (and fractally replicated) as qualitative schemata for the interpretation of contemporary forms of social and linguistic conduct and neorural value productions. Driven by a reaction against the post-war encompassment of regional linguistic varieties within a national standard and the parallel pragmatic automation of language (Pasolini 1964), the metapragmatics of untranslatability developed by the neodialect literary experiments has indirectly provided contemporary neoruralists with a "poetic capital" they can now draw on to craft profitable forms of agrolinguistic nonscalability and poetic incommensurability. During my fieldwork, I came across a series of semiotic and interactional practices, which conjure forms of effervescent intersubjectivity and informal "pericapitalist spaces," located "simultaneously inside and outside capitalism" (Tsing 2015, 63). These sites, I argue, are variously produced through creative intersemiotic translations, displays of untranslatability, and relatively unscripted exchanges whereby neorural farmers retrieve ways of inhabiting language and craft meaningful social relations, which are both alternative to oppressive centripetal forces and economically advantageous.

Neodialect poets and neorural farmers share a nostalgic and highly reflexive construal of the rural exodus and linguistic transformation that have characterized Italian agrarian peripheries since the late 1940s. The metapragmatics of untranslatability they have elaborated in response is simultaneously aimed at rematerializing the language and subverting the encompassment of regional linguistic variants within standard Italian. Their respective projects are at once related and divergent. Rejecting the modernist "dematerialization of language" (Manning 2006, 273) epitomized by the Saussurean separation of "the denotational sign […] from the material world" (Irvine 1989, 248), the neodialect experimentalists focused on asserting the inseparable connection between local referents and their dialect signifiers (Pasolini 1952; Scataglini 1988). To do so, they, somewhat paradoxically, relied on sophisticated forms of translation (across different linguistic varieties) to craft a novel poetic language imbued with highly local (phonological, lexical, and syntactic) features to underscore the polyphonic effervescence of linguistic peripheries and proclaim the untranslatability of regional variants into standard Italian. Neorural farmers show a similar metapragmatic stance vis-à-vis the parallel processes of economic scalability and translational encompassment. Not only they focus on heritage foods and regional agrological varieties, but they also market their hyper-local products using a highly local lexicon and refuse to provide linguistic glosses in standard Italian. My interlocutors opt instead for ostensive definitions and complex forms of intersemiotic translation, offering food samples, suggesting recipes, and engaging in elaborate forms of interaction with their customers. While the neodialect poets are primarily concerned with developing forms of linguistic differentiation to salvage the generative potential of the poetic word (imaginatively epitomized by regional variants) from the sweeping centripetal and homogenizing forces of the language of modernization (standard Italian and its capitalist automation), the neorural farmers are interested in marketing their local products. Unlike the poets' nostalgic and anticapitalist sabotage of the collusion between centripetal linguistic standardization and intensive agribusiness scalability, the farmers' reactions to seamless intertranslatability are both an exit strategy from

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unfulfilling wage-labor arrangements and a project of capitalist valorization. These neorurals' goals are, however, strictly connected to poets' endeavors not only because they tap on the materialist semiotic ideology and axis of differentiation developed by poets but also because their pericapitalist experiments stem from the long-term effects of the rural exodus and linguistic hegemonic displacement discussed by the poets.

To illustrate these points, let me provide some ethnographic snapshots of the insurgent interactional and semiotic practices whereby my neorural interlocutors try to recalibrate to their advantage over the hegemonic orders of centripetal scalable standardization.

Cherries, sort of… On agrolinguistic (un-)translatabilities

They look at once familiar and strange, somewhat resembling cherries, yet different. They are smaller, and their iridescent and significantly thinner skin veers from bright vermillion to rich carmine and near-black (Figure 1). Their most distinctive qualities are the dark inner pulp and their tart flavor. For most speakers of standard Italian, the lexical term *visciola* (pl. *visciole*) is an empty signifier, a name lacking any specific *denotatum*. When, speaking with most of my Italian colleagues and acquaintances, I happen to mention that my current fieldwork involves working with neorural farmers specialized in cultivating *visciole*, I inevitably receive puzzled looks and blank stares. This is not the case, however, when I mention the term to people dwelling in central Italy, where the word *visciola* is commonly used to refer to what in Linnaean terminology is called *Prunus cerasus* (i.e., sour cherry), that is, a wild species of *Prunus* (genus) in the *Cerasus* (cherry) subgenus considered to be one of the ancestors of cultivated cherries.[8]

Visciole are one of the several local ingredients that are increasingly in vogue within gourmet-niche culinary circles in contemporary Italy. In the high-end local food stores proliferating in my current field site in the Ancona and Macerata provinces of Le Marche (a region located on the eastern side of central Italy), bottles of *visciola*-flavored wine and jars of *visciola* jam are juxtaposed to other indigenous food items and names: glass containers filled with pickled *paccasassi* (sea fennel, or *Crithmum maritimum*), bottles of *sapa* (a reduction of grape juice, akin to vinegar allegedly used in ancient Roman cuisine), jute bags containing *cicerchia* (*Lathyrus sativus*, an ancient legume once common in central and southern Italian peasant cuisine), and so forth (Figure 2).

While extensive literature (see Beriss 2019 for a recent review) has discussed the worldwide growing market for organic, traditional, and zero-mile foods,[9] this article

[8]Linneaus coined the name *Prunus cerasus* in 1753 (Faust and Suranyi 1998, 59). Interestingly, the name "visciola" is not local, but has Germanic or Slavic origins and derives from Proto-Germanic **wīhsilō*, Old High German *wīhsila*, and Proto-Slavic word **višьňa*. Despite its prominent role within the Italian niche market of regional delicatessens, the *visciolo* tree is probably native to the Carpathian Basin and is well known and used in Eastern Europe and Southwest Asia (Faust and Suranyi 1998).

[9]Despite the extensiveness of the literature on food activism and sustainable foodways, little attention has until recently been paid to the role of language within alternative agri-food movements, but see Karrebæk et al. (2018) for a review on the emerging literature in linguistic anthropology and food studies.

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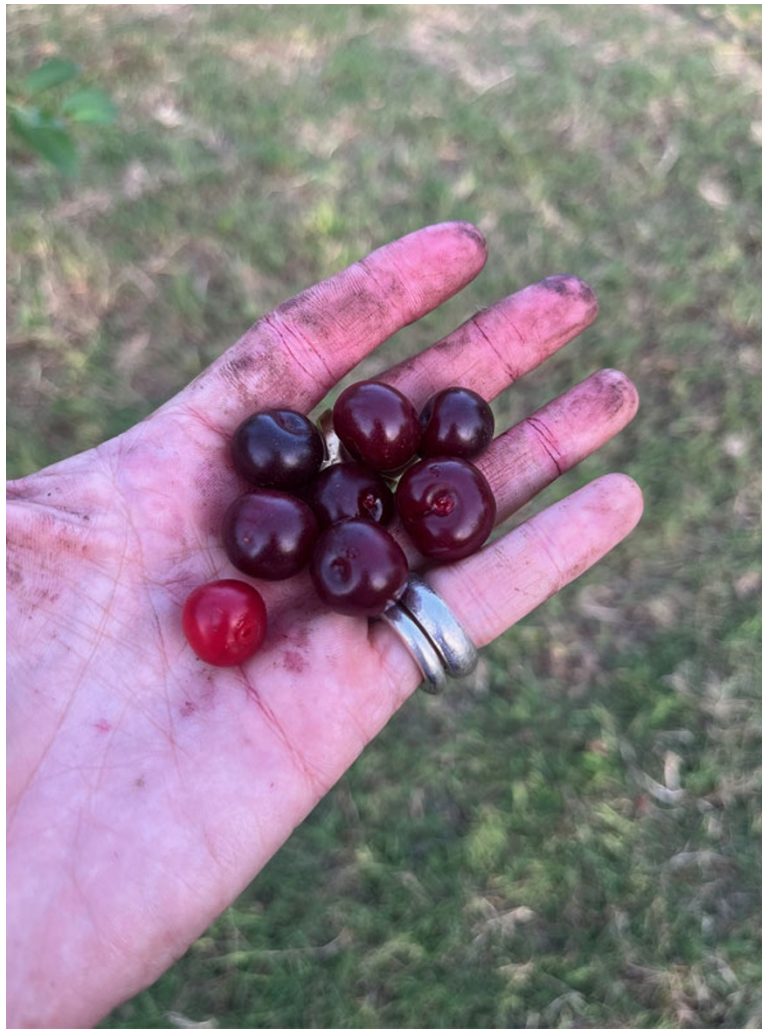

Figure 1. Freshly picked *visciole*. Courtesy of the author 2024.

focuses on a less explored dimension of this phenomenon: the role of language in shaping humans' agro-ecological imagination and the role of translation (across linguistic codes and semiotic domains) in crafting niche agri-food markets and regional "commodity registers" (Agha 2011), as well as in structuring the social lives of their producers and consumers.

As we were driving to inspect the company's fields during a hot summer morning, Claudia, who is in charge of social media managing for a sea fennel company, began to explain to me the challenges of marketing a product whose vernacular name—*paccasassi* (literary "rock breakers")—is completely obscure outside the region and whose edibility has been long forgotten by locals. Typical of coastal ecosystems,

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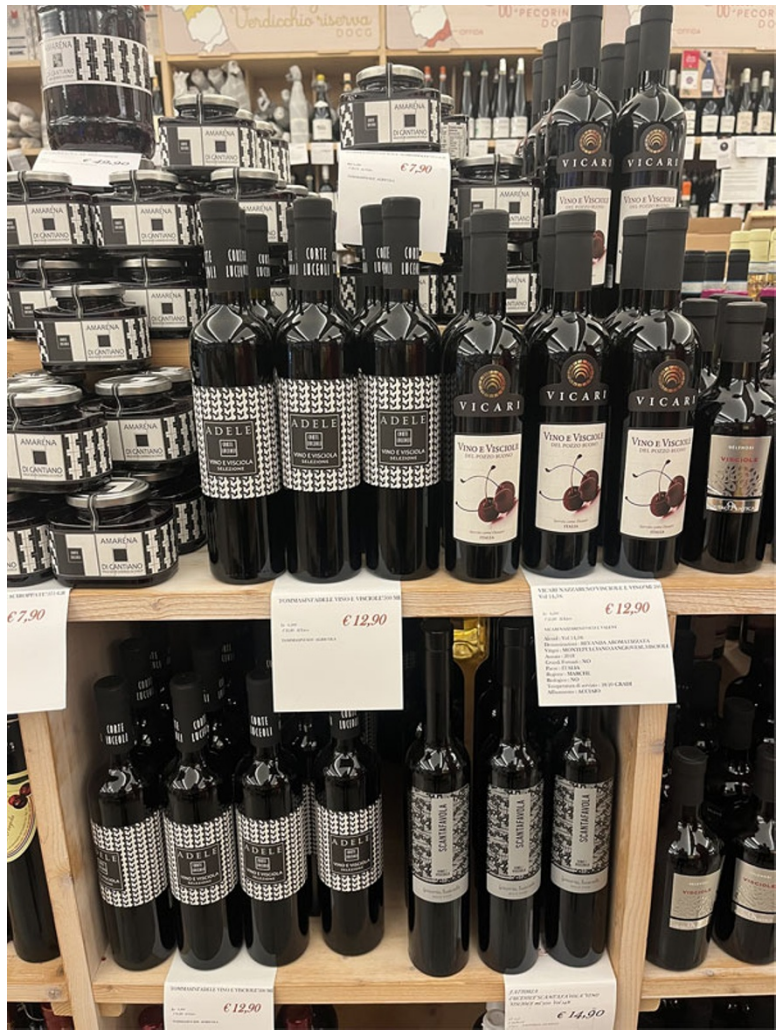

Figure 2. Regional delicatessens on display in a high-end grocery store in Numana (Ancona province). Courtesy of the author 2023.

paccasassi (a.k.a. *C. maritimum* in Linnean terminology) is a wild edible plant found throughout the Mediterranean, Pacific, and Atlantic coasts (Figure 3).

Since its establishment in 2015, this small artisanal company's main brand concept has pivoted on using the local term (*paccasassi*) to launch its flagship product. Commenting on the company's commercial strategy to "bet it all" on the oil-pickled *paccasassi*, their most expensive product (selling for about 10 euros a jar), Claudia pointed out how *il vasetto*—a glass jar in which all the details of the small succulent leaves are clearly visible—works as their name card (*biglietto da visita*), especially when they deal with American importers who have never encountered the plant or its derived

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Figure 3. Sea fennel. Courtesy of the author 2023.

products. The analogy between an object (*il vasetto*) and a textual artifact (*biglietto da visita*) is revealing of the labor of intersemiotic translations (across semiotic domains) performed by the neorural entrepreneurs I work with. A similar strategy is at play in the promotional flyer, which displays full color images of possible *paccasassi* culinary uses: on bruschetta, with focaccia, in a series of salads, etc. The crafting of what Agha (2011) calls a "commodity register," that is, the task of connecting an unfamiliar token (a jar of pickled *paccasassi*) with the company's brand type and with a forgotten social and culinary world, requires complex semiotic procedures and cannot simply rely on verbal language (Nakassis 2012). Claudia further articulated the challenges she faces in marketing a product whose name is unknown, forgotten, or even unintelligible:

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> If one has to sell […] let's say *pasta*, you'd try to persuade [the customers] by explaining [them] why your pasta is better, that is, you'd tell them about the production process […] I [instead] still have to explain people what [*paccasassi*] actually are […]. Because these products are so utterly typical that there is not really a word to call them.

Despite these challenges, the neorural entrepreneurs who decided to quit their 9 to 5 jobs to start a new professional life as farmers of these highly local delicatessens firmly insist on using the regional terminology to refer to these hyper-local products. When I asked Giorgio, the cofounder of a family-run wild-cherry-based agricultural company, how does he market his products to customers who are not familiar with the term *visciola*, he explained to me how, in approaching novices, he mostly relies on nonverbal explanations and on ostensive definitions (i.e., showing the item instead of providing a metalinguistic gloss for it):

> [I always] bring along a jar of sour cherries in syrup. That is, the freshly picked sour cherries covered with sugar and exposed to the sun. In such a way, I can make [people] understand what we're talking about because if I say "wild cherry" people have a hard time understanding. Instead, I make you understand that it's much smaller and it's dark and thus in that way it is easier to understand.

A key role is played by the display of the company's limited production of glass jars filled with fermented sour cherries (Figure 4).

As he continues to discuss his marketing and translating techniques, Giorgio describes his two other main procedures: *sampling* and *pairing*. He explains how, after *showing* an emblematic product-token *visciole* in syrup, he proceeds to create (through *pairing*) syntagmatic relations with other nonverbal elements (i.e., other food items) and thus forge meaningful tasting connections capable of rendering (through *sampling*) the sensorial and social world of his signature product: *visciola* dessert wine:

> So, I first I show you the product. The second part is where to use it […] so well here we have sweet [cherry] wine, but how do I pair it, right? And so, I… we decided to make this second product which is the *ciambelline* [ring-shaped dry cookies] […] so I always bring them with me […] and so I tell you what it is… I tell you what the sour cherry is, I show it to you, and then I tell you how to pair it and the pairing is at the end of the meal with dry pastries and whatnot.

As I first-hand noticed while observing Giorgio interacting with customers at food festivals and farmers' markets, his first marketing move is at once a nonverbal attempt at translating the unfamiliar regional term and a food-offering act, in which the core ingredient of his niche production is connected to rural practices of domestic production and food-mediated hospitality, still vivid in the memory of all my Marchesan interlocutors in the 45–85 age range. It is through *showing, pairing*, and *sampling* that Giorgio establishes the semantic extension (i.e., referential range) of the term and crafts a (regional) commodity register (Agha 2011) wherein to inscribe his products. As revealed by their little gasps of surprise and delight, the natives of the region immediately recognize the social world evoked by the precious dark and viscous content of

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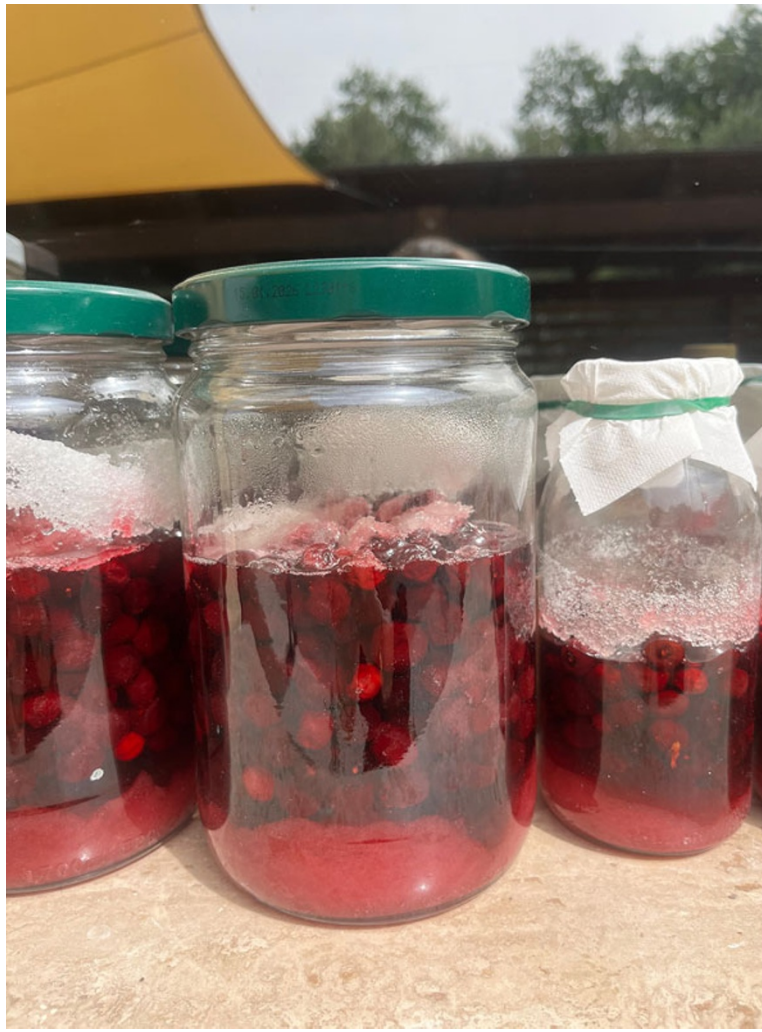

Figure 4. *Visciole* fermenting in sugar. Cingoli (Macerata province). Courtesy of the author 2024.

the jar. "Haaah! Le visciole de nonna!" Exclaimed in awe (and in a distinctive regional accent) a visitor of Giorgio's stand at the farmers' market where I first met him. The comment signaled the visitor's uptake (Austin 1962) of the rural sharecropping imaginary that Giorgio sought to evoke through the display of the jar, that is, through a multimodal transductive act: from object, to memory, to utterance.

As was the case for most of central Italy, Marchesan agriculture pivoted on sharecropping (*mezzadria*). Every sharecropper's family owned at least one *visciolo* tree. In June, when the trees were harvested, the fruits would be generally placed in large glass jars and covered with sugar. The jars would be exposed to the sun for about two months and periodically stirred and shaken to facilitate the fermentation process, during which

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the sugar would dissolve morphing into a dark red syrup. The process, which was generally a prerogative of the older women in the household, would result in a syrupy blend of whole unpitted *visciole* floating in sweet and tart juice. The product of this informal work of care by women would become a welcoming gift dispensed in parsimonious amounts to the household's visitors. Like *paccasassi* hand-picked by women and kids from the rocks along the coast where they spontaneously grow, *visciole* occupied a distinctive peripheral status in the political economy of sharecropping: the hobby product of a side job aimed at circulating as a gift and as a token of culinary (and picking!) talent. As Roberto, one of my elderly (79 years old) interlocutors, put it: "*Visciole* and *paccasassi* could not be bought, they were picked and they were given. But if you wanted to buy them… well they were not for sale." In a similar fashion, recalling her childhood summer memories of *paccassassi* picking, Margherita now in her early 60s, described how her great-uncle would give her and her cousins a boat ride to the most secluded and inaccessible beaches along the coast for them to pick from the rocks the thick, fleshy leaves needed to prepare the pickles (Figure 5).

As Tsing points out (Tsing 2013, 21), capitalism is incapable of producing most of what it needs to function, it "depends on converting stuff created in varied ways […] into capitalist commodities" and thus has to rely on translation. To turn *visciole* wine and *paccasassi* pickles into commodities, the people I work with deploy complex forms of intersemiotic translation across modalities and semiotic fields whereby gift/hobby products are turned into meaningful and intelligible desirable commodities. To be successful, however, these operations require preserving some of the informal semiotic activities and gift-like sociality that originally surrounded these products. An informal and gift-like quality strongly infuses social interactions around the production and distribution of these delicatessens and is key in turning them into regional commodities through crafting connections between a local food item and "fragments of sensorial experience, specific social activities, modes of conduct, fashions of speaking" (Agha 2011, 27). My interlocutors are often busy organizing *eventi* ("events"): afternoon hikes in the woods culminating with an al fresco dinner or aperitif at a panoramic location, participation (with food and wine sampling) in fundraising events for the most diverse causes, outdoor activities, and hands-on nature explorations to enhance children's botanical knowledge and environmental awareness, etc. Although the commercial gain is generally minimal, these social and linguistic activities are fundamental in producing both regional commodity formulations and pericapitalist linguistic spaces, which both farmers and their customers seem to greatly appreciate.

The several small-sized companies currently burgeoning across the Marchesan countryside aim at revitalizing old culinary practices that had consistently remained outside of the commercial sphere by turning them into niche gastronomic commodities. To do so, they forge a regional commodity register whereby their activities are made at once financially profitable and existentially meaningful. Key in this process is the production of a representational economy of qualitative incommensuration centered on acts of semiotic labor, which combine proclaims of linguistic untranslatability and material gestures of sensuous translation. To understand how these practices and ideologies of (un-)translatability inform the nexus between language, ecological imagination, and neorural revivals, we should turn to the interplay between linguistic standardization and agricultural scalability within Italy's social and economic life since the aftermath of WWII.

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Figure 5. Margherita and her cousins picking *paccasassi* along the Conero Coast, early seventies. Courtesy of Margherita Guarnerio.

Linguistic standardization, rural exodus, and neodialect poetry

Renowned for its great linguistic diversity and fragmented for centuries into a multiplicity of city-states and regional polities, Italy became a unified state (under the Savoy Dynasty) only in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is estimated that when the newly unified kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861, only less than 10% of the population mastered the national language, while the rest of the country spoke linguistic varieties, commonly referred to as "dialects" (Maiden and Parry 1997; Tosi 2001). For almost a century, most of the population only spoke local languages and had limited

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knowledge of Italian. The situation changed dramatically after the end of World War II, due to a series of factors, such as compulsory schooling and military service, the rise of broadcast media (television and radio), as well as the unprecedented language contact prompted by the massive rural exodus and the migration from northeastern and southern Italy to the industrial North (De Mauro 1970).

Within a few decades, Italy shifted from a context in which "dialects" were the most common form of everyday spoken communication to a situation in which they became relegated to informal and in-group situations and stigmatized as the parlance of lower classes and elderly people (Cavanaugh 2004; Berruto 2018). Interestingly, it was precisely during the 1940s and 1950s, that a new generation of prominent Italian writers and poets, stimulated by the fast-paced industrialization and the erosion of entrenched sociolinguistic ecologies, began to turn to local linguistic varieties as the main source of literary expression. Starting in the 1940s, various poets began to express a renewed interest in regional codes and colloquial registers, giving form to the heterogenous and long-lasting (till the present day) field of "neodialect" poetry (Brevini 1990). Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975), one of the most renowned Italian writers and public intellectuals, played a key role in spearheading the post-war neodialect trend. Spread over three-plus decades, Pasolini's efforts to revitalize local languages and poetic traditions include his own poetic production in Friulan (Pasolini 1942), a series of critical essays in Italian (Pasolini 1999), curatorial works—see the two major poetic anthologies he edited in 1952 (with Mario Dell'Arco) and in 1955, as well as a nearly ethnological enquiry, published in three different issues of the journal *Il Belli* (AA.VV 1952-1953) with the title "Our Referendum." Here, 12 prominent poets writing in different regional languages were invited to respond to three questions on their literary and social choices.[10]

As several literary critics and poets have highlighted, this dialect revival was all but a naïve return to an original mother tongue (Benvegnù 2017; Brevini 1990; Pasolini [1951] 1999, 375; Villalta 1995a; Zanzotto 2011, 510). Rather, it was the outcome of a highly deliberate and reflexive metalinguistic meditation on the socioeconomic frictions and linguistic tensions triggered by the parallel standardization of the Italian language (De Mauro 1970) and the mechanization of rural labor aimed at scaling up production (Ginsborg 1990).

In several of his critical essays, Pasolini (1999) framed his neodialect call as a deliberate 'regression' (*regresso*) along the "degrees of being […] toward a language closer to the world (*una lingua più vicina al mondo*)" (Pasolini 1952, CXVIII–CXIX). Pasolini's (1942) groundbreaking literary debut was, indeed, a collection of poems in Friulan, a language he did not speak natively nor fluently (Pasolini 1952, CXVIII). Imbued with political and psychoanalytic overtones, Pasolini's ([1951] 1999, 375) "regression" from standard Italian to Friulan mediated a different mode of experiencing the world and inhabiting language, which may be understood as a process of identification with the linguistic and phenomenological experience of rural speakers to advance the poet's awareness of reality and the peasant's political consciousness.[11] Another more contemporary Northeastern poet, Gian Mario Villalta (born in 1959), often declared his lack

[10]Each poet provided radically different answers to the three questions, confirming Brevini's (1994, 15) description of neodialect poetry as "a punctiform field of unrelated experiences."

[11]As such, the neodialect literary endeavor is different from other nostalgic attempts to revitalize local dialects, which focus more on the nexus between local dialects and identity politics (Cavanaugh 2004).

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of fluency in the local parlance (Benvegnù 2017). The Ancona native Franco Scataglini drew on the language of Dante, and other prominent Vulgar and troubadour poets of the Middle Ages (e.g., Guido Cavalcanti, Jacopo da Lentini, and Jacopone da Todi) and the Renaissance (Olimpo da Sassoferrato) to distill a linguistic alternative to standard Italian, which he deemed unfit for poetic expression (Scataglini 1988; Tandello 2010; Mengaldo 2022).

Despite their many differences, neodialect poets share a common interest in a poetic medium capable of expressing a linguistic and sociopolitical resistance against the centripetal homogenization and loss of agrolinguistic diversity of post-war Italy. Theirs is a quest for a primal and originative word whereby to convey the increasingly evanescent experience of a direct connection between reality and language. The central theme of the disappearing socioeconomic and agrolinguistic worlds thus becomes a meditation on the (un-)translatability between linguistic codes and a reflection on the incommensurability between poetic language and the utilitarian techno-automatized idioms of scalable production.[12]

Two decades after his 1942 poetic debut, Pasolini (1964) published, in the Communist periodical *Rinascita*, a passionate metalinguistic appraisal of Italy's sociolinguistic context and a resolute accusation of what he defined as *Italiano medio* ('average Italian'): a service lingua franca that lacked a community of native speakers and was reduced to the mere referential function (Jakobson 1960) of exchanging information as if it were currency. Pasolini's (1964) dread for the average Italian was not simply motivated by his critical political stance toward the increasing marginalization of the spoken word and the social world of subaltern classes, but it also derived from a poetic concern for the centripetal pull of linguistic automatization. "Average Italian," in Pasolini's (1964: 35) view, was not a real national language but a "technical sub-language," based on a metapragmatics of translational encompassment, whereby regional linguistic varieties could be subsumed within a maximally instrumental and minimally expressive national *koiné*.

Crafting nonscalability through acts of poetic untranslatability

Inspired by Pasolini's poetic production and metalinguistic reflections, other post-war neodialect poets have developed a variety of literary responses to standard Italian's linguistic scalability and translational encompassment. The widespread neodialect practice of autotranslation, for example, entails the juxtaposition of two or three versions of the same poem and is aimed at providing a display (at the same time material and linguistic) of the incommensurable and nonunilinear relationship between Italian and "dialect." An example is Gian Mario Villalta's (1995b) collection of poems, *Vose de vose/Voci di Voci* ('Voices of Voices'), composed in a Venetian–Friulan linguistic variant spoken in his village (Visinale). By providing almost every poem with a critical

[12]Whereas Pasolini's vernacular poetic production is characterized by the practice of autotranslation and by the juxtaposition of Italian versions of the Friulan poems, in his metalinguistic and critical reflections, Pasolini often emphasized the untranslatability of the vernacular poetic word, which he described as systematically lacking lexical and sonic equivalents in standard Italian (Pasolini [1947] 1999, 255). Pasolini's ambiguous, or even contradictory, stance with respect to (un)translatability should be interpreted as a strong refusal of forms of metalinguistic encompassment, that is, as an assertion of the radically autonomous status of the regional languages, which cannot be incorporated into standard Italian.

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gloss and a translation, Villalta confronts his readers with juxtapositions of texts and lexicons meant to produce interruptions and frictions between the different linguistic variants. In so doing, Villalta foregrounds the irreducible and nonscalable existence of the local parlance and of its related ecological imagination, reasserting Pasolini's conception of language as a vibrant core of political and social existence (Benvegnù 2017, 441).

In a similar yet different way, Franco Scataglini, one of the most renowned poets operating between the 1960s and the 1990s in the very region where I currently work with neorural farmers, articulated his own poetics of nonscalability by combining precarious forms of interlinguistic calibration with the deployments of poetic analogies framed through tight quatrains of septenarian verses. Deeply and explicitly influenced by Pasolini, to whom he dedicated a section of his poem *Carta Laniena* (Scataglini [1982] 2022, 223), Scataglini (1988) aimed at restoring a meaningful connection with locality, understood as the linguistic consciousness of the material existence of things in the world, or, in his own words: "the profound sense of saying in which the naming of things is *tout court* their essence" (*il senso profondo del dire in cui la nominazione delle cose e' tout court la loro sostanza*).

Scataglini's poetic oeuvre is characterized by the systematic insertion, in a central Italian substratum, of regional voices and expressions derived from Anconitan lexical, morphosyntactic, and phonological features. Namely, the degemination of consonant sounds (*sepia* instead of the standard Italian *seppia*, "cuttlefish"), the elision of final syllables (apocope), the inversion of sounds in a word (metathesis): *drento* instead of *dentro* ('inside'), the lack of morphological agreement between plural noun phrases and singular third-person verbs.[13] Although he departed from more radical forms of neodialect linguistic alterity and bilingualism (such as the practice of auto-translation), Scataglini preserved a sense of linguistic and ontological otherness through the insertion, in his generally brief compositions made of one or two four-line stanzas, of one or two highly regional (and largely unintelligible) lexical items, to which he would assign a pivotal role in the text. A case in point is *Vita e scritura* ([1977] 2022, 70), which Scataglini (1988) considered to be his poetic manifesto, as well as an account of his formation as a poet through his own struggle with the bilingual environment of his youth.

Vita e scritura	*Life and writing*
Per me vita e scritura ène compagni, el sai, tuta scancelatura dopo dulor de sbai.	For me life and writing They go hand in hand, you know, it's all erasures after the pain of mistakes.
Se cerca'n sòno lindo drento de sé e se trova el biatolà d'un dindo spèrsose'nte la piova.	You are on a quest for a pure sound but what you find within yourself [is] the lament of a turkey lost in the rain.

[13] See also Canettieri (2022) and Scataglini's (1988) explicit discussion of linguistic operations he used to restore a sense of the Anconitan soundscape.

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In comparing himself to a humble bird (a clumsy turkey lost in the rain), the poet exposes different gradients of dialectal otherness: from the most foreign-sounding *dindo* ('turkey') and *biatolar* ('lament'), to the near-Italian *sbai* ('error'), and *scancelature* ('erasures'). This work of interlinguistic tuning and calibrated translation is at once a display of "vernacular specificity" (Tandello 2010, 233) and a metalinguistic approximation, through errors and deletions, to an ultimate poetic language. As Scataglini (1988) pointed out in an extensive reflection on the relation between Italian and Anconitan, the poem also offers an account of the literary and linguistic travails of his youth, when, as he initially tried to write in his regional language, he was confronted with his teachers' reprimands, which led him to suppress the language of his daily existence and simultaneously erase the painful mistakes of his failed poetic production in standard Italian:

> I began to repress [Anconitan] inside of me since the first year of school, when I learned to write my first words and thoughts. […] Thus, when many years later I began to compose verses in Italian, and as I continued to write, I always had the perception of a fracture within me that could not be healed. This is why I kept on writing and destroying [what I was writing]. I did it for twenty years. I only saved a few notes written in very minute and almost untranslatable handwriting: they were the dialect verses that I had begun to write at the beginning of the 1960s.

This process of self-censorship, continued Scataglini (1988), finally came to an end when he realized that his path to poetic expression required learning how to inhabit, through processes of interlinguistic calibration, the liminal and precarious space produced by the difference between Italian and his own interpretation of the vernacular. Furthermore, by anchoring the existential meaning of his poems to hyper-local terms and/or referents, posited as untranslatable into standard Italian, Scataglini used the vernacular as a tool of analogic expression, whereby subjective affective states and intensities are objectified as elements of a specific physical and linguistic ecology. Rather than being mediated by elaborate adjectival structures, the description of subjective qualitative experiences is consigned to vernacular noun phrases. This procedure is exemplified in the poem below (Scataglini [1977] 2022, 107), in which, by means of a simile (i.e., a direct comparison between two unlike things), the poet explicitly compares his lovelorn self to the fishbone of a *mugellina* (a local fish).

So'rimaso la spina	*A fishbone is left of me*
Est'amore m'ha coto	This love cooked me
Come'na mugelina	Like a little mullet
Spolpato sopra e soto	Stripped above and below
So'rimaso la spina	A fishbone is left of me

In another poem titled *Insetto de Passió* ('insect of passion'), Scataglini ([1977] 2022, 140) compares himself to a June bug (*ziza*, in Anconitan), likening his dependence from a tenderly sadistic lover to that of June bugs local kids used to play with by tying a fine thread around the insects' bodies. Understanding these fragments of lived experience and translating the regional lexicon that intersperses these poems

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require not a process of semantic decodification, but an existential proximity with the vernacular and nearly onomatopoeic linguistic environment, made of "small snails perched on purple grass" (*C'è i bumbardeli apesi/in cima a l'erba viola*; Scataglini [1977] 2022, 84), "flocks of seagulls fishing large sardines" (*sta suspeso un affolo/de cocali che spiga/sardoncini*; Scataglini [1982] 2022, 162), "dolphins-decapitated cuttlefish" (*la sepia delfinata*; Scataglini [1982] 2022, 223), "half-dead shrimp mantises with their legs scampering" (*nochie che meze morte/sgrícula co'le zampe*; Scataglini [1977] 2022, 74), etc. In this sense, the combination of self-enclosed quatrain stanzas with the analogical procedure variously realized through vernacular metaphors and onomatopoeic similes at once seeks to rematerialize language and conjure a sense of vernacular linguistic incommensurability and nonscalable life forms.

I argue that these poetic assertions of linguistic and ontological irreduction foreshadow the neorural displays of untranslatability discussed earlier. By hindering the encompassment of local (agro-)linguistic varieties and practices within higher-level national orders, these poetic procedures have, somewhat paradoxically, charted out "frameworks of semiotic engagement" (Agha 2011, 25) wherein contemporary neorural farmers may craft economically profitable and existentially meaningful alternatives to intensive farming. Let us now return to them.

Free thinkers … On exit strategies and unscripted interactions around words and things

On a hot summer afternoon, I was picking *visciole* near Osimo with a rather heterogenous group of full-time and part-time farmers. As we were laboring over the same tree, Giancarlo (now in his early sixties) began to tell me the story of how, once he turned 50, he quit his job as a "commercial accountant" (*revisiore contabile*) to become a "free thinker" (*libero pensatore*). Despite their differences (in age, gender, social and educational background, etc.), the Marchesan farmers I work with share similar professional and existential trajectories: after inheriting a small plot of land from their family, they abandoned their jobs (or prospective employment opportunities) in the secondary or tertiary sector to start a new career as independent small farmers.[14] In every single conversation I had with my interlocutors about their professional trajectories, farming (be it full-time or part-time) was contrasted with wage labor and presented as a realm of personal independence and autonomous decision-making. Giancarlo's account (from which the excerpt below is drawn) well conveys this existential posture.[15] Through an impressive historical parable, he compared his back-to-the-land trajectory with that of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus (c. 519–c. 430 BC), a Roman patrician and military

[14]From a politico-economic standpoint, it should be noted that these neorural entrepreneurial adventures are never solitary endeavors, but always entail a partnership with other proximate consanguineal or affinal relatives and some substantial economic backup either in the form of family assets (e.g., house and land) and/or occasional unpaid labor (e. g., a mother-in-law who offers to bake cakes or pick cherries in her spare time), or capital (e.g., severance pay, retirement funds, and pension income).

[15]In the transcripts, the lines follow intonation units, *italics* mark lexical or morphosyntactic regional variants or colloquial expressions, […] indicates omitted lines, (??) inaudible speech, CAPITAL letters reflect emphasis realized either through higher volume or slower pace.

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leader who lived during the early Roman Republic and became an emblem of civic virtue.

"I did like Cincinnatus." Osimo, June 18, 2024.

1. Nella tarda età mi sono dato all'agricoltura […]	1. When I got older, I took up farming […]
2. I miei genitori *c'avevano la tera*	2. My parents *had land*
3. ho fatto come Cincinnato	3. I did like Cincinnatus
4. siccome ero un libero pensatore	4. since I was a free thinker
5. mi è sempre piaciuto fare come *me pare*	5. I always liked to do *as I like*
6. se c'era qualcosa che non me andava	6. if there was something that I did not like
7. me ne andavo	7. I would leave
8. e non *c'era problemi*	8. and *there was no problem*
9. e me ne sono andato	9. and [so] I left
10. e mi sono dedicato all'agricoltura […]	10. and dedicated myself to farming […]
17. Come Cincinnato […]	17. Like Cincinnatus […]

Portrayed as a "temporary dictator" who alternated serving as a valiant military commander to withdrawing to his cherished life as a small farmer, Cincinnatus epitomizes the ideals of independence, understatement, and autonomy that my interlocutors associate with farming.

19. Siamo all'inizio della Repubblica Romana. […]	19. We are at the beginning of the Roman Republic […]
20. A un certo punto contro gli Etruschi,	20. At one point, against the Etruscans
21. c'era da combattere contro gli Etruschi.	21. [the Romans] had to fight against the Etruscans.
22. L'unico generale un po' in gamba era Cincinnato,	22. The only general who was a bit smart was Cincinnatus
23. era un po' strano	23. he was a little strange
24. perché diceva sempre pane al pane e vino al vino, hai capito?	24. because he would always call a spade a spade, you know?
25. non era di quelli	25. he wasn't like those
26. i politici, no? che cercano sempre la mediazione	26. the politicians, right? who always seek mediation
27. Allora cosa succedeva?	27. So how did it work back then?
28. Quando c'era *da fa'*	28. When there was something *to do*
29. allora *chiamava a lui*. […]	29. then *they would call him*. […]
33. e per meno di un anno, comandava lui […]	33. and for less than a year he would be in charge […]
35. sconfiggeva	35. and would defeat (the enemy's troops)
36. e ritornava nel suo orto,	36. and go back to his garden,
37. nel suo *campeto* […]	37. to his *little field* […]
38. lui era un piccolo coltivatore.	38. he was a small farmer.
39. E tornava lì,	39. And he would go back there,
40. poi […] lo richiamavano,	40. then […] they would call him back
41. poi l'anno dopo…	41. then after a year …
42. se ne era andato di nuovo. […]	42. then he would go back [to farming] again. […]
44. Gli piaceva fare	44. He enjoyed being
45. Fare il servitor della patria	45. Being a servant of the country
46. Senza avere incari particolari duraturi	46. without having any long-lasting mandate

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Giancarlo's narrative is evocative of how most of my interlocutors see their existential choice as a way of avoiding (dependent) labor, or, even more radically, enacting a "strategy of refusal," a theme that has long been discussed by (neo-)workerist theorists (Tronti [1965] 1980; Fumagalli 2015). Several of my interlocutors (in their mid-twenties to early-thirties) are at the beginning of their professional lives; others (in their early to mid-forties) have turned to full-time farming after a first part of their lives spent in different professions, while others are retirees who, after several decades spent as factory workers, are finally able to devote more time to what used to be their side job/hobby: farming. As revealed by the local term *metalmezzadro*—roughly translatable as 'metalsharecropper', a portmanteau of *metalmeccanico* ('metalworker') and *mezzadro* ('sharecropper')—a mixed pattern of livelihood has been widespread in the region: many of my middle-aged and elderly interlocutors used to combine a regular factory job (as metal factory workers) with more informal types of agricultural engagement, suggesting a longstanding connection between farming and personal autonomy (Wolf 1969) and between informality and rural revenues.[16]

Regardless of explicit pronouncements, the ambiguous blurring of the boundary between work and nonwork, which imbues the lives of the neorural farmers I study, is produced through situated moments of interaction, characterized by a marked degree of discursive unscriptedness and regional parlance. Whether recorded in the fields or in local farmers' markets, the interactions in my corpus (approximately 150 hours of recordings) reveal strong parallels between the informal quality of (relatively) unregimented agricultural labor and the interactional effervescence in people's modes of talk. While they manually pick *visciole* or *paccasassi* without the aid of noisy mechanical tools, the friends and acquaintances, who generally gather as a casual work team during the harvesting season, chat and joke, exchange farming tips and intimate narratives, gossip about common acquaintances, and recall the old times of sharecropping (*mezzadria*) social life, in an unpredictable succession of topics and affective intensities. Without any predetermined work plan, people choose a tree or a plant to harvest and talk as they steadily and somewhat distractedly pick cherries, their attention's focus effortlessly shifting from manual to conversational labor (Figures 6 and 7). All this interactional activity is characterized by the deployment of markedly regional linguistic variants and is performed in a colloquial mode.

In the fragment of rural conversational activity and labor reproduced in the excerpt below ("Sugo del batte"), Gino begins to recollect a local recipe, for the benefit of three other local pickers and myself (an outsider). Interspersing the narrative with regional lexical terms and syntactic constructs, the participants recollect cooking and commensal practices of their youth, when major events in the farming cycle were marked by special communal meals. Back in the days, farmers would make the best of food scraps and turn them into fancy meals, a case in point was the "sugo del batte," a special sauce made with chicken or duck entrails and used as a special dressing for the pasta-based meal communally consumed to celebrate the end of threshing (*batte* in the local language), which at that time was done manually.

[16] As Eric Wolf (1969, xiv–xv) points out, peasants are typically self-employed and subsistence-oriented, which, unlike the wageworkers' condition, entails a remarkable degree of autonomy in making "decisions regarding the processes of cultivation" (Wolf 1969, xiv).

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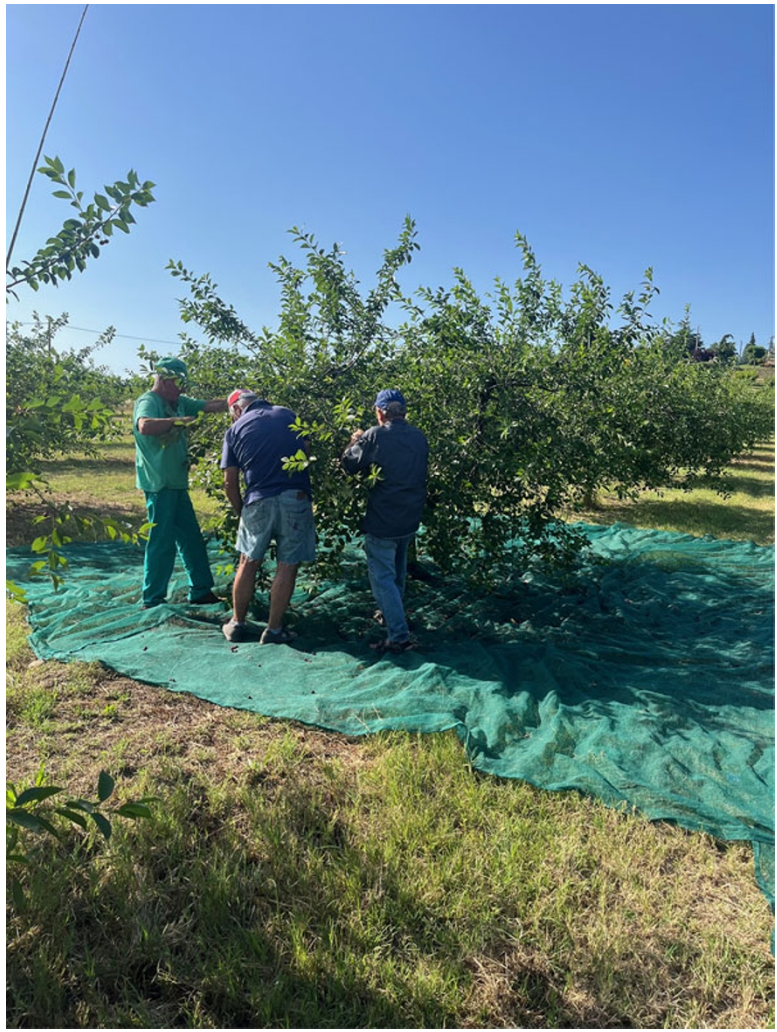

Figure 6. Harvesting *visciole* in Osimo (Ancona Province). Courtesy of the author 2024.

"Sugo del batte." Osimo, June 18, 2024.

1. Gino: No no no TUTTO!	1. Gino: No no no EVERYTHING!
2. del pollo non *se* buttava via niente […]	2. Of the chicken, nothing *was thrown* away […]
3. *i ragagli* del pollo non *se* buttava via niente	3. chicken *entrails*, nothing *was thrown* away
4. dallo *zampo*	4. (you would eat everything) from the *leg*
5. alle budella	5. to the guts
6. all'interiora	6. to the entrails
7. TUtto *se magnava*	7. EVERYthing *was eaten*

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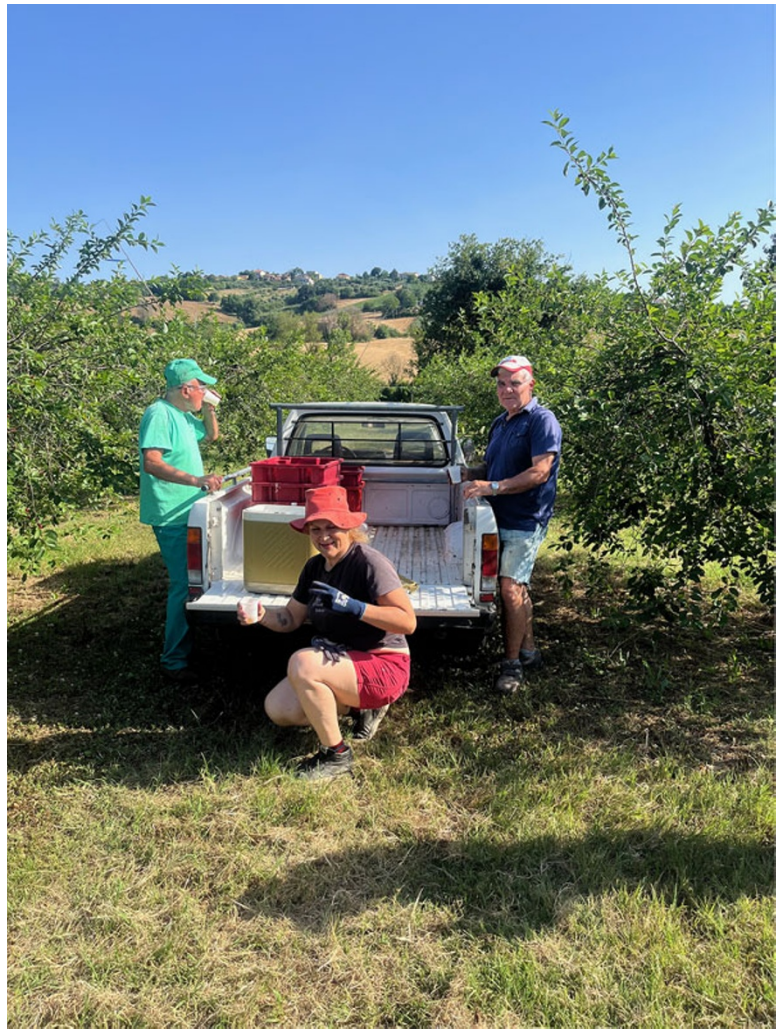

Figure 7. Harvesting *visciole* in Osimo (Ancona Province). Courtesy of the author 2024.

8. e *se* faceva il sugo *se* faceva	8. And the sauce *was made. It was made*
9. e il sugo *veneva bono* Eh	9. and the sauce *came out good* Eh
10. ma per pulire le budella del pollo	10. But to clean the guts of the chicken
11. si lavavano *ben fatto*	11. they were rinsed *well done*
12. poi si mettevano sotto aceto	12. they were soaked in vinegar

In the interaction, the hiatus between the here-and-now and the there-and-then of a seemingly lost rural world is simultaneously emphasized and blurred. On the one hand, the imperfective tense and the ditransitive impersonal constructions (the so-called Italian impersonal-passive SI, which is here replaced by the regional variant SE)

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foreground the habitual and iterative character of the actions described and the semantic prominence of the recipe's referents (the ingredients expressed by regional terms) over the human agents, conjuring an idyllic elsewhere located in a nonspecific past (Bakhtin 1981, 225). On the other hand, by being embedded within an activity (picking *visciole*) associated with traditional rurality and by deploying a series of regional terms (*ragai, zampo, ruspe, scorticavano, magnava, coceva, arosto, ciccetto*) indexical of the participants' membership in the local community of speech and practice, the narrative operates a "transduction" (Silverstein 2003) into the present of embodied dispositions, cultural values, and social structures of the sharecropping lifeworld, which is, thus, not translated into present-day conceptual frameworks, but actualized through material and linguistic practices.[17] As was the case for the neodialect poetic procedures and the neorurals' *showing, sampling*, and *pairing* practices discussed earlier.

This is particularly apparent at line 13, when Gino seeks confirmation (of the correctness of the recipe) from Maria (a fellow female picker) by addressing her with the exquisitely local title of *vergara* ('landlady'), thus momentarily eliding the distinction between the here-and-now and the there-and-then and superimposing the sharecropping social structures onto the contemporary moment.

13. Gino: dico bene *vergara* là?	13. Gino: Hey there *landlady*, am I right?
14. Maria: sì a bagno con l'aceto	14. Maria: yes soaked in vinegar
15. Gino: a bagno con l'aceto	15. Gino: soaked in vinegar
16. poi *se se* facevano bollire	16. then they *were boiled*
17. e poi *se risciacquavano* di nuovo	17. and then *they were rinsed* again
18. e poi *se* mettevano nel sugo	18. and *were put* in the sauce
19. lo stesso i piedi	19. the same with the feet
20. i *zampi* […]	20. *the zampi* […]
22. Maria: anche le *ruspe*	22. Maria: also the *gizzard* (part of a bird's stomach)
23. Gino.: Come? Ah *sci* perché *sci* i cos	23.Gino.: what? Ah *yeah* because *yeah* the…
24. Maria: le *ruspe* del pollo	24. Maria: the *gizzard* of the chicken
25. Gino: eeeh *se* puliva *ben fatto*	25. Gino: eeeh they *were rinsed well done*
26. *Se faceva* bollire	26. *they were boiled*
27. *Se scorticavano* (???)	27. *they were scraped* (??)
28. poi *se metteva* lì e	28. *they were put* there and
29. non *se* poteva *di'* niente	29. and *there was* no *question* [about it]
30. faceva un sugo di quello (???) […]	30. the sauce was marvelous (???) […]
31. e la domenica *se magnava* a pranzo la pasta	31. and on Sundays for lunch *they would eat* pasta
32. coi *ragai*	32. with *the entrails*
33. e alla sera *se coceva* il pollo *arosto*	33. and in the evening *they would roast* a chicken
34. dico bene Silvano?	34. Am I right Silvano?
35. Silv.: alla domenica	35. Silv.: on Sundays
36. Gino.: ALLA domenica	36. Gino.: ON Sundays
37. la domenica la domenica	37. on Sundays on Sundays

[17] Silverstein's (2003) notion of transduction aims at overcoming Saussurean/denotational notions of interlingual translation and emphasizes the importance of finding "transductional equivalents" capable of capturing the "indexical penumbra" of words (Silverstein 2003, 89).

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38. un pezzo per uno […]	38. Everyone (would get) a piece […]
41. Un *ciccetto* per uno	41. a *little piece of meat* each

The capacity of regional and relatively obsolete linguistic expressions to materialize, once embedded within relevant farming practices, agrolinguistic social worlds nostalgically perceived as vanishing is even more apparent in the next excerpt. Here, Sandro draws an imaginary ("as if") comparison (at line 3) between the leftovers from the cherries we were picking that day and the political economy of scarcity of the old times, when some people would survive by gleaning the grains dropped by harvesters. The combination of proximal deictics (*adesso* 'now' and *questi qui* 'these here') with a hypothetical conditional clause (introduced by the "as if" conjunction) evokes a comparative horizon of both continuity and discontinuity with former rural practices.

"Le purette da Monsano." Osimo, June 18, 2024.

1. Sandro.: dopo la trebbiatura	1. Sandro: after threshing
2. *se andava a raccoglie* le spighe	2. *you would go to pick* the ears of wheat.
3. come se adesso uno volesse raccoglie questi qui	3. As if now one wanted to get these here (referring to the cherries that are left on the ground)
4. fra qualche giorno	4. in a few days (once we have finished harvesting)
5. *se contenta*, capito?	5. (*you would) be content* (with what is left), you know?
6. Pensa *passava le purette* da Monsano	6. Imagine, the *poor women* from Monsano *would come* by
7. quando hai *cavato* le patate	7. when you *have dug* the potatoes
8. *che* noi *cavavam*o le patate q*uand'era 'nverno*	8. *'cause* we would *dig* potatoes *when it was winter*.
9. Allora *passava dopo de noi*	9. Then *they would come by after we* (had finished)
10. *Ruspava* ancora un po'	10. *They would rake* a little further
11. Per trovarne qualcuna	11. To find some

The use of regional terms and morphosyntactic constructions, such as the lack of agreement between (third person) plural subject and verb (inflected in the third person singular, see lines 6, 10, 11, and 15), is key for recuperating a lived sense of yesterday's moral economy, of the social relations that underlay it, and even of its protagonists' voices, as in the direct reported speech at line 14.

[…]	[…]
12. campavano racimolando qualcosa, capito?	12. they would survive by gleaning something, you know?
13. queste qua	13. these here
14. *Diceva: "posso anda' vede se c'è qualcosa?"* […]	14. *they would say: "can I go to see* if there's *anything*?" […]
15. Ma *nesciuno glie diceva no*	15. But *no one would tell them no*

My interlocutors share a strong commitment to forms of agricultural labor (such as picking *visciole* by hand) that are not scalable and are targeted at "hyper-niche production," as Francesco (one of the cofounders of a local artisanal company for the cultivation and transformation of sea fennel), once put it. They enjoy this approach

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to farming and most of them do not seem interested in scaling up and transitioning toward intensive forms of agribusiness. This commitment can be explained, at least in part, by their affective and ideological attachment to regional language, which, once combined with old-school farming practices, has the transductive capacity of actualizing seemingly vanishing social worlds and their related "attentional practices," that is, embodied dispositions and "activity-specific ways of paying attention" (Duranti 2009, 212; see also Goodwin 1994; La Mattina 2023). The production of nonscalability, through acts and ideologies of (un-)translatability, is, however, also an effective form of capitalist valorization, as revealed by my previous analysis of marketing and commodity formulation practices.

Conclusion

After the fast-paced rural exodus that followed the end of World War II, Italy is now experiencing a reverse trend. Many people across the peninsula are participating in various forms of rural revival, ranging from "hobby-farming," to "back-to-the-land" experiences, to forms of collaboration with small local farmers (Grasseni 2014; Siniscalchi 2019; Koensler 2023). In this article, I proposed to explore this phenomenon by analyzing the relation between language and (non)scalability.

To understand the intersection between capitalism and the political economy of translation in contemporary Italy, I proposed an audacious connection between two apparently unrelated fields of cultural production: neodialect poetry and neorural farming. My own audacity resonates with that of my research interlocutors. By choosing "to bet it all" (as one of them put it) on dialect name-branding, neorural farmers opt for a costly and time-intensive approach to crafting a commodity register that might result unintelligible for a larger market of consumers. In a like manner, by centering their poems on vernacular terms and highly local referents, neodialect experimentalists are constantly exposed to the risk of remaining municipal poets, incapable of reaching a national public of critics and readers. Despite these risks, neodialect poets and neorural farmers have consistently pursued a politics of nonscalability through acts of incommensuration and displays of untranslatability.

To fully capture the lived experience, structures of practice, and modes of attention embedded in the poems discussed above, knowledge of the Anconitan is not enough. For example, whereas for individuals who grew up in Ancona and its surroundings in the 1940s and 1950s, the vernacular terms and the images (June bugs kept in hole-filled small cardboard boxes) of *Insetto de Passió* (Scataglini [1977] 2022, 140) are immediately evocative of a common springtime children's game, the poem remains mostly unintelligible for people who are not familiar with its lexicon and with the practices it describes. Aside from the poetic production of nonscalable lifeworlds through various enactments of semantic untranslatability and ontological incommensuration, neodialect poets have also developed, based on the initial opposition between vernacular and national language, a series of "fractal replications" of contrastive sets of qualities (Gal and Irvine 2019, 49), such as periphery vs. center, concreteness vs. abstraction, uniqueness vs. seriality, linguistic purity vs. linguistic crisis, rural world vs. industrial capitalism, germinal language vs. techno-automatism, low vs. high, quotidian vs. lyrical-elegiac, heteroglossic vs. monolingual, standardized vs. spontaneously

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unpredictable, thus generating fractal (i.e., endlessly replicable) orders of nonscalability (Gal and Irvine 2019).

Originally formulated by prominent poets and critics such as Pasolini (1942) and Contini (1943), these "axes of differentiation" (Gal 2012; Gal and Irvine 2019) spread across the Italian cultural and literary landscape in the aftermath of WWII and circulated through more peripheral environments such as the Anconitan province, which provided the backdrop for Scataglini's (2022) literary experimentations, and were locally disseminated through a series of poetry festivals, radio programs, and cultural events devoted to the promotion and revitalization of vernacular poetry and folk literatures.

For example, *Residenza* (Residence),[18] a weekly "radio journal" devoted to poetry readings, that Scataglini founded in 1980 together with other local poets and intellectuals constituted an important device for the dissemination of these qualitative contrasts. In 1994, the year of his death, Scataglini also founded in Ancona a poetry festival entitled *Poesia in Giardino* (Canettieri 2022: XXX). More recent incarnations of these initiatives are *Marchestorie*, a multisited festival devoted to the promotion of Marchesan gastronomic traditions and folk literature and the poetry festival, held across several Marchesan locations, *La Punta della Lingua*.

The neodialect poets' literary and ideological work has delineated how centripetal forces may be creatively disbanded, recalibrated, and disrupted by alternative modes of using language, providing, albeit indirectly, a semiotic framework for the neorural farmers' production of a niche-market pivoting on profitable forms of nonscalability.

Contrary to existing hegemonic regimes of translational encompassment, according to which regional languages can be completely subsumed within standard Italian, without leaving residues, my neorural interlocutors engage in sophisticated displays of untranslatability and interlinguistic calibrations, suggesting how certain things cannot be "reduced" to standard Italian verbiage or to plain and straight commodities. Further, contrary to the relentless production of highly scripted and generic interactional templates prescribing how language should be used to maximize scalable productivity, my interlocutors are committed to a significant degree of discursive unscriptedness as they interact both in the fields and in farmers' markets. Through the practice of showing, pairing, and sampling, they produce sophisticated sensorial dictionaries whereby they provide ostensive definitions of their typical products, without having to rely on the use of standard Italian to translate the names and flavors of the local delicatessens they produce and sell, in so doing they incorporate, within the commodity registers they craft, traces of the gift-like sociality that originally surrounded these products. The forms of nonscalable incommensuration resulting from neorural practice are clearly (and somewhat paradoxically) scalable and connected to the literary experiments with (un-)translatability formerly undertaken by neodialect poets. Ironically and perhaps unknowingly, the former manufactured poetic processes the latter may now draw on to develop a "strategy of refusal" (Tronti [1965] 1980) to disengage from the alienation of agribusiness scalable production and, at the same time, craft profitable niche markets from where to extract capitalist value.

[18] *Residenza* (Residence) was broadcast by the local branch of Italian national radio (Radio Rai Marche): https://www.raiplaysound.it/audio/2023/07/Wikiradio-del-25072023-3f9119ef-cfb0-468b-a75e-8674f5fb5976.html accessed on July 18, 2025.

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How do incommensurate worlds emerge, and how are they sustained in their incommensurability?" Asks Povinelli (2001, 320) in a discussion on the possibility of alternative ethical or epistemological horizons and the emergence of radical social worlds against "the complicated space and time of global capital." Neorural and neo-dialect projects (through their history of reciprocal collisions and overlaps) may offer an interesting perspective to attend to Povinelli's (2001) question.

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