Italian Cowboy Songs: The Wild West in the Countercultural Imagination

"It was not just of fights; this frontier was of guitars as well."
Jorge Luis Borges[1]

During the long decade of sociopolitical unrest and cultural revolution in Italy (1968-1980), how is it that the myth of the Cowboys-and-Indians West[2] became so conspicuously popular in both mainstream and countercultural productions? For, beginning with the student revolutions in 1968, the counterculture set itself up as alternative and oppositional to mainstream Italian values. Revolutionary ideology, furthermore, was diametrically opposed to some dominant modern ideologies that were recognized as born in and spread from the US. In 1968 the student and laborer revolutionaries were marxist, anti-capitalist, collectivist, egalitarian, anti-imperialist and opposed to US interference in Vietnam, while the US myth was libertarian, individualistic, and based in a historical setting of imperialism and big-business-driven progress. There were certainly aspects of the myth that would have appealed to the revolutionaries: it is indeed anti-authoritarian, pre-bourgeois, and full of the potential for individual and national rebirth. Yet, the foundations for that rebirth, in a mythical 'new' and 'pure' land, lie in genocide; indeed, a genocide that was accomplished during the very years of the so-called Wild West of *Far-West* as it is called in Italy. The foreign myth seems

[1] "no sólo de peleas; esa frontera era de guitarras también." Jorge Luis Borges, "Palermo de Buenos Aires," in *Prosa completa 1* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1985), 25.

[2] I will use the terms 'Indian' and 'America' when I am speaking about mythical ideas of those two terms. When speaking about them historically, I will refer to them as 'Native Americans' and the 'US'.

utterly incongruent with the Italian mythos of the counterculture years, so why was it so pervasive in both mainstream and countercultural film, television, comics, and song?

I argue that by the late 60s the myth had changed in a way that made it an empty vessel for ideology; it came to signify nothing and thus could be used to signify anything at all. No longer was it Cowboys v. Indians, rather, heroism and victimhood merged into a single cowboy/indian and the villain became a vague 'baddy' who was changeable across stories. With the merging of cowboy/soldier values and Native American values, then with additional conflations: of immigrants (in the Italian mythos) and musicians (in the folk mythos), heroic values were so diverse as to include nearly any set of values. Roland Barthes claimed that the language of myth has just this power, which allows a formal signifier to refer back to a system of ideas constructed between it and the original sign. The meaning of myth, he says, "is already complete, postulates a past, a memory, a comparative order of ideas. When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind, empties itself, history evaporates, only the letter remains."[3] In the case of the Far-West, it seems that the form had become overly empty, through distance and distortion, and so the system of ideas it represented were not a single commonly-accepted and understood ideology, but, rather, varying sets of ideological systems. I propose that it is this very nature of the myth that made it so popular in Italy during years that saw the nation extremely divided at nearly all levels: Italians from all factions could paste their own narrative and ideals on that of the chameleon hero in the West.[4]

So just how popular was this myth? In mainstream media the West appeared almost ubiquitously leading up to and continuing into the long decade of revolution. *Tex Willer,* an Italian-produced comic book series about a Texas Ranger in the frontier West was the bestselling comic book from 1948 to 1989, including the decade in question. Spaghetti Western releases in Italy peaked in 1968 with 72 films, and continued in popularity even through the economic depression of the 1970s with a second, smaller peak of 42 releases in 1974, until the genre eventually faded out, across the

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[3] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 226-7.

[4] This argument can be extended, somewhat, to the US as well. For the myth was popular in mainstream and alternative culture in the US as well and was re-appropriated to signify all sorts of diverse ideological stances.

world, around 1978.[5] On television, there were ads such as *Carne Montana*'s Gringo campaign, 1966-1979, while RAI aired the musical comedy show *Non sparare, canta!* (Don't Shoot, Sing!) in 1968, costarring the Italian *cantautore,* actor and playwright, Giorgio Gaber.[6]

But it was not just mainstream production that sanctioned and propagated cowboy heroism, but countercultural productions as well. Indeed, the myth became so entrenched that by the time of the 1977 Revolution, the Left, as we will see, seemed almost to be playing at Cowboys and Indians. Between 1972 and 1985 three of the most influential *cantautori*—all three considered then and today to be narrators and interpreters of those tumultuous years—filtered postwar Italy, to a surprising degree, through the lens of the American foundational myth. Francesco Guccini and Francesco De Gregori begin as early as 1972 and 1976, respectively, to present their views from within the mythical space and both continue into the 1990s.[7] They, like the mainstream producers, use the myth as a tool to tell their own narratives; they are the hero/victims in a nostalgic landscape, which represents at once the paradise-lost of childhood and that of the utopic promise of the West itself. Their relationship with the West is sentimental, and because they view it from within, they do not fully parse it, discover its discrepancies, recover and reveal its most troubling historical implications. Fabrizio De André, however, does just this.

De André's use of the myth is not distributed across his career, as it is for Guccini and De Gregori, but is restricted to the years 1978-1981. When he first uses it in 1978's *Rimini*, it is not as a metaphor for his experience, but, rather, he views the myth from outside it. He harnesses it to review the events of the 1977 revolution, which had played themselves out, in the counterculture, as a sort of prairie story of Cowboys and Indians against the amorphous baddy. In "Coda di lupo" and "Avventura a Durango" De André depicts the left as it appears to imagine itself in 1977: split into two factions, the *Indiani metropolitani* (Metropolitan Indians), and the pistol-toting militarist *Autonomia operaia.*

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[5] 3 in 1963, 24 in 1964, 31 in 1965, 51 in 1966, 65 spaghetti westerns produced in Italy in 1967, 72 in 1968, 28 in 1969, 36 in 1970, 42 in 1971, 44 in 1972, 29 in 1973, 8 in 1974, 16 in 1975

[6] Giorgio Gaber plays a half-blood Native American, Idaho Martino, called Halfblood (Meticcio). The series told the story of Custer's 7th regiment on the way to Little Bighorn and Gaber was known for singing the opening theme, "The Ballad of Idaho Martino" (La ballata di Idaho Martino) in cowboy-dress, and summing up the events of past episodes.

[7] De Gregori on his 1992 *Canzoni d'amore* and Guccini's 1992 *Parnassius Guccinii* and his 2004 *Ritratti.*

And as De André, himself, says, in "Avventura a Durango," he additionally satirizes singer-songwriters who romanticizes frontier violence and fancy themselves sorts of cultural outlaws.

Umberto Eco, in 1977, declared that the cowboy has revealed himself a false hero in Italy, and the three *cantautori*'s post-revolutionary songs seem responses to his unmasking.[8] In the first half of the 1980s, all three men release American frontier songs that, to a great degree, reflect back on the economic miracle and counterculture years. Guccini and De Gregori still relate sentimentally, with an air of nostalgia, appearing to mourn the loss of the cowboy hero and his utopia. De André, rather, begins work to return historical memory to the mythical space, he produces an album that is free of cowboys and that restores each character to his historic position. In 1981's *L'indiano* the mythical hero is the Native American, and as history demonstrates, he is also the victim. In songs like "Quello che non ho" and "Fiume Sand Creek" the cowboy and his European ilk—implying the soldier and business man but also the contemporary *cantautore* and his audience—have been returned to their historical position as violent imperialists and bringers of capitalist socioeconomic structures that destroy the native man and his nomadic model.

Historian Paul Ginsborg proposes three reasons for the ultimate failure of the 1968 revolution and its transformation into very different, and even less successful, 1977 revolution. He states that, firstly, the revolutionaries themselves were sectarian and often expressed their ideals "in the vaguest terms," making it difficult to unify under a single banner; secondly, that society at large did not share in revolutionary values—which, however vaguely expressed, were understood broadly as marxist and collective—but rather that "the society that was being formed in the image of the 'economic miracle' was one that accentuated atomization and individualism";[9] and, finally, that the Strategy of Tension's civil acts of terror, beginning in 1969, forced the leftist revolutionaries into either submission to smaller reforms or violent and extreme retaliation. The Strategy of Tension was enacted by the Italian secret service and neo-fascist agents, but surreptitiously supported by the Christian Democrat government, which had close ties with American interests. In fact, many

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[8] "this individual hero had the pose, the terrifying isolation […] of the solitary shooters in the West—no longer dear to a generation that wants indians." Umberto Eco, *Sette anni di desiderio* (Milano: Bompiani, 1983), 99.

[9] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1990), 342.

commentators suspected that President Saragat in the early 1970s believed like his allies at the CIA that "the activities of the extreme right would serve the salutary purpose of increasing the demand for a strong and moderate government."[10] All three of these—the Left's diverse ideological make-up, mainstream Italy's identity as largely aligned with capitalist ideals, and possible US influence or interference—could, perhaps, be read in correlation with the prominence of the vague and changeable, but ultimately capitalist and American, myth. Indeed, Barthes stresses that mythical language cannot fully suppress historical meaning, only distance and distort it. So while it was used to convey many ideologies, it always covertly conveyed, as well, its original historical meaning, so at odds with revolutionaries values and sympathetic to US interests during the Cold War.

This investigation, however, is not concerned with theorizing about the myth as a tool for cultural control during years that saw Europe as a battleground between capitalism and communism. It is, rather, concerned with understanding how singer-songwriters in Italy (but there are implications for US as well) affectively sanctioned and idealized a myth that carried with it and broadcast the very ideological systems that the counterculture set itself up against. If indeed, as I believe, singer-songwriters in contemporary culture stand in a unique position from which they can hold a mirror up to the masses, help man understand himself and his experience, aid man in parsing history, culture, and ideology, then I see countercultural singer-songwriters as largely failing their audience by adhering to this particular myth. As Richard Slotkin, author of *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America,* claims, the value system myth represents becomes naturalized and accepted as a given within the structure of the set of symbols that supports the myth. "Ideas," he says, "are offered in a form that disarms critical analysis by their appeal to the structures and traditions of story-telling and the cliches of historical memory."[11] Yet, it seems to me that singer-songwriters cannot afford to be non-critical. There must be semiological guerrilla fighters who read and decode myth, according to Barthes.[12] This is a particularly apt metaphor for the revolution years, and who better during those years than the artists with an entire generation's attention, the cultural

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[10] Ibid., 335.
[11] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1998), 6.
[12] Barthes, *Mythologies,* 239.

heroes of that era, the singer-songwriters?

In order to arrive at the use of the myth by the counterculture, this chapter will first define the original US myth and summarize the revolutionary events of 1968-1980 in order to propose their essentially oppositional values. It will then go back in time to explore the history of the American frontier in Italy's communal imagination, from opera to immigration, from adventure novels to comics. We will begin to look at how the myth changed in the postwar by comparing *Tex Willer* and *The Lone Ranger,* which appeared apparently independently in Detroit and Milan, in order to understand what the West might have meant to counterculturalists as children. Then we will explore further modifications that fully prepare it for countercultural adoption in Italy, as seen through Sergio Leone's 1968 *C'era una volta il West,* Sam Peckinpah's 1973 *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid,* and Bob Dylan's involvement in that film. Only then may the chapter begin to investigate how the myth was used by countercultural producers, like Marco Ferreri in his 1974 farce starring Marcello Mastroianni as General Custer. And, most importantly, what was conveyed through it by the three *cantautori:* De Gregori, Guccini and De André.

Characterizing America's Founding Myth and Italy's Revolutionary Left

The Essential Ideologies to the American Myth

To each culture, a foundational myth. To each modern nation, as Benedict Anderson argues, the foundational myth is part of the invention of itself, which requires a nation to claim both sovereignty and limitation, and to create a sense of almost religious kinship. The myth of the West in the US is a particularly prevalent and successful example of Anderson's "invention of nationhood where it does not exist."[13] The Pioneer Myth, the Cowboy Myth, the Myth of the Wild West, is the story taught in grade school, the story taught to justify both history and contemporary society. It is the story of the plucky pioneers, the raccoon-hatted explorers, the primitive savage enemy / noble Native American friend, the progress and strength-of-will demonstrated in the cross-country railroad, and, finally, the accomplishment of a teleological anthem and battle cry, which accomplishes

[13] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

both national sovereignty and limitation: "Manifest Destiny." It is the myth, as well, of the wholly original 'American' citizen and his distinction from both New World Indians and Old World Europeans. He is individualistic, uncultivated yet modern, rebellious, at once reluctant and willing to be violent, distrusting of the State/Law yet profoundly nationalistic and innately just, self-actualizing, daring. This is a strong communal imagining, its strength demonstrated still today in the USA's First and, particularly, Second Amendments.

Some of the keywords of the original myth: rebirth and renewed potential; adventurous pioneer spirit; absolute, uncorrupted individual justice; hard work and progress; already reveal an incongruence between the original version of the myth and history. For these positive values and attributes not only hide, but are verily born out of, the dark underbelly of the West as frontier: big business interests, immigrant and African American labor exploitation, national land grabs, and the slow genocide of North American native people that would see its final act in the Great Plains, when Native Americans could not be pushed any further West. The Wild West, Frontier West, or Italian *Far-West*, represent a long historical time-period, but most-frequently play out in the decades following the Civil War. These are the years of greatest action and conflict in the West due in part to Lincoln's 1862 Homestead Act, which allowed settlers to file for federal land grants in the Great Plains and further west, while Native Americans were forced onto increasingly restricted reservations. Tribes of warriors allied and rose up in self-defense and the Great Plains American Indian Wars were fought from 1862 on. These wars and these years mark some of the most well-known battles and characters of the centuries-long fight: the Battle/Massacre of Washita River, the Sand Creek Massacre, Red Cloud's War, the Great Sioux War of 1876–77, the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Wounded Knee Massacre.[14] The California Gold Rush also occurred in this period and sent New Englanders and new immigrants West. It has become a recurring setting for rags-to-riches tales, while historically it resulted as well in a major, state-funded genocide in the Great Basin. Likewise,

[14] These post-Civil War years, furthermore, are represented as emblematic of the intrepid white-European individual's opportunity to pull himself up by his bootstraps, turning his plot of 'wilderness' into tilled field. But history shows that big business was already taking advantage of government grants by paying private individuals to sign contracts in order for the business to patch together larger systems of land for mining, securing water or oil rights, or laying railroad tracks. The pioneer West was already land most fallow for industry.

the Black Hills War and General Custer's Land Stand, the most famous of frontier battles, were driven by gold found in Lakota territory. The cowboys—who in the myth appear wandering the range, upholding justice (or stealing from the rich) wherever possible—historically were most often corporate and government employees, herders for cattle barons, agents of the Wells Fargo Pony Express, or Indian Agents for the government. Finally, the utopic aspect of the myth, that of rebirth in a virgin land, implies an empty space and clean slate, yet the Western 'wilderness' was not wilderness at all, but, rather, a habitat created across millennia by Native Americans.[15]

So when I say that the American national myth represents courageous individualism, personal freedom, rebirth and potential, and anti-authoritarianism, we must remember that all those positive values are based in their negative historical counterparts and that they guarantee the positive aspects of the myth to a certain set of people (white, male) by exploiting, for personal gain, other groups (new immigrants, ex-slaves, native americans, and women (mostly appearing in the myth as prostitutes)) and nature itself. Yet, in the US the myth develops to a point that it can no longer be convincingly argued 'untrue' within the borders of the nation, for it is a cornerstone of the self-conception of a people who have come to resemble the myth and therefore to sustain it. That the myth manages to transform itself in order to continually coalesce with most Americans during periods that would seem to it antithetical is noteworthy, but as it mirrors its people, it is not wholly unbelievable. That the myth could take on such power in Italian culture, however, when it is neither based in Italian history, nor a representation of the foundation of their nation, and that it could, furthermore, replicate itself and amplify its power during the 1960s and 70s in Italy when youth struggled against capitalistic and individualistic values that were associated with the US, is, as I see it, incredible and fascinating.

The Essential Ideologies of the Italian Revolutionaries

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[15] "La wilderness non è tanto un luogo; corrisponde piuttosto a una condizione mentale, ditata culturalmente. L'idea di wilderness come realtà intonsa e selvaggia, contrapposta alla cultura rimane comunque un'astrazione di tipo urbano che riflette il punto di vista di persone ben lontane dall'ambiente naturale dal quale dipendono. L'idea di una natura vergine, senza traccia di occupazione umana, acquista, inoltre, una connotazione di tipo politico e sociale in quanto implicitamente 'disumanizza' le popolazioni indigene che [ci] vivono." Seminario "Le frontiere del Far West (2007: Bergamo, Italy), *Le frontiere del Far West: forme di rappresentazione del grande mito americano*, ed. Stefano Rosso (Milano: Shake, 2008), 105.

The first instance of revolt in Italy was in the spring of 1968 by university students who were unconvinced by the individualistic and consumeristic values that had become predominant in Italy since the economic miracle of the 1950s and 60s. Catholic priest, teacher and reformist, Don Lorenzo Milani's 1967 *Lettera a una professoressa* (Letter to a Teacher), which he wrote together with pupils, denounced the education system as favoring rich students and saw it as one symptom of the triumph of individualism in Italy. It became a cult text for student revolutionaries the following year and was read together with the revival in Marxist thought that was printed in journals like Emilio Panzeri's *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks).[16] The Vietnam War had changed Italian youths' relationship, fracturing for them the American Dream. Revolutionaries were on the side of the Viet Cong and in 1968 one popular anti-imperialist slogan was "Create one, two, many Vietnams!" Works like Milani's and Panzeri's had formed an ideological bases for the values that students would propose in opposition to those of capitalist society. The movement was at once collective and libertarian, it was anti-authoritarian, with even the authority of the family model coming under attack. It was a peaceful movement unless provoked by police violence, yet, with slogans like "power comes out of the barrel of a gun," and its idealized view of revolutionary fighters like Che Guevera and Chinese and Vietnamese communists, revolutionaries seemed from the beginning prepared to revert to violent struggle. In its individual libertarianism and ambivalence towards violence, the '68 revolution has some values in common with the West mythos. Yet, those values do not broadly define it, rather, as Paul Ginsborg states, "the values of solidarity, collective action and the fight against social injustice [as] counterposed to the individualism and consumerism of 'neo-capitalism'" were the main characteristics of a movement that, at its heart, was marxist.[17]

In the summer of 1968 and through 1969, the students joined forces with factory workers and numerous extra-parliamentary revolutionary political groups were formed that occupied the political space to the left of parliamentary parties like the traditional PCI (Italian Communist Party). The most prominent labor group was *Lotta continua* (Continuous Struggle), which until 1976 promoted a marxist self-conception of the working class towards improved working conditions and

[16] Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy,* 300-302.
[17] Ibid., 301, 306.

an eventual toppling of capitalist and white-collar hegemony. The groups continued organized strikes and trade-union bargaining, with significant results even through the economic downturn of the 1970s. PCI support increased during those years and in 1975, for the first time in the history of the postwar Republic, the center-left nearly overtook the center-right Christian Democratic party to gain control of the parliament. Yet, the PCI did not overtake the DC, and the successes the left garnered were in the form of reforms rather than revolution. At the same time neo-fascist Black Brigades' acts of civil terror, beginning with the bombing of Piazza Fontana in Milan in late 1969, put pressure on the left to return that violence in kind. As early as October 1970, a small faction of revolutionaries on the left formed the Red Brigades, their answer to right's Strategy of Tension, and declared the need for illegal and violent action "which would sharpen contradictions in Italian capitalism and make inevitable a civil war between exploiters and exploited."[18]

The struggle continued with workers strikes and occasional violence of the Black and Red Brigades until 1976 saw a disillusioned and frustrated left begin to resort increasingly to acts of terror and 1977 saw a new youth movement manifest itself. 1977 was very different from 1968: the youths were disillusioned, prone to heroin use, and disaffected from traditional, and seemingly unmovable, politics. This disillusionment revealed itself in two forms: a faction that was creative and artistic, tending to create the alternative structures in community centers rather than attempting to overhaul all of society, and a faction that was militaristic and sought to organize a battle against the state.[19] By 1977 it was as if the values of 1968 had been distilled and divided between the distinct groups that resurfaced nearly a decade later, but still the drive for both groups was anti-capitalist and the youths' values were constructed in opposition to capitalist values. Yet, for all of its opposition to these fundamentally modern-American values, the 1977 revolutionaries, as we will see, essentially constructed themselves in the image of the *Far-West* and American foundational mythology. To begin to understand how the myth gained such a lasting foothold in the Italian communal imagination, and what it might have meant to the revolutionaries who dressed up as cowboys and indians in 1977 to bear out their cultural renewal, let us now look back to the myth's long history on the peninsula.

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[18] Ibid., 361-2.
[19] Ibid., 382.

A History of the American Frontier in the Italian Cultural Imagination

The Swiss-Italian ethnomusicologist, Marcello Sorce Keller, argues that in Italy it was written-music, the music of opera, rather than popular folk music, that became "the symbol of an artistic and cultural identity that aspired to consolidate into a political unity."[20] Indeed, it is through opera, rather than the folk tradition, that the foundational myths of the New World—initially its war for independence in the wilderness of New England, then its adventures in the Far-West—first manifest in Italian cultural productions. Pierpaolo Polzonetti cites 1768, the British occupation of Boston, and Niccolò Piccinni's setting of Francesco Cerlone's libretto, *I napoletani in America,*"[21] as the first Italian operatic production set in the US colonies. The 18th-century archetypal character in Piccinni's opera, as well as those that would follow (like the 1770 Neapolitan *Pulcinella da Quacquero,* Piccinni's 1772 *L'americano,* or Pietro Alessandro Guglielmi's 1783 *La quakera spiritosa*), was the Quaker, and, surprisingly, this figure is similar to the 20th-century American archetype of the cowboy as they are both, according to Polzonetti, "the independent fighter who acts according to laws that do not coincide with those laws that bind and bond the rest of the social system."[22] And while tales of American independence vanish from the Italian stage until the early 20th century, its early introduction to Italian culture through opera, if Sorce Keller is correct, and its inclusion from the beginning of an early cowboy prototype in the Quaker, could explain in part how the Far-West came to claim such a strong hold within the Italian mythos. For, indeed, the Far-West would be reintroduced in Giacomo Puccini's 1910 *La fanciulla del West* (*Golden Girl of the West*), and the myth would take off to capture the nation's imagination throughout the century. Puccini's opera tells the story of an outlaw/hero and his romantic soprano love-interest during the years of the California Gold Rush, 1848-1855. While the Revolutionary War operas primarily featured Quakers and 'noble savages', *La fanciulla del West* includes the stock characters—popularized by James Fenimore Cooper's

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[20] "Oral music, that very music that according to the Romantics expressed the Volksgeist, the quintessential ethnic and spiritual character of a people, never played this role in Italy and was therefore completely absent from the political discourse." in Marcello Sorce Keller, "Italy in Music: A Sweeping (and Somewhat Audacious) Reconstruction of a Problematic Identity," in *Made in Italy: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Goffredo Plastino and Franco Fabbri (Florence, GB: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 17–27, 20.

[21] Pierpaolo Polzonetti, "Quakers and Cowboys: Italian Mythologies and Stereotypes of Americans from Piccinni to Puccini," *The Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2008): 22–38, 23.

[22] Polzonetti, "Quakers and Cowboys," 23.

Leatherstocking Tales,[23] and, in Italy specifically, by Emilio Salgari's adventure-tale series, the *Ciclo del Far-West* (*Far-West Series*)[24]—that remained fashionable throughout the 20th century: outlaw/bandit (hero), sheriff, gold-rush miners, the Indian and his squaw (natives), traveling minstrel, Pony Express rider, Wells Fargo agent (all variations of the cowboy hero).

While it began as a representation of a fascinating *otherness:* another land, another people, another possible future, it also would have made many along the Italian peninsula long for their own independence from foreign powers, long for their own rising up and forcing out, which would not be realized for nearly 100 years after the American Revolution. It furthermore symbolized the promise of unknown riches to the adventurous emigrant, which we see in the Italian-transplant protagonists and lesser characters featured in many early New-World operas,[25] as well as in the increased popularity of the genre in coincidence with historical waves of Italian emigration. Indeed, *Golden Girl of the West*, a rags-to-riches *per eccellenza,* with its Gold-Rush 'bonanza frontier' setting, marks the return of the genre to the public eye as well as the near-end of the largest historical wave of Italian emigration to North America, 1890-1917. Critically, however, Puccini does not tell the emigrant story, as it will not be told by any of the most popular Westerns or Spaghetti Westerns to come. Puccini returns to a nostalgic time and space of possibility and promise, of literally hidden treasures. By the turn of the century, as revealed by muckraking literature like Upton Sinclair's 1906 *The Jungle*, the experience of the immigrant in the industrialized cities of the East is that of a despised subaltern; progress and modernization show their ugly under-bellies as immigrants and ex-slaves (the same groups seen in the periphery of Westerns as they race to build the railroad) are exploited for national and industrial gains.[26] Yet, the Italian emigrant had few options, and the dream of a better future, no matter how improbable or romanticized, seems a hope that he clung to in the absence others. This

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[23] *The Pioneers*, 1823; *The Last of the Mohicans*, 1826; *The Prairie*, 1827; *The Pathfinder*, 1840; *The Deerslayer*, 1841.

[24] *Sulle frontiere del Far-West,* 1908; *La scotennatrice*, 1909; *Le selve ardenti,* 1910.

[25] A trend which continues in mythical productions today. For examples, in the 2009 Tex Willer publication, C*ongiura contro Custer,* at the Battle of Little Bighorn, Custer calls to a soldier and notes "Hai uno strano accento … Sei straniero?" The soldier replies: "Italiano, signore. Sono venuto in America tre anni fa." While a footnote states: "Giovanni Martini era originario di Sala Consilina (Salerno) dove era nato nel 1853." in Claudio Nizzi, *Tex: congiura contro Custer* (Milano: Oscar Mondadori, 2009), 294.

[26] While some Italians in the States did, indeed, strike figurative gold, it was not through romantic adventure but through business savvy, as brands like Ghirardelli, Progresso, Planters Peanuts, Contadina, Chef Boyardee, and Jacuzzi are household names yet today.

emigrant's hope reveals a bit further how the myth of the West began to prosper in Italy again during years in which Italian men were departing for 'America'. Tales of the West gave the emigrant courage and hope as he risked life and loss, while it gave the family he left behind an adventurous image to cling to as they waved farewell to their loved one and continued on in his absence.

Tex Willer: The Conflation of Cowboy and Indian

Tex Willer is arguably the cultural production that played the largest part in popularizing the myth in Italy, and the eponymous hero is still today a household name that evokes certain idyllic nostalgia for those who read the comic book in their youths.[27] *Tex Willer* (originally *Tex Killer*) was first published in September of 1948, just a few months after Italian general elections placed the DC (Christian Democratic Party) decidedly in control of parliament at a time when American culture was massively disseminated in Italy,[28] and the Americas after Fascism returned to the Italian mindscape as both an ideal and a real promised land. In post-WWII Italy, the Italian myth of the *Far-West* changed as it took on forms newly relevant to contemporary society. The *Far-West*, once again in postwar Italy, represents the dreams of emigration, as the Americas see a surge in European immigration in the decades following the war. But now, the cowboy embodied a new Italian hero as well. After the war and two long decades of Fascism, the cowboy easily took on aspects of the non-conformist, the anti-fascist, the guerrilla-fighter *partigiano* (partisan), member of the Italian resistance movement, who fought occupying German forces and Italians who remained Fascists under Mussolini's puppet regime, the Italian Social Republic, after Italy and the Allies armistice was signed in September of 1943. The partisan, like the cowboy, relied on a sense of absolute justice in the face of corrupt State justice, and relied on violence to achieve it. The partisan, too, left civilization and family and took to the 'wilderness', the mountains and forests, where he joined bands of individuals who fought (together and individually) for the grassroots defense of justice. Wilderness and civilization switched positions, as cities were highly controlled by fascism and threatened by war, while in the

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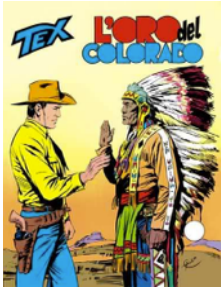
[27] There are Italian-produced Western comics before it, like Rino Albertarelli's (illustrator, as well of Salgari's adventure series) *Kit Carson il cavaliere del West* (*Kit Carson, Knight of the West*), which was first published in 1937, but *Tex* has been, by far, the biggest seller and longest lasting comic of the set.

[28] See, for example, Alberto Sordi's 1954 satirical film, *Un americano a Roma* and Renato Carosone's 1956 swing hit "Tu vuò fà l'americano."

wilderness men were free. The imagining of the city-utopia had to begin outside its walls. The frontier West, now, represented a land of new hope, a nation yet to build, inviting imagery for a country coming out of 20 years oppressed by a fascist regime and torn apart by war. So the cowboy-hero naturally accrues new affiliations in postwar Italy, as readers filter the stories through the lenses of their own experience. At the same time, he gains an important affiliation within the stories themselves, one that appears to be an absolute necessity in the postwar, for it occurs, and in a remarkably similar fashion, in both the US and Italy. The famed cowboys the Lone Ranger and Tex Willer, two heroes who become synonymous with the West in the 1950s, are tales of dual heroes, who represent both the cowboys and the indians of the mythology.

The Lone Ranger was a popular radio show that ran starting in 1933 out of the Detroit station WXYZ, it gained nationwide popularity in 1949 when it was developed as a television show. *Tex Willer*, when it was released in in 1948, is nearly an identical tale. Both the Lone Ranger and Tex are affiliated with Texas Rangers and roam the West fighting crime and upholding justice. The really remarkable innovation in both characters is that they have dual identities, as both are white men associated with official US authority, as well as with Native Americans and their alternative value sets and relationship to the Great Plains and frontier West. The Lone Ranger saves the life of the Potawatomi or Comanche Native American, Tonto,[29] and Tonto years later saves the Lone Ranger's life. When Tonto is introduced in 1938, he names the Lone Ranger 'Kemo Sabe' and becomes his constant partner. In this way the ex-Texas Ranger takes on a native identity as Kemo Sabe or 'faithful friend.' Tex, similarly, adventures with the Navajo, Tiger Jack, who is his blood brother and who calls him *Aquila della Notte* (Night Eagle). Tex Willer is furthermore, not only a Texas Ranger, but chief of



[29] 'Wild one' in dialect of Ojibwe, spoken by Ottawa in Michigan where the Lone Ranger radio show was first broadcast.

the Navajo Nation when he is dressed as Aquila della Notte. Thus, the Lone Ranger and Tex even more completely absorb part of the myth of the Indian to make the cowboy/indian relationship less oppositional and antagonistic to the modern reader. This movement of associating the white hero with his indian counterpart is not an entirely new one. Indeed, in James Fenimore Cooper's min-19th-century *Leatherstocking Tales* pentalogy, natives were often the allies of white men, as they were historically during the years of the New York frontier and the French and Indian Wars. The hero of the pentalogy is, furthermore, a dual figure, Natty Bumppo/Hawkeye, the child of white parents raised by a Native American tribe in Delaware and accompanied by his native 'foster' brother, the Mohican Chingachgook.

While this conflation of the imperialist and native figure is not, perhaps, a new one, after the WWII it seems to become nearly an imperative, and the legendary characters of *The Lone Ranger* and *Tex Willer* set the stage for innumerable stories to come.[30] It is important in these stories to understand how the conflation functions, as it takes both heroism and victimhood from the native people, while lending a new sort of native heroism and victimhood to the cowboy. To take one example of the hundreds of Tex stories that might have been read by children who would later make up the long revolutionary generation, in the 1958-59 story cycle, *Sangue navajo* (Navajo Blood),[31] two business men kill four young warrior Navajos on horseback as they travel by train. Tex prevents an immediate Navajo vendetta, by first placing faith in US authorities to take care of the matter, and when that fails, by using mostly non-deadly military tactics to disarm local troops, while working together with a journalist to bring the events to the headlines in Washington DC and force government action. The tale is resolved when the killers turn on each other and both die just hours before they would have been brought to justice by US government officials. The story maintains a structure in which only white can/is allowed to defeat white, emptying historical Native Americans of agency and making them puppets of their white leader. We continually see Tex refer to the Navajos as

[30] There will be many examples given in this chapter, but one may also consider the US films *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), and *The Revenant* (2015), and the 1997 Italian comic *Magico vento.*

[31] Gianluigi Bonelli, *Tex: sangue navajo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2010).

'his navajos'[32] as they blindly follow his instructions as the wisest of the tribe,[33] and as they are relegated to a silent space, often only responding 'Ugh'[34] (meaning 'yes,' as introduced by James Fenimore Cooper) to his orders.

In the 1971-72 story cycle, *Terra promessa* (Promised Land),[35] Tiger Jack has gained some autonomy, but is still a subaltern voice, grouped with the youngster Kit, Tex's son, rather than with his blood-brother Tex. Indeed, when Brunetto Salvarani in his book on comics, *Disturbo se fumetto* (Do You Mind If I Comic), remembers the late 1960s and playing at 'Tex.' As he recalls, there was a hierarchy in children's minds, determined by the source-text, *Tex*. "The fact is that when we played," he writes, "no one wanted to be Tiger Jack: everyone wanted to be Tex, at most someone, fascinated by Carson, chose him for his part, and the smallest of the group (to his great happiness) was inevitably Kit Willer. Tiger Jack was […] too silent, too absent in his omnipresence, too perturbing in his being 'other' to be able to be part of the game."[36] The Indians, as a whole, oscillate between stereotypes of Noble Savages and Simply Savages. They are respected as calm, thoughtful, wise, by the 'good' white men, while their tendency for savage torture must be curbed by Tex, as we see in *Navajo Blood*: "[Soldier:] 'I wouldn't be surprised to find that poor guy hung from the torturing pole.' [Captain:] 'You've forgotten that the chief of the Navajos is Tex Willer and I'm absolutely sure that Tex Willer would not degrade himself by ordering a man to be tortured.'"[37] This exchange is one of many that reveals a prevailing opinion that even noble savages are, in some fundamental sense, less noble than the noble pioneers.

In Italy, Tex's position as defender of the native people can be read in its original mythical

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[32] Bonelli, *Tex: sangue navajo,* 23, 30.
[33] Bonelli, *Tex: sangue navajo,* 26, 75.
[34] Bonelli, *Tex: sangue navajo,* 24, 35.
[35] Gianluigi Bonelli, *Tex: terra promessa* (Milano: Mondadori, 2002).
[36] "Il fatto è però che quando si giocava tra noi, nessuno voleva 'fare' Tiger: tutti volevano essere Tex, al massimo qualcuno, affascinato dalla figura di Carson, sceglieva per sé la sua parte, e il più piccolo inevitabilmente (e con la sua grande felicità) Kit Willer. Ma Tiger Jack […] troppo silenzioso, troppo 'assente' nella sua onnipresenza, troppo perturbante nel suo essere 'altro' per potere entrare nei nostri giochi." Brunetto Salvarani and Raffaele Mantegazza, *Disturbo se fumetto?: Dylan Dog e Martin Mystère, Tex Willer e Nathan Never: ipotesi per un uso politicamente corretto.* (Milano: Unicopli, 1998), 138.
[37] "Non mi sarei affatto stupito di trovare quel disgraziato appeso al palo di tortura. / Avete scordato che il capo dei navajos è Tex Willer, e sono assolutamente certo che Tex Willer non si degraderebbe sino a ordinare la tortura di un uomo." Bonelli, *Tex: terra promessa,* 98.

context or as a metaphor for the Italian context. In the original context, the *Sangue navajo* story and Tex's conciliatory tactics are risible. For example, a key plot point in *Sangue navajo* is that the headlines in Washington—"Navajos in Revolt," "Fort Defiance Razed to the Ground," "Tex Willer guides his […]"[38]—cause the government to pacify the Navajos in order to end the conflict. While in the actual time of this tale, the post-Civil War years, the government was exterminating Native Americans in the final Great Plains Indian Wars, and any conflict with the Navajos would have been cause to massacre, not pacify them. Furthermore, that Tex would defend the lives of four Navajos or place faith in the US government to secure justice in the matter, reveals his mythical position. The lives of four Navajos meant next to nothing in light of the cultural genocide that was wrapping up on the continent. If, on the other hand, one reads *Tex* as a metaphor for contemporary Italy in which the West is overlaid on the peninsula, Tex's collaboration to end censorship with Floyd, editor of the *New Gallup Dispatch*, takes on contemporary and local relevance, as does his fight against the collusion between the private sector and the State, and the defense he takes up of the underclass. Italians suffered a long history of censorship, with media controlled by the Catholic Church, the past Fascist state, and the current DC government, and notorious struggle with collusion between the private and public sectors to allocate capital and control. Italy had also suffered from centuries of colonization and suffered as an underclass on the peninsula until driving out the last imperial powers in 1861, while the south of Italy, whose agricultural land significantly resembles the plains of the West, still considers itself an underclass to the north.

Yet, whether readers consider the nature of *Tex*'s convictions and objectives to be Native American or a metaphor for the Italian, the hero takes them up with half-measures that maintain the status quo and keep Navajos/Italian underclasses pacified and contented in their status as marginalized and continually threatened subalterns. He works only barely outside the normative structures, by collaborating with officials and playing political games, never by threatening their general power or their right to that power. Thus Tex is revealed as complex figure, as Aquila della Notte he is seemingly situated at the margins, outside of social norms, and dedicated to courageously

[38] "I navajos in rivolta!" "For Defiance raso al suolo" "Tex W / Guida i s" The final headline is only partially shown but its content is easily inferred. Bonelli, *Tex: terra promessa,* 177.

defending those with no voice in the system. Yet, at the same time, as Tex the ranger and Indian agent, he is firmly within the system, part of the official government apparatus that not only defends the native people, but also placates them into submission.

It is this character, read in stories in the 1940s and 50s, who perhaps most influences the basic conception of the cowboy hero in Italy in the 1960s and 70s. For, as Scott McCloud points out in his *Understanding Comics,* "Cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled,"[39] and for this reason legends expressed through cartoons or comics are particularly fit to imprint themselves on young minds.[40] This theory argues for the the power of visually-expressed iconography experienced in childhood and cultural expressions by adults who read Tex as children support McCloud's theory. This theory seems to play out in some of the *cantautori*'s work explored later, but is perhaps best demonstrated by Niccolò Ammaniti's 2001 novel *Io non ho paura* (I'm Not Scared).[41] The novel is set in the politically tense climate of civil terrorism during the height of the violence of the *Anni di piombo* (Years of Lead) in 1978. This is the year that sees the Italian prime minister, Aldo Moro, kidnapped, killed and left on the streets of Rome by the Red Brigades. The protagonist of the book is 9-year-old Michele Amitrano, the child of a poor working-class family in southern Italy. Michele discovers another boy, the son of a rich Northern industrialist, chained and imprisoned in a hole behind an abandoned house, and without understanding the dangerous political atmosphere or context of the other child's imprisonment, he becomes entangled in a deadly adventure. Michele summons Tex and his Navajo blood brother, Tiger Jack, whenever he needs to bolster his courage during a potentially dangerous adventure that summer, as the story blends the nostalgia for childhood summers, innocent dares and dangers, the imagined thrill of the Far-West read about while sprawled

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[39] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 36.

[40] He explains this by stating that "comics have a more direct relationship with iconography than other forms of verbal or written storytelling. An icon, as he defines it, is "any image used to represent a person, place, thing or idea". Cartoons, he claims, are some of the most effective icons because they are more real than real. They are "form[s] of amplification through simplification," which allow us to see ourselves in representations, rather than seeing the faces of others. McCloud, *Understanding Comics,* 27, 34.

[41] Niccolò Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura* (Torino: Einaudi, 2011).

on one's bed, and the real heroism of helping a boy escape death by vigilante kidnappers.[42]

The choice of *Tex* as blending agent demonstrates the powerful emotional response that myth catalyzes in Italian readers as it is associated in their memories with their own pasts, as well as its relevance to the communal memory of a decade defined by revolt and terror. It also demonstrates an interesting way in which the 1970s thought about Tex and Tiger Jack. In the series, as shown above, Tiger Jack is still clearly a subaltern in the comic-book universe of the early 1970s, and as Salvarani remembers it in the late 60s-early 70s, no one wanted to play Tiger Jack because he was essentially a non-character. Yet, in Ammaniti's remembrance of heroism by 1978 (he was 12 in 1978), it is Tiger Jack who stands out as the character who most resonates as an essentially *Italian* hero. In a moment when Michele needs to decide between his own personal safety and his sense of doing the right thing, he asks himself: "What would Tiger Jack have done in my place? He wouldn't have turned back even if [the god] Manitou had personally ordered him to. Tiger Jack. He was a serious guy. Tiger Jack, the Indian friend of Tex Willer. […] I am Tiger Jack, even better, I am the Italian son of Tiger. […] Too bad I don't have a dagger, or a bow, or a Winchester rifle."[43] In Ammaniti's memory, by 1978 Italy had become a nation of Indians rather than cowboys, but Indians with cowboy values and cowboy friends, who "massacred" bad guys with rifles.[44] At the same time, in the US and Italy, another hero was emerging out of the mythical landscape, a hero who absorbed some of the quiet honor traditionally associated with the mythical Indian chief who holds a peace pipe rather than a weapon. This hero is the minstrel cowboy who holds a guitar rather than a gun.

Revisionist Westerns and US Folk: The Conflation of Cowboy and Musician

Famous John Ford and John Wayne's Classical Western films desisted, as did *The Lone Ranger*

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[42] In the novel, Michele discovers a young boy imprisoned in a hole dug behind an abandoned house in the country. As he seeks to help the boy, he discovers that the boy is the son of a northern Italian industrialist, kidnapped by a group of southern Italians. The story is set during the Years of Lead in Italy, with many political and socio-economic implications and undertones.

[43] "Cos'avrebbe fatto Tiger Jack al mio posto? Non tornava indietro neanche se glielo ordinava Manitù in persona. Tiger Jack. Quella era una persona seria. Tiger Jack, l'amico indiano di Tex Willer. […] Io sono Tiger, anche meglio, io sono il figlio italiano di Tiger, mi sono detto. Peccato che non avevo un pugnale, un arco o un fucile Winchester." Ibid., 50-51.

[44] "Li avrebbe affrontati. Li avrebbe massacrati con il suo Winchester e li avrebbe trasformati in salsicce da arrostire sul fuoco insieme a Tex e a Capelli d'argento. Ibid., 215.

and *Tex,* from portraying Native Americans as enemy 'injuns' or savage criminals, creating a prairie that largely pitted white hero against white villain. But when Spaghetti Westerns and other types of so-called 'Revisionist Westerns' began appearing, new directors sought to disrupt Ford's and Wayne's classical narratives as traditional Western ideals began to come into question and directors sought increased realism.[45] So just how were those narratives disrupted? It can, indeed, be a bit hard to see it. Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Westerns, indeed, transitioned to an even more culturally-neutral communal remembering as native people were practically absent, figuring nominally in names like Cheyenne and Tuco. Leone cites as his reason for excluding them from his films: "I could not conceive of fake indians like they use in Hollywood […] Indians fit perfectly into my Western canvas, but not into my cinematic vision: if I had to include them in a film, I would want them to be authentic, and today they are almost impossible to find."[46] Their absence, then, one could argue is part of Leone's realism. For, the "true essence of [his] cinema" is, he claims, "a fairy tale rich with ties to contemporary reality,"[47] and the contemporary reality is, indeed, one without Native Americans. A further move towards realism that Leone claims is violence—the blood and explicit deaths that are not present in classical Western films, in shows like *The Lone Ranger,* or in comics like *Tex.* Violence makes his fairy tales critical realism, moral tales, "truer than chronicles," as he says. The violence for Leone "has a political origin," and reminds the audience that death existed in the West as a "real fear," that the bullets of guns had *and have* real consequences.[48] In this sense, the director would seek to rehistoricize the mythical space itself, yet without Natives present, it is still a contrived space. His

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[45] Revisionist Westerns , also called Anti-Westerns or Modern Westerns, is a Western sub-genre from the 1960s and 70s that begins to question the structure and ideals of Classical Western films. In the US, Sam Peckinphah and Robert Altman films are generally considered early Revisionist Western productions. Clint Eastwood productions, like *The outlaw Josey Wales,* are also part of the sub-genre. Spaghetti Western and Jodorowsky's Acid Western genres are examples of Revisionist Westerns from abroad.

[46] "non potevo concepire gli indiani finti che venivano utilizzati a Hollywood […] Gli indiani rientrano perfettamente nel mio quadro del West, ma non nel mio discorso cinematografico: se dovessi inserirli in un film, li vorrei autentici, e oggi come oggi è quasi impossibile trovarli." Francesco Minninni, *Sergio Leone* (Roma: Il castoro, 1994), 7.

[47] "È questa l'essenza vera del mio cinema: una favola ricca di agganci con la realtà contemporanea." Ibid., 5.

[48] "La violenza dei miei film ha un'estrazione politica. Non è che nei film americani la gente non morisse. Moriva male, in campo lungo, e il pubblico quasi non si rendeva conto dell'idea della morte. La morte, invece, deve rappresentare una reale paura, e può farlo soltanto attraverso l'evidenza fisica […] si deve capire il danno provocato da un foro di pallottola. È realismo, ma realismo critico. […] La favola deve essere più realistica della cronaca." Ibid., 5-6.

violence has the flavor of class and value struggle within a single economic and cultural system, rather than imperialist struggle between two structurally opposed, and mutual exclusive, modes of existence: nomadism and capitalism.

While Leone works within the subgenre of Revisionist Westerns, seeking like other directors to return realism to the West, he does not manage to disentangle his heroes from their cowboy/indian conflation, indeed, he entangles them even further. The hero in his 1968 *C'era una volta il West* (Once Upon a Time in the West), for example, is both a fascinating instance of the cowboy/indian dual identity and an example of a further conflation that was convenient for a 1960s generation that idolized folk musicians: the conflation of gunslingers and guitar-singers. The hero is nameless and nearly voiceless in *C'era una volta il West,* he is called Harmonica after the instrument whose meloncholy tune heralds his arrival and comes almost to substitute his voice. Harmonica's motivations show the same narrative hybrid as *Tex*, complexly entwining the relationship between oppressor/oppressed and white/native, while his character blends the figures of cowboy as wandering knight and cowboy as wandering minstrel, one masculine, courageous and deadly, the other feminine, pacifist and artistic.

Harmonica has followed the villain, Frank, for years, seeking revenge. A flashback during their final duel reveals the the moment that forms the hero's identity and the reason for his vendetta. It seems that Frank had hanged the young Harmonica's brother, forcing the boy to act as the gallows stand so that he would effectively kill his brother when his own body became too weak to support the other's weight. The audience sees this memory through the green-gold eyes of the fair-haired Charles Bronson, who plays Harmonica. Yet Harmonica remembers himself as a young boy of obviously native origin. The drastic physical difference in the memory is so jarring that the viewer seeks another solution; perhaps Harmonica is avenging another boy, for example. But, no, the setting of the event is isolated and Leone makes sure to show the face of each witness, none of which is a younger Harmonica. Frank, furthermore, to stifle the boy's screams, shoves a harmonica in his mouth; the very harmonica that will come to identify the adult hero, the very harmonica that he will shove in Frank's mouth when he kills him. Truly nameless after completely his revenge and shedding the symbolic

instrument, the hero leaves his former identity behind. Once Harmonica, a vessel for multiple, complex and impossibly incongruent sets of meaning, the nameless hero is now empty of signification and walks off into the sunset ready to be filled again.

What could this metamorphosis from young native victim to adult white hero mean for Leone? Is it a symbol of a universal underclass that is blind to race? Is it meant to further obscure the identity of the hero, to make him not only nameless, but faceless? Whatever Leone's intent, it is certainly, if perhaps unwittingly, another example of the sewing together of the victim's and victor's narratives into a single smooth history. The cowboy in the 1960s *becomes* the native. Or vice versa. As a child, Harmonica is innocent, primitive, savage, uncorrupted by civilization. As an adult, he becomes the romantic ideal of the *bon sauvage,* he has lost his primitiveness and savagery, without, however, being corrupted by civilization. In transferring this ideal, Leone's myth simultaneously homogenizes the historical setting and creates a new sympathetic hero for a new audience. For, indeed, the mythical Cowboy is not just cowboy/indian, he is also cowboy/musician.

Two figures who traditionally wander the wilds between civilized lands are the hero (erring knight or roaming cowboy), who becomes a popular symbol of courage, and the vagabond (traveling minstrel), who remembers and spreads his story in the communal imagination. There are moments in history in which these roles mingle, the gauchos of the Pampas, for example. Domingo Fausto Sarmiento in his 1845 *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism,* tells of four types of gauchos, one of

which is the outlaw (*gaucho malo*) and another the minstrel (*cantor*). He remarks that in the minstrel "we have the idealization of this life of resistance, civilization, barbarism, and danger. The *gaucho Cantor* corresponds to the singer, bard, or troubadour of the Middle Ages and moves […] between the life which is passing away and the new life gradually arising."[49] 80 years later, Jorge Luis Borges said similarly of the South American Pampas, "it was not just of fights; this frontier was of guitars as well."[50] Both the minstrel and the knight reject the city, society and its norms, both are adventurers sitting around a campfire, both have their sidearms, instruments of pain and pleasure respectively. In the Argentinian Pampas there were four types of gauchos, all of whom discrete, and two of whom are minstrel and outlaw. While in the North American and Italian myth, those two eventually blend into one. That is, the symbols of violence and pacifism, war and art, of revolutionary subversion and of poetic subversion, are one. Leone's Harmonica carries both instrument and weapon, and before him the reformed gunslinger in the 1954 Revisionist Western, *Johnny Guitar,* reapplies his fingers, the fastest draws in the West, to strum the strings of a guitar. But a fascinating reversal occurs in the 1960s and 70s when, not only do the fictional cowboys, ideological artifacts of a national foundation myth, become carriers of folk song. But, the real-life folk stars, themselves, begin to model themselves on the mythical cowboys.

This imitation is, indeed, at least somewhat influenced by the US Folk Revival. To be sure, an investigation of Folk Revival artists would turn up some of the same disconcerting and unrigorous idolization of the Wild West from artists who simultaneously promoted pacifism, economic equality, and collective sharing of land. One case in point might be quickly proposed in Woody Guthrie's guitar slogan, "This machine kills Fascists," his famous "This Land is Your Land," and his idealizing of Jesse James as a figure who fought economic inequality. Guthrie succumbs to mythical slippage as all those we have seen: he conflates the weapon and the instrument, he elides genocide in his Manifest Destiny anthem, "This Land is Your Land," and he makes icons of frontiersmen, who were heroes of

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[49] "El gaucho cantor è el mismo bardo, el vate, el trovador del Edad Media que se mueve […] entre là luchas de lass ciudades y del feudalismo de lo campos, entre la vida que se va y la vida que se acerca." Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (Buenos Aires: Mundo Moderno, 1952), 43.

[50] "no sólo de peleas; esa frontera era de guitarras también." Jorge Luis Borges, "Palermo de Buenos Aires," in *Prosa completa 1* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1985), 25.

genocide and colonization, recreating them as the ultimate protesters.[51] But in the cases explored here, there is a mythical recreation of the cowboy that largely goes beyond US folk music, so as to hardly even concern it any longer. The concern here is in post-folk-revival aesthetic choices made by folk artists,[52] in film, on stage, and on album covers, and the influence of these aesthetic representations of the West (as opposed to musical representations of country-western), not only on US counterculturists, but on the Italian *cantautori* and counterculture as well. The idea is clearly born out in Sam Peckinpah's 1973 *Sam Garrett and Billy the Kid* the cowboys carry no musical instruments, yet they are both Sarmiento's *gaucho malo* and his *cantor,* for Billy the Kid and his sidekick Alias are played by Kris Kristofferson and Bob Dylan. Peckinpah's heroes are contemporary cowboys, dressed in slightly bell-bottomed pants, cowboy and bowler hats, cowboy boots, vests and leather or suede jackets. Yet, it is not only that Peckinpah's cowboys have somewhat modernized dress, but, more significantly, that the singer-songwriters themselves dress like cowboys. To look at Kristofferson as himself in the 70s or as Billy the Kid, to look at Dylan as Alias or himself, it is hard to distinguish the line between reality and fiction.

Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid tells of an outlaw friend, Garrett, who has turned sheriff (and bourgeois) because he feels he needs security for his retirement years; he is charged with bringing in the Kid, a hero who mixes vigilante outlaw and hippie values. These value sets are both extra-societal, rebellious, idealistic, yet on the whole incompatible; as has been pointed out, the vigilante outlaw depends on violence and individualism, while hippie values demand peaceful and communal protest. Yet Kristofferson is both in the film and Peckinpah certainly chose his historical figure carefully, as the historical Kid[53] is as close as it comes to a cowboy-outlaw who fulfilled counterculture values. Yet

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[51] John S. Partington, ed., *The Life, Music and Thought of Woody Guthrie: A Critical Appraisal,* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011).

[52] Aesthetic allegiance to the myth of the West is of particular interest, as musical allegiance would be more constrictive within a particular genre, while an artist whose music is new, rock, rebellious, or best of all, unclassifiable, but who dresses like a cowboy, will manage to bring the myth with him into other, more globally popular musical genres.

[53] Henry McCarty, best known as Billy the Kid, is arguably the historical figure who most closely resembles the romanticized cowboy outlaw and folk hero. He was well-spoken, including in Spanish, he was known to kill reluctantly and only in self-defense, he never worked as an Indian scout, soldier, or Pony Express rider, but most often was an itinerant ranch hand, horse thief, and sometimes (apparently reluctant) murderer. He lived to be only 21, from 1859-1881, and had little to do with the Great Plains or Gold Rush West, much more to do with the Southwest frontier.

Peckinpah's film ties itself up in contradiction as it attempts to take Kid's character beyond its limited parallels with counterculture and mold him into a prototype of the contemporary hero. The Kid kills reluctantly (but without remorse) to maintain his freedom, he lives on a free-love ranch commune (where women have just barely edged themselves out of a strictly-prostitution position[54]), and, ultimately dies, in a romanticized fictional denouement, as a martyr for his beliefs, and the people he defends.

By casting two folk-music heroes in the roles of the protagonists, Peckinpah gives a conclusive touch of contemporary credibility to his revised folk hero. Dylan plays a shop-keeper who is inspired by the Kid's escape from jail and puts down his pen to pick up a knife and follow him. He plays no music in the film but wrote the soundtrack, the most famous song of which is "Knockin' on Heaven's Door." He also wrote "Romance in Durango" while filming in Mexico, a song which he released three years later on his 1976 *Desire*,[55] and which De André translated to ironically include on his 1978 album, *Rimini*. While Kristofferson was both an actor and a musician (Janet Joplin having made his "Me and Bobby McGee" a #1 hit just two years before), this is, significantly, the first film Dylan chooses to act in. And while Kristofferson is from Texas, making a Western style natural for the country and folk singer, Bob Dylan was born in a mining town in Minnesota and moved to New York City to live out his adult years. Dylan's cowboy style is more obviously an aesthetic choice. When he appeared on the music scene in 1961, he was a beatnik hipster in tight jeans, a greek fisherman's hat, and sunglasses, but his style changed. As he moved away from the acoustic sound, he, conversely, moved towards an acoustic western-music look, and picked up a cowboy hat that would become nearly synonymous him as an artist for decades.

The Cowboy-hero myth may have come musically to Dylan through Guthrie and the Folk Revival, but a large part of that cultural heritage is lost in the global context when Dylan became a

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[54] When the Kid escapes from jail, he returns to his ranch to find his friends all in one room in bed, some with women, some alone. The man in bed with the Kid's woman reluctantly gets up, and the naked girl happily allows the Kid to take his place.

[55] An album which De André calls "uno dei i suoi migliori album […] dove c'è ancora il gusto per la ballata." 1. Claudio Sassi and Walter Pistarini, eds., *De André talk: le interviste e gli articoli della stampa d'epoca* (Roma: Coniglio, 2008), 245.

Clockwise from top-left: Dylan as Alias on a version of the cover for the soundtrack to Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*; Dylan's album covers for his 1976* Desire *and 1978* Masterpieces*; Kristofferson's album cover for his 1971* The Silver Tongued Devil and I*; Kristofferson from two scenes as the Kid in* Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*; Kristofferson's album cover for his 1974* Breakaway *with Rita Coolidge.*

worldwide folk hero and emblem of protest and subversion.[56] That is not to say that Bob Dylan maintained he was revolutionary. That which Bob Dylan said he was and protested that he was not, changed across his career and is the topic of many variously-opinioned books. What is important here is what his audience accepted him to be: one of the most significant guiding spirits of the counterculture generation. His self-portrayal as a part of the mythical West sanctioned and perhaps encouraged larger countercultural adoption of the landscape. Francesco Guccini and Francesco De Gregori were fans of and influenced by the international star. Guccini in his first album *Folk beat n. 1* from 1967 sings in "Talkin Milano": "Late one night, sleeping I dreamed that I had become Bob Dylan, / I wandered the world with a guitar,"[57] while De Gregori openly styled himself after Dylan,

[56] De André admits in an interview from 1968 that his early protest songs like his 1960 "La guerra di Piero" (Piero's War) hardly sold at all until 1965 when the protest boom came along with Dylan's music. Sassi, *De André talk*, 48.

[57] Tardi la notte, dormendo ho sognato che Bob Dylan ero diventato, / giravo il mondo con la chitarra" in Francesco Guccini, *Folk beat. n. 1*, Vinyl (La voce del padrone PSQ 027, 1967).

played covers of his songs regularly,[58] and in 2015 came out with a tribute album, *De Gregori canta Bob Dylan* (De Gregori Sings Bob Dylan) of Dylan songs translated into Italian.[59]

Fabrizio De André's relationship with the folk musician is more complex. In 1969, when asked about the relationship between his music and Dylan's or Baez's, he replies: "I would say there is no relationship. I would say that my songs depart from a folk, if you can call it that, that is occidental European, above all French, while the songs of Bob Dylan, and of Joan Baez and other English-speaking musicians, depart from a Western-style of folk. There's a huge difference!"[60] When asked what he thinks of Dylan in that interview he claims that he does not know his work well enough to comment. Yet in 1968, he had stated that Italy would do well to have fewer commercial musicians from Sanremo and more musicians like Bob Dylan,[61] and he covers two Dylan songs during his career: "Desolation Row" in his 1974 collaborative album with De Gregori, *Canzoni,* and "Romance in Durango" (as will be discussed later) in his 1978 *Rimini.* While De André's relationship to and opinion of Dylan's work is not fully clear, what is clear is that Bob Dylan had a huge influence on the Italian folk music scene from the mid-1960s on and he is the paradigm against which the great Italian folk artists of the era are most often compared. Indeed, if the American dream of the 1950s was fracturing for the 1960s and 70s generations, it was only to be replaced in Italy by a new American dream represented in the counterculture: its music scene, with Dylan as its icon, its campus protests, and its west-coast commune lifestyle.[62]

Italian Counterculture: Self-Conceived in Far-West Terms

Francesco De Gregori

Francesco De Gregori in 1976 and Francesco Guccini in 1972 and 1978 describe the same

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[58] De Gregori performing Dylan songs in his duo Francesco e Giorgio (principally a Simon and Garfunkel cover band) and in his solo career, he participated in Dylan's film, *Masked and Anonymous* in 2003, of Italian folk artists he is considered closest in style to the US artist, with his 2005 album *Pezzi* coming the closest to achieving that style.

[59] The album was #1 on the FIMI chart as of 5 November 2015. Francesco De Gregori, *De Gregori canta Bob Dylan - amore e furto*, CD (Caravan 88875126882, 2015).

[60] "Direi che non c'è nessun rapporto. Direi che le mie canzoni partono da un folk, se così si può chiamare, europeo occidentale, soprattutto francese, mentre tutte le canzoni di Bob Dylan, della Joan Baez and other anglosassoni partono invece da folk di tipo western. C'è una bella differenza!" Sassi, *De André talk*, 93-94.

[61] Ibid., 42.

[62] Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy,* 302.

mythical pasts when they refer to the West: one which refers to the historical time and place, the American Frontier after the Civil War, and another which refers to their own memories of childhood in Italy and their experience of the myth of the West. They suggest clearly in these and later works the extent to which the utopian past of the Far-West was lived by Italian children as an imagined present, and how that dream was shattered into assorted broken promises, by the arrival of the future, the future of the child (adulthood and 1970s Italy), and the future of the West. The guiding concept in De Gregori's 1976 *Bufalo Bill* is, according to the *cantautore,* America,[63] a setting and concern he returns to in 1985 with his "I cowboy" (Cowboys) from *Scacchi e tarocchi* (Chess and Tarot) as well as his 1993 "Adelante! Adelante!" from *Canzoni d'amore* (Love Songs). The misspelling of 'bufalo' in the title was meant to show the implicit contradictions of the US myth and its Italian adoption,[64] yet the relationship with the American West as conveyed in the title track, rather than contradictory and problematic, is sentimental and romantic. Indeed, the very story of the song "Bufalo Bill" was inspired by a US tale: Sam Peckinpah's 1970 Revisionist Western film, *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*. The greatest contradiction in the song is the same contradiction as in the film, the existence of a cowboys-and-indians West in a cars-and-highways world.

The narrator in "Bufalo Bill" is not named until the final line of the song reveals "my name was Bufalo Bill,"[65] and until that point the perspective is unclear: the 'I' of the first stanza could easily introduce a young De Gregori or any young Italian. For, Italy too was young, and soldiers and horses were its defense for a boy playing at Cowboys and Indians. Thus the narration can be understood simultaneously the tale of cowboy hero, Bufalo Bill, that of folk hero, De Gregori, and that of an Italian everyman, representative of a generation.

The narration begins by conveying a youthful idealism and a shining world seen through the narrator's eyes. His youth is mirrored in the landscape around him, for his country, too, is young and full of promise. It describes an innocent time when God's existence is certain, visible everywhere, in

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[63] Intervista a De Gregori di Michelangelo Romano e Paolo Giaccio, reprinted in Riccardo Piferi, *Francesco De Gregori: Un Mito* (Roma: Lato Side, 1980), 69.

[64] A *bufalo* in Italian is a water buffalo, famous for their mozzarella di bufala. While the North American buffalo, or bison, is a *bisonte*. So Buffalo Bill, by nature of his name, is automatically misinterpreted in the Italian collective imagination, by all those who do not speak English well enough to distinguish between bison and water buffalo.

[65] "il mio nome era Bufalo Bill" in De Gregori, "Bufalo Bill," *Bufalo Bill.*

nature as well as in man's uncontroversial progress:

> The country was very young,
> soldiers and horses were its only defense.
> The sparkling green of the prairie
> demonstrated glaringly the existence of God,
> of the God who designs the frontier and constructs the railway.
> At that time I was a boy
> who played rummy, whistled at girls.
> Gullible and romantic, with a man's mustache already.
> If you had asked me to choose between life and death,
> I would have chosen America.[66]

The young narrator plays and flirts, and innocently does not understand there is a choice between life and death, for, indeed, neither life nor death has any meaning without America. America is the symbol of the future full of promise, as De Gregori sings a few years later in "I cowboy," "the future for [the cowboys] is a beautiful thing."[67] It is a symbol of life to come and of death to come, heroically and meaningfully. For, in America, one lives and dies for a cause, an unnamed ideal, at once vague and innately perceived, an ideological edifice, as Slavoj Žižek says, behind whose "dazzling splendor" are the empty elements which hold it together: "self-referential, tautological, performative."[68]

The second verse differentiates between those who "kill to thieve," who "kill for love," and the narrator who "always kills to play."[69] This verse, too, refers bidirectionally to the historical Bill who killed bison for sport, and who became famous for his play, his spectacle and performance of the West, and the young Italian who played at make-believe shoot-'em-up in the Far-West. The narrator grows older in the verse that follows, one day he is a "blonde only child, almost like Jesus,"[70] the next he is 20, then he is looking back and his youth is gone. He remembers a sad afternoon when he and a

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[66] "Il paese era molto giovane, / i soldati a cavallo erano la sua difesa. / Il verde brillante della prateria / dimostrava in maniera lampante l'esistenza di Dio, / del Dio che progetta la frontiera e costruisce la ferrovia. / A quel tempo io ero un ragazzo / che giocava a ramino, fischiava alle donne. / Credulone e romantico, con due baffi da uomo. / Se avessi potuto scegliere fra la vita e la morte, / fra la vita e la morte, avrei scelto l'America." in Francesco De Gregori, *Bufalo Bill*, Vinyl (RCA Italia TPL1 1192, 1975).

[67] "il futuro per loro è una cosa bella" Francesco De Gregori, "I cowboy," *Canzoni d'amore*, Vinyl (Columbia COL 472215 2, 1992).

[68] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 109.

[69] "c'è chi uccide per rubare / e c'è chi uccide per amore, / il cacciatore uccide sempre per giocare, il cacciatore uccide sempre per giocare." Ibid.

[70] "unico figlio biondo quasi come Gesù." Ibid.

mechanic friend "sat on the side of the road contemplating America."[71] For Bufalo Bill, this afternoon is the twilight of the golden age of the West, marked by the arrival of 20th-century technology. For De Gregori, it marks a passage to adulthood, when one realizes that the myths and ideals of one's youth are just that, myths and ideals. The song folds the mythical American West onto the Italian peninsula, and ebbs and swells from a macrovision of the history of the United States to zoom in on childhoods passed in backyards and parks.

Francesco Guccini

Francesco Guccini, like De Gregori, folds his mental map of the world to superimpose the myth of the West on his own childhood, some ten years prior to de Gregori's.[72] In the song, "Little city," first released in 1972 on *Radici* (*Roots*), Guccini remembers his hometown of Modena vividly, with its signs of bombings and its smell of postwar. He differentiates it from his imaginings in class: "eyes looking at you [teacher/nun], but dreaming of heroes, guns and billiards, / the imagination ran to the plains, between Emilia Street and the West."[73] In the following verses, as he had distinguished the reality of Modena from the utopian Far-West, he distinguishes nostalgic memory from unsentimental recollection: "Silly adolescence, false and stupid innocence, / continence, empty third-hand American myth."[74] As the song and remembering progress, the dreams of heroes become "obscure nightmares of a dark period," the imagination is no longer inhabited by the West, but by his erotic dreams, and the streets bear witness now to his frustrated love, rather than his games. Like De Gregori, there is friction between myth/reality, youth/adulthood, that revolves around the myth of the West, and more broadly, the myth of America. Indeed, Guccini eventually writes: "There is continual confrontation between his America—marginalized, backbreaking, defeating—and mine, made of myths, imaginations, and flights of fancy."[75] The 'he' of "his America" in this citation was Guccini's

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[71] "E mi ricordo infatti di un pomeriggio triste, io, col mio amico 'Culo di gomma', famoso meccanico, sul ciglio di una strada a contemplare l'America." Ibid.

[72] Guccini and De André were both born in 1940 while De Gregori was born eleven years later in 1951. Guccini and De André both released their first albums in 1967 while De Gregori released his first five years later in 1972.

[73] "gli occhi guardavano voi, ma sognavan gli eroi, le armi e la bilia, correva la fantasia verso la prateria, fra la via Emilia e il West…" Francesco Guccini, *Radici* (Columbia C 063-17825, 1972).

[74] "Sciocca adolescenza, falsa e stupida innocenza, / continenza, vuoto mito americano di terza mano" Ibid.

[75] "C'è un confronto continuo tra la sua America – emarginata, di fatica, di sconfitte – e la mia – fatta di miti e immaginazioni, di viaggi di fantasia." in Francesco Guccini, *Un altro giorno è andato: Francesco Guccini si racconta a Massimo Cotto*. (Firenze: Giunti, 1999), 101.

great uncle, Enrico Guccini, of whom he writes in "Amerigo", the title track for his 1978 album.[76] His uncle emigrated to the United States and his experience of the American Dream when he returned to Modena differed tremendously from Guccini's childhood ideal.

Guccini's Amerigo is, like De Gregori's narrator, 20 years old when he hits the road to contemplate America, and like Amerigo Vespucci, to see it for himself:

> That morning he had the face of a 20-year-old without lines
> And he had rage and adventure and vague socialist ideas,
> Hard words to his father and behind him a tradition of hunger and flight.[77]

But Guccini remembers meeting him, not as a young man, but as an old man who had returned from his American adventure, and who, though old and broken, still had signs of a cowboy:

> When I met him, or began to remember him, he was already old
> Or that's how it seemed to me, but then I wasn't old enough to go to school
> His shaved head struck me and a mysterious and strange device of his
> A hernia belt that seemed a holster for pistols.[78]

Guccini recounts his own idea of America before his uncle's return: it was Roosevelt's soldiers, it was Atlantis, destiny, peace, paradise lost, and the heroes of Fort Apache.[79] Amerigo's America, rather, was blood, hard work, hard days, whores, beer, immigrants in the coal mines, and all for a few bucks.[80] Guccini contrasts the idealized solitude of the cowboy with his uncle's lonely lost youth, the Po Valley a distant dream and English a strange sound that wounded him like a knife.[81] He contrasts the Missouri and Texas of the open, endless, free *Far-West* with the Missouri and Texas where his uncle worked locked up in the darkness of the mines. He introduces beer and prostitutes to his uncle's

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[76] Francesco Guccini, *Amerigo*, Vinyl (EMI 3C 064-18341, 1978).

[77] "Ma quel mattino aveva il viso dei vent' anni senza rughe /e rabbia ed avventura e ancora vaghe idee di socialismo, / parole dure al padre e dietro tradizione di fame e fughe." in Ibid.

[78] "Quand' io l' ho conosciuto, o inizio a ricordarlo, era già vecchio / o così a me sembrava, ma allora non andavo ancora a scuola. / Colpiva il cranio raso e un misterioso e strano suo apparecchio, / un cinto d' ernia che sembrava una fondina per la pistola."

[79] L' America era allora, per me i G.I. di Roosvelt, la quinta armata, / l' America era Atlantide, l' America era il cuore, era il destino, / l' America era Life, sorrisi e denti bianchi su patinata, / l' America era il mondo sognante e misterioso di Paperino. L' America era allora per me provincia dolce, mondo di pace, perduto paradiso, malinconia sottile, nevrosi lenta, / e Gunga-Din e Ringo, gli eroi di Casablanca e di Fort Apache." in Ibid.

[80] "E fu lavoro e sangue e fu fatica uguale mattina e sera, / per anni da prigione, di birra e di puttane, di giorni duri, / di negri ed irlandesi, polacchi ed italiani nella miniera, / sudore d' antracite in Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Texas, Missouri. / Tornò come fan molti, due soldi e giovinezza ormai finita." in Ibid.

[81] "e Pavana un ricordo lasciato tra i castagni dell' Appennino, / l' inglese un suono strano che lo feriva al cuore come un coltello"

loneliness and struggle: objects of the cowboys' greatest pleasures become pitiful substitutes for the home and community the immigrant has left. His uncle, Amerigo, the roaming adventurer, the cowboy, when seen from up-close, is revealed as having not a pistol holder, but a hernia belt, and the experience of America, as Guccini concludes, is itself his hernia.[82] The *cantautore* certainly critiques the American myth here, and with his references to Texas, holsters, Fort Apache, he refigures his uncle as a truer cowboy than in the comics and reinstates some truth to the Myth of the West as well. It is in this very refiguring, however, that the cowboys-and-indians myth presents its greatest rub in Guccini. For it substitutes past native victimhood for contemporary European immigrant disillusionment in order to ingratiate and propagate itself: the historical native victims disappear and now cowboys represent mythical heroes and contemporary Italian immigrant victims.

In another song from the album, "100, Pennsylvania Ave," the personal nature of Guccini's long preoccupation with the US, and his sense of disappointment with the myth of America, becomes clear. Not only his great uncle, but also, Guccini himself emigrated to the US for a few months in 1970 to follow an Pennsylvanian girl he had met at Dickinson College in Bologna. Disappointed by his real experience of the once imaginary and idealized place, Guccini returned and began sorting out the incongruences of the real and imaginary in his music. "100 Pennsylvania Ave." has a brisk moment of sublime clarity, in which he pulls apart so much that the myth of the West has blended together. For two verses, the cowboys are an imperialist force bringing 'civilization' to the indians, just like Kennedy's New Frontier turned out to include extending US power through imperialist action in Vietnam, and the hippie generation who value 'love' and 'nature', who side with the Natives of the American Indian Movement through the late 60s and early 70s, are more like John Wayne than they like to imagine themselves. Guccini imagines his old Pennsylvania flame and her new boyfriend:

> I imagined you and him, two Americans safe and sound, a little like John Wayne,

[82] "l' America era un'ernia" in Ibid.

> Continuing Kennedy's myths and teaching the Indians:[83]
> love and ecology up there in Maine.[84]

Guccini, in moments like this of supreme clarity, realigns the mythical players, but the myth is too close to his personal experience and his dealings with it, as a whole, express a personal nostalgia and resentment for the loss of a promise he once held close.

While in "100 Pennsylvania Ave." he recognizes the cultural violence that played out in order for America and the West to transform into a new promised land, the album's title, "Amerigo," reaffirms the New World as a non-place, a wilderness, that came into being, through naming, after its discovery by Italians. Guccini describes the myth of America over and over again, in 1972, in 1978, and in 1984, as a land of cowboys. He is disappointed with and resentful of that myth whenever he comes face to face with it, yet in that very disappointment he reveals the point at which his encounter with the myth fails. He recognizes it as a false myth, but he *wishes* it were real, hence his nostalgia and resentment. While in his 1967 "Auschwitz (Canzone del bambino nel vento" (Auschwitz (Song of a Child in the Wind)) and his 1981 "Lager" (Concentration Camp), Guccini contemplates and critiques Nazi extermination camps, his relationship with the myth of the West does not appear to allow him to see the American frontier in those terms. Indeed, in his very desire for the myth to have proven real, he validates the underlying genocide on which it is based.

Fabrizio De André

The *Rimini* album that Fabrizio De André created in collaboration with Massimo Bubola in 1978 was inspired, according to De André, by the huge and impossible dreams of the petite bourgeoisie in the Rimini of Fellini's *I vitelloni* (The Loafers) and *Amarcord* (I remember).[85] The

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[83] As Richard Slotkin points out, the West mythos was used in American politics by John F. Kennedy during his 1960 election campaign: "I stand tonight facing west on what was once the last frontier […] the problems are not all solved and the battles are not all won and we stand today on the edge of a new frontier—the frontier of the 1960s, […] I believe that the times require imagination and courage and perseverance. I'm asking each of you to be pioneers towards that New Frontier." Similar imagery, of cowboys, indians, and frontiers, was used by his strategists to gain popular support of military intervention in Vietnam. "American troops would be describing Vietnam as 'Indian country' and search-and-destroy missions as a game of cowboys and indians; and Kennedy's ambassador to Vietnam would justify massive escalation by citing the necessity of moving 'Indians' away from the 'fort' so that the 'settlers' could plant 'corn'." Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 2-3.

[84] "E immagino tu e lui, due americani sicuri e sani, un poco alla John Wayne, / portare avanti i miti kennedyani e far scuola agli indiani: / amore e ecologia lassù nel Maine." in Guccini, *Amerigo*.

[85] "la Rimini di Fellini e dei vitelloni, i piccoli-borghesi coi loro grandi, impossibili sogni." Sassi, *De André talk,* 178.

album is kaleidoscopic in both its musical variation and textual allusions. It tells of the dramas of vacationers to Rimini, symbolic location of the ideal bourgeois vacation, which De André calls in an interview "a mirage of affluence/well-being and consumption,"[86] then folds the peninsula in half lengthwise to mirror Genoa, De André's birthplace, in Fellini's birthplace. The title track, "Rimini," superimposes the port city on the seaside resort town, and create a link between old- and new-world narratives; characters from the new world migrate to and settle in the album as if they have disembarked from Columbus's returning ships. It introduces Columbus, not as an idealized hero, but on a stretcher with his hands manacled and a cloth shoved in his mouth. When the young protagonist of the song removes the cloth, Columbus laments: "'I committed two errors,' he says to her, / 'a want of wisdom, / to abort America / and then look upon her sweetly."[87] Columbus laments his devotion to a sad Catholic king and before the album transitions to New World settings, he situates the listeners in the historical relationship between the Christian immigrants and native population: "I invented a kingdom for him," he says, "and he slaughtered it on a wooden cross."[88] Like De Gregori and Guccini, this is a micro and macro-layering of local hometown Italy with the myth of the New World, yet the nostalgia is gone from "Rimini." The myth of America begins to unravel right here in the album's first song, as the installation of the myth is not the story of America's creation, but rather of America's abortion and then subsequent mythification as those who aborted her started 'looking upon her sweetly.'

Initially, the album folds the Italian map in half to lay Genova over Rimini, then in the third song, "Coda di lupo" (Wolf Tail), the world map is folded. Like Marco Ferreri's 1974 Western farce, *Non toccare la donna bianca* (Don't Touch the White Woman!), the song's climactic scene takes place at the Battle of Little Bighorn. Ferreri's film is an allegory for the French student movement in 1968; General Custer (Marcello Mastroianni) is called to modern-day Paris to battle Sitting Bull (Alain Cuny) and his Indians, who are squatting in the city and, as stated in the opening scene, "do not

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[86] "un miraggio di benessere e di consumo" Ibid., 197.
[87] "E due errori ho commesso / due errori di saggezza / abortire l'America /e poi guardarla con dolcezza." Fabrizio De André, *Rimini*, Vinyl (Ricordi SMRL 6221, 1978).
[88] "Macellato su di una croce di legno." Ibid.

recognize the value of private property."[89] The film returns Cowboys—who in the film are a group of representative white men, Custer, Buffalo Bill, an Indian Scout, and a CIA agent (Paolo Villaggio)[90]—to their historical position of violent antagonism toward Indians. Yet, Indians themselves, are no longer Native Americans, but a group of marxist hippies, led only nominally by Sitting Bull, while their true leader is white marxist in a loin cloth called the 'Mad Indian.' While Sitting Bull wavers and frets, the Mad Indian preaches to the tribe about collective action, which in the end, allows them to defeat Custer. "Where are the warriors of old, who would fight alone against 100 guns?" Custer laments as his troops are depleted. Finally, when Sitting Bull's father takes aim at Custer and kills him, the Mad Indian is holding the rifle as well, a sort of ghost presence and guiding force.

In this countercultural production, Ferreri indeed parses some of the conflated identities in the myth, yet, like *Tex* the Indian is no more than a metaphor for the European and like *Tex* agency is taken from Sitting Bull and his tribe and handed over to the white-man hero.[91] De André's "Coda di lupo" is not an allegory of student revolutionaries as mythical indians, but, rather an exploration of the student revolutionaries, who by 1977 had come to understand themselves as indians. The *indian metropolitani* (Metropolitan Indians), perhaps inspired in part by Ferreri's film, were a faction of the 1977 movement which De André remembers and critiques in 1978. While De André never uses the key mythical terms like "cowboy" or "West" that show up as English-loan words in De Gregori and Guccini, and while he never specifies that the protagonist of the song, Wolf Tail, is a Native American, it becomes clear through the story, that the metaphor is one of a young Cherokee coming-of-age yarn knit with that of a young Metropolitan Indian that plays out on the Italian peninsula. An attentive and contextualized reading of the song reveals it to be an exploration of the revolution that

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[89] Marco Ferreri, *Non toccare la donna bianca* (PEA Produzioni Europee Associate, 1974).

[90] Paolo Villaggio was a childhood friend and early collaborator of De André, as well as radio and television host in the 1960s and 70s, including on *Canzonissima,* and other collaborations with *music leggera* stars like Raffaella Carrà. Villaggio claims to have written the songs ("Il fannullone" and "Carlo Martello ritorna dalla battaglia de Poitiers" (1963)), while De André claims they wrote them together: "Quanto al mio amico Villaggio … Be', siamo amici, ma un giorno o l'altro faremo a botte perché lui continua a dire di essere l'autore delle parole di *Carlo Martello,* mentre le abbiamo scritte insieme." Bianco, Luigi. "Se incontro Paolo villaggio lo picchio," in *Sogno.* 12 January 1969. Reprinted in Sassi, *De André talk,* 78.

[91] Indeed, in *Tex: la congiura di Custer* (The Custer conspiracy), it is Tex, rather than Sitting Bull, who guarantees the victory at Little Bighorn. Claudio Nizzi, *Tex: congiura contro Custer* (Milano: Oscar Mondadori, 2009).

both laments its ultimate failure and questions some of its decisions and ideals. Of primary concern for De André, in a conviction that remains strong for the *cantautore* throughout the 1990s, is the appropriation of the Native American heroism and victimhood.

One of the key differences between the 1968 and 1977 movements, as Paul Ginsborg points out, was that in 1977 the students were disaffected from traditional politics and that the movement began and ended with the needs of its participants. The example he gives is of 'auto-reductions,' which in 1968 had been practiced on family electricity bills to support factory laborers, while in 1977 became the auto-reduction of concert ticket prices.[92] Some artists, like De Gregori, organized free or nearly free tours in support of the students. However, De André in 1978 remembers *Re nudo's* (the most influential contemporary counter-culture magazine in Italy) protest against ticket prices and remarks:

> "*Re nudo's* initiative to lower ticket prices was serious, but to expect it to be free, or to want to take down the artist, seems to me a highly unfair position. Maybe I am just outside of certain frames of mind though, I am not a revolutionary, not even by temperament, and even if I were, I would have fought for candies, for superfluous things, like all the bourgeoisie."[93]

This is an lightly veiled dig at youths' 'superfluous' concerns, behind which the *cantautore* detects the same bourgeois individual whom Žižek looks for when he denounces false universality or "the interest of a particular class [which] disguises itself as universal human interest."[94] Indeed, he states in that same interview that *Rimini* "is a disc made by, and making fun of, the petite bourgeoisie."[95] In that comment De André reveals that he considers the beachgoers of "Rimini", the revolutionary Wolf Tail of "Coda di lupo," the romanticized modern-day cowboy of "Avventura a Durango" and he, himself, to be petit-bourgeois actors dressed up in costume.

"Coda di lupo" is a song of refusals and overcoming, as well as a song, finally, of disappointment and disenchantment. Each verse ends in a reversioned refrain telling the listener not

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[92] Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy,* 381-382.

[93] "l'iniziativa di *Re Nudo* per la diminuzione del prezzo del biglietto era seria, ma pretendere la gratuità, o pretendere di demolire la figura, il ruolo mi pare altamente scorretto. Ma forse sono proprio estraneo a certi schemi, non sono rivoluzionario, nemmeno per temperamento, e se anche lo fossi stato, avrei combattuto per i cioccolatini, per il superfluo, come tutti i borghesi." Sassi and Pistarini, *De André talk*, 179-180.

[94] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* 50.

[95] "Questo è un disco fatto da piccoli borghesi e come tali li prendo in giro." Sassi and Pistarini, *De André talk*, 179.

to believe in these various gods: Never believe in a English god, in a loser god, in a gluttonous god, in the god of the Scala, in a god of happy endings, in a back-breaking god, in a god without staying power.[96] The protagonist is born under the 'English god,' understood as bourgeois ideology, but by 14 and his coming-of-age ceremony, when he steals a horse and is given his name 'Wolf Tail,' he is associated with a different way of life, a life antithetical, and no longer believes in the 'loser god' of his grandfather's tutelage. Communist ideology follows, crucifying his grandfather on a fork, symbol of peasant uprisings, and his grandfather and his church are "dirtied and cleaned" with blood that painted them red.[97] Communism, too, is overcome, "Never believe in the gluttonous god," De André sings, and in this verse the transition is to both 1968 and 1977. By 1968, young marxists affiliated themselves with neither the Soviet Union, exposed as a violent and authoritarian regime, nor with the traditional Italian Communist Party. Paul Ginsborg argues that they were, in fact, as ferociously anti-Communist as they were anti-capitalist.[98] The tale of the following god, the god of the Scala, folds the ten years of social struggle onto each other, and one verse recounts both the beginning and end of the long decade. One of the first manifestations of 1968 saw protestors gather to throw rotten eggs at theatergoers at Teatro della Scala in Milan. The protest was symbolically repeated in 1976, but that time it turned violent. In this verse, the young Wolf Tail carries a metal rod, as many protestors did in 1976.[99] He apes his courageous rite of passage in the second verse as an excuse to kill and steal, "I stole my first horse and I became a man" he had said in the second verse. Now he claims with the same simple pride: "I killed a suit and I stole it from him."[100] The synecdochic use of "suit" (*smoking*) to refer to a business man ironically reveals an attitude that Marx crucially condemned in the capitalist economy, that of treating men as commodities, their value as men strictly associated with their value in the workforce.

Just as soon as the it starts, the '68 revolution is over, "Never believe in the god of the Scala,"

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[96] "al dio degli inglesi non credere mai … al loro dio perdente non credere mai … al loro dio goloso / ecc. / non credere mai"

[97] "E fu nella notte della lunga stella con la coda / che trovammo mio nonno crocifisso sulla chiesa / crocifisso con forchette che si usano a cena / era sporco e pulito di sangue e di crema / e al loro dio goloso non credere mai."

[98] Ginsborg, *A Contemporary History of Italy,* 307.

[99] "possedevo una spranga un cappello e una fionda" from "Coda di lupo." While protestors in 1977 carried *bastoni* and molotov cocktails.

[100] "rubai il primo cavallo e mi fecero uomo […] uccisi uno smoking e glielo rubai"

and the next two verses trace the final disillusionment of Wolf Tail as he starts using drugs and faces his last battle:

> Then we returned to Brianza for the opening of the bison hunt
> They tested our breath and our urine
> And an Andalusian poet explained the mechanism to us
> 'For the bison hunt,' he said, 'the number is closed.'
> And never believe in a God of happy endings.
>
> And I was already old when near Rome at Little Bighorn
> Shorted haired, a general, spoke to us at the university
> Of our brothers in blue coveralls/uniforms who had buried the hatchet
> But we were did not smoke with him, he had not come in peace.
> Never believe in a backbreaking god.[101]

De Gregori's Bufalo Bill says there are three types of people who kill bison: those who do it to steal, those who do it for love of the hunt, and those who do it for play. He implies that he did it as a game, like a boy playing at Cowboys and Indians. In De André this imagery, of young Italians 'playing' at a bison hunt in a cowboys-and-indians game, is turned on its head. Wolf Tail's Brianza implies the BR, or *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades), and the bison hunt is not play at all, rather it is a reference to the increased violence against government officials, industrialists and journalists in those years. The BR grows in size and action the late 1970s and the group is increasingly affiliated with a faction of the 1977 movement that stood in sharp contrast to the creative Metropolitan Indians: the militaristic and autonomist *Autonomia operaia.* Wolf Tail attempts to join the militants but is denied entrance after he fails a drug test. He is told that the 'number is closed' or *il numero è chiuso* for the hunt, which evokes the memory of a university reform introduced in the 1960s that opened university numbers and allowed any student to attend university.[102] Without reforming the education system as a whole, this singular reform resulted in overcrowded and barely functioning schools that, in their malfunction, stacked the deck against lower-class students who had to work while attending university. Education reform was a large part of the impetus for the 1968 student movements and it leads the song back to

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[101] "Poi tornammo in Brianza per l'apertura della caccia al bisonte / ci fecero l'esame dell'alito e delle urine / ci spiegò il meccanismo un poeta andaluso / - Per la caccia al bisonte - disse - Il numero è chiuso. / E a un Dio a lieto fine non credere mai. / Ed ero già vecchio quando vicino a Roma a Little Big Horn / capelli corti generale ci parlò all'università / dei fratelli tutte blu che seppellirono le asce / ma non fumammo con lui non era venuto in pace / e a un dio fatti il culo non credere mai."

[102] When students have to pass an exam to enter a university or a faculty within the university it is called *a numero chiuso.*

Sapienza University and a February 1977 campus occupation led by *Autonomia operaia.*

De André's Battle of Little Bighorn recounts a visit by Luciano Lama, head of the trade union most closely associated with the PCI, CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour), to the occupied campus. The events of this afternoon have come to be known as the *Caccia di Lama* (The Hunt of Lama). In the song, Lama is described as a short-haired general who tells the activists that their brothers, the factory workers, have laid down their arms. The reference to *tutte blu* is ambiguous and evokes both the coveralls of factory workers (whom Lama represented) and the blue uniforms of Union soldiers who fought Native Americans in the West. The idiom 'to bury the hatchet,' meanwhile, comes to the English language from the tradition of Native Americans at the cessation of hostilities. Lama's was essentially a call to end violence,[103] as he recalls himself: "In those years Italy ran great risks … the battle [against terrorism] completely absorbed us, and so we did not see all the rest with the necessary clarity."[104] But the crowd understood it as a call to surrender, a call to sacrifice, and both the creative and militant elements of the crowd mobilized into a violent clash with the PCI organizers. "We did not smoke with him, he had not come in peace," De André sings. This moment defined the movement as overwhelmingly militant, while the peaceful and creative Metropolitan Indians demonstrated themselves to be a minority. Two weeks later a demonstration of 60,000 people in downtown Rome turned into a four-hour guerrilla-style battle with both police and students firing shots. Paul Ginsborg remembers that "demonstraters chanted a macabre slogan in praise of the P38 pistol, the chosen weapon of the *Autonomi.*"[105]

De André's protagonist, though figuring himself after a Native American when he is renamed Wolf Tail, has elements of the cowboy figure as well, as he attempts to join the militant faction in the bison hunt and then joins in with the militants in the Hunt of Lama. When the mixed crowd of Metropolitan Indians and militants reemerge on the streets of Rome two weeks later to sing the

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[103] Paul Ginsborg argues that a fatal flaw in the PCI's policy in the late 70s cut them off from their youth base, "instead of championing civil-rights issues, [the party] rapidly became a most zealous defender of traditional law and order measures." This was due to a desire to end the long years of violence, but it turned youths against the PCI and caused them to revolt against them, in the Hunt of Lama as well as in Bologna during the spring and early summer. Ginsborg, *A Contemporary History of Italy*, 380

[104] *Ibid.,* 379.

[105] Ibid., 382.

praise of their pistols they have transformed into a loose affiliation of autonomous pistol-carrying militants. The Indian element is gone and they have transformed into the cowboy Men of P38 who will soon become the iconic face of the revolution, while Wolf Tail, in the final stanza, recedes into a heroin-induced stupor, trying to remember what he had been fighting for.

The final stanza is a lament for a life experienced as a series of hopes and disillusions, for both the Metropolitan Indian and Cherokee Native American, Wolf Tail. Indeed, the entire song can be read as the history of native people in the US as well. The 'English god' arrives with the immigrants, the 'Loser god' is Wolf Tail's Cherokee way of life as he believes for a moment in the future promised by white men, who, however, betray him and crucify his grandfather on their church. Wolf Tail attempts to fight back but is powerless against the imperial culture. At a certain point his people are introduced to drugs and alcohol and at the same time their traditions are taken from them, like the sacred bison hunt, which becomes both illegal and impossible as the bison's numbers are reduced by the game-hunting practices of European settlers. The final battle is remembered as a native victory in the American myth, but it is a convenient memory, one of the few victories and one of the last. Wolf Tail succumbs to the drugs, as his culture, his people, and his land have all either been stolen from him or destroyed.

The images from left to right: The cover of De André's 1978 album, picturing Italian youths vacationing on the beaches of Rimini; Metropolitan Indians dressed up in native attire at a campus protest. A poster declaring 'We have unearthed the battle hatchet.'

This layering of two narratives is the critical act in "Coda di lupo", as De André sharply contrasts the Native American and Metropolitan Indian plights. He furthermore questions some of the student ideology, as he had with the auto-reduction of concert prices. In the context of *Rimini* as

a whole, which evokes bourgeois vacations and Fellini's *I vitelloni* (The Loafers), verses like "I learned to fish with a bomb in hand," and "Never believe in a backbreaking God," raise a question: Are these revolutionaries or *vitelloni*? Indeed, Paul Ginsborg admits that the creative element of the 1977 often refused to work when jobs were available and "desired above all to 'stare insieme' [be together] and enjoy themselves."[106] More than De André's judgment of the movement, what is most significant about the song, especially when seen in conjunction with the ironic take on the obverse face of that myth in "Avventura a Durango," is the *cantautore*'s depiction of the counterculture as a group of adults still playing at Cowboys and Indians.

Bob Dylan wrote "Romance in Durango" while shooting *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* in Durango, Mexico and his song has a feel similar to the film's: adventure, love, an endless desert and a tragic hero on the run. The first-person narrator of the song is a cowboy and outlaw in the southwestern USA. He has killed a man, and together with his love, Magdalena, is fleeing towards Durango, Mexico. He had to sell his guitar for bread, but he promises Magdalena that he will buy another and play for her while they ride, he promises her that they will be married and live happily ever after in Durango. His dreams of the future and reassurances end when he is shot down, leaving Magdalena his gun to defend herself. The narrator is a perfect vision of the classic, romantic cowboy outlaw on horseback, but crucially, he is contemporary cowboy, much as Dylan portrays himself to be, but more coherently descended. He is not a Jewish man from a Minnesota coal-mine town, but the grandson of Mexicans who fought with the revolutionary hero, Pancho Villa during the Mexican Civil War, 1910-1920. De André and Bubola's "Avventura a Durango," which translates as both "Adventure" and "Romance in Durango," is largely in keeping with the intentions of the original. Where Dylan, in the refrain, evokes an imperfect and incomplete Spanish—"no llores, mi querida, / Dios nos vigila"—the Italian version invents a dialect that is close to the *abruzzese*—"Nun chiagne Maddalena Dio ci guarderà." Like this adjustment, most changes in the song are formal and the plot

[106] Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy,* 381-382.

remains one of murder, flight, dreams, romance, youth and tragic death.[107] There is one essential alteration, however, in the narrator's loss of his familial ties to Mexico. Dylan's "Past the Aztec ruins and the ghosts of our people" becomes "After the Aztec temples and the ruins,"[108] while "We'll drink tequila where our grandfathers stayed / When they rode with Villa into Torreón," becomes "At the corrida with iced tequila / […] / where Villa applauded the rodeo."[109] This exclusion seems an unwillingness to allow the narrator to claim the furtive duality of both cowboy and indigenous Mexican hero. De André, indeed, will obsessively see historical lines maintained here and in his 1981 *L'indiano*, never ceding to the romance of myth.

These small changes alone are, admittedly, hardly enough to claim it as a satire of the original. The irony and critique, rather, is not inherent to it, but becomes apparent, as in "Coda di lupo," in context with the rest of *Rimini* and in De André's own explanation of the song in 1978 "Durango," he said in 1978, "is a comic, a pretty pitiful one, that we inserted with a certain irony."[110] Comic perhaps as he sees Italian *cantautore* conceiving of themselves from within the highly foreign mythos and projecting that conception into their interpretation of contemporary Italy. Pitiful because he perceived the foreign ideal playing out in 1977 with the protests and vigilante violence in the spring of that year. Indeed, the foreignness of this myth is no abstract consideration in Italy at the time. On May 14th, 1977, a photo was taken during a police assault on the streets of Milan. The photo shows a masked and lone gunman, legs spread, gun raised and aimed. During the same incident, within moments of the photo being taken, a 25-year-old policeman was shot and killed. The gunman's identity was unknown, but it was known that he was a member of the Men of the P38 (referring to the Waltham P38 semi-automatic pistol), the

the French band Air, tells three western stories, the first of
vboy gunslinger. Baricco says of Clay "Bird" Puller: "Niente di
se than not dying, for a gunslinger.) In fact, famous cowboys,
mbered as heroes, indeed, because they died young.

eador toccare il cielo / All'ombra della tribuna antica / dove

che noi abbiamo inserito con una certa ironia." in Sassi, *De*

same pistol whose praise was chanted by protestors in Rome two months prior. The photo hit the media stream and quickly became iconic. After years of concerns around the level and type of conflict, years of ambivalence, the publication of this photo consolidated the opinion of the PCI, which joined with much of the country in condemning the actions of the P38. As Umberto Eco said in his article, "A Photo" (*Una foto*), published in *L'Espresso* on 29 May 1977: "I think that [the photo] revealed suddenly, without need for much more discourse, something that had been circulating in many conversations, but that words alone did not manage to make people accept. That photo did not look like any of the images in which the idea of revolution, for at least four generations, had been emblematized. The collective element was missing, and the figure of the individual hero returned in a traumatic mode."[111] Suddenly, the myth of the cowboy hero and the myth of the collective-action hero had collided, and the cowboy revealed himself terrifying, individualistic, extreme, and above all unacceptable. The myth of the individual revolutionary hero in Italy, Eco says, is rather always that of a victimized person. The myth of the West was able to victimize the cowboy by association with natives, but that association, water-tight on desert vignettes, became a sieve on the streets of Milan, the sincerity of the cowboy's absolute justice poured out of the photo, leaving insoluble violence behind.

Eco uses the event to demonstrate how, in contemporary society, the simulacrum has become more real than the real. The image of the world is truer than the world itself, and symbols, in effect, *create* reality. He argues that "this individual hero had the pose, the terrifying isolation […] of the solitary shooters in the West—no longer dear to a generation that wants indians."[112] Yet, it is not so clear as that, for indeed, the opposite could be argued, that the image of the cowboy inspired and allowed armed revolutionaries to continue their activity, precisely because they resembled him as marginalized figures who seemed to be fighting for a sense of justice like he did. The semiologist and

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111 "Credo abbia rivelato di colpo, senza bisogno di molte deviazioni discorsive, qualcosa che stava circolando in tanti discorsi, ma che la parola non riusciva a far accettare. Quella foto non assomigliava a nessuna delle immagini in cui si era emblematizzata, per almeno quattro generazioni, l'idea di rivoluzione. Mancava l'elemento collettivo, vi tornava in modo traumatico la figura dell'eroe individuale." in Umberto Eco, *Sette anni di desiderio* (Milano: Bompiani, 1983), 98.

112 "Questo eroe individuale invece aveva la posa, il terrificante isolamento degli eroi dei film polizieschi americani (la Magnum dell'ispettore Callaghan) o degli sparatori solitari del West—non più cari a una generazione che si vuole di indiani." Ibid., 99.

essayist, Gianfranco Marrone, in his 2012 "One photo, a thousand things," (*Una foto, mille cose*) says of the P38: "the fact is that this violent deviation, as much as it was explicitly motivated by a thousand, sometimes quite sophisticated, post-marxist analyses, was, in effect fueled by the disseminated media image of the solitary gunslinger (from the West, one understands), the real hero, in spite of his [opposition to] the classic revolutionary iconography."[113] De André asks the Italian public to reflect on cowboy iconography in the moment, precisely when the icon has become poignantly out of place and revealed as perhaps even injurious. Eco claims it is an overcome icon, but De André cast doubt on that assertion, especially as he highlights the continued popularity of the cowboy as folk singer. His creation of a false Italian dialect that mimics Dylan can be seen as satirizing those artists who mimic American folk and American myths as clumsy tools to understand local experience. His made-up Italian highlights the foreignness, the untranslatability of both the American folk hero and the cowboy myth. Yet, as we will see, the power of the cowboy hero is not completely destroyed, either by the iconic image of the P38 gunslinger, or by Eco's or De André's cultural unmaskings.

Cowboy Songs after the Revolutionary Frontier Closed

For De Gregori and Guccini, the cowboy myth reappears in the post-revolutionary 1980s as relatively unchanged. Their critique is still mixed with a prevailing nostalgia for the mythical utopia, which is perhaps an overcome ideal in revolutionary politics on the Italian streets, but one that still absorbs their mental landscapes. And it is still a representation of innocence, youth, and lost hopes for a bright future. In De Gregori's 1985 album, *Scacchi e tarocchi* (Chess and Tarot), the song "I cowboy" (Cowboys) is a sort of lament for their loss. As Bufalo Bill finds his mythical land interrupted by the arrival of the future, the car and the highway, so the cowboys in 1985 are set up for a fall when the future arrives. Yet, the song is not an unmasking of the cowboy as a foreign hero, but a sentimental farewell.

Cowboys go by horse through the canyons of life,

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[113] "si mette a sparare per le strade essendo però fortemente minoritaria, isolata; d'altra parte, il fatto che questa deriva violenta, per quanto motivata esplicitamente da mille analisi post-marxiste anche molto raffinate, era in effetti nutrita di quell'immaginario mediatico diffuso che vede nel pistolero solitario (da Far West, per intenderci) il vero eroe, a dispetto dell'iconografia rivoluzionaria più classica" in Gianfranco Marrone, "Una Foto, Mille Cose," *Doppiozero*, February 20, 2012, Doppiozero.com.

Their glory is a golden belt and a rusted buckle.
The desert is their star, their star has no family,
And the future for them has no morning, the wine has no bottle.
The desert is their star, their star forestalls the sunset,
And the future for them is a beautiful thing,
That they will deal with when it arrives.
Cowboys are fast animals, when they return they are already leaving,
Their streets have no intersections, their life is a railway.
When the train departs again, everyone is armed to his teeth.
They salute you with their rifles, legs astride the buffer stop.
Cowboys go by horse, in the Arizona of our hearts.
They have no children they have no parents, they have no corps they have no loves.
They adventure alone, so they seldom get lost.
They are hearts in the drift, they are souls in the current.
And when the train returns it's evening, and the future shows up.
Before the cowboys who knows who there was, after the cowboys there is no one else.[114]

The cowboys live in the present, but think of the future as a beautiful thing. They travel alone so that they are truly free, no army or family to bind them. They may no longer wander the range but still travel in the "Arizona of our hearts," De Gregori states. In the last verses, when the future finally arrives, one senses that it is the end for the cowboys and their mythical and internalized range, yet, De Gregori can imagine nothing before or after them. The future that they saw as 'beautiful,' the future they 'forestalled' on the range, creates a void in the song when it arrives. It erases the cowboy but replaces it with nothing else. As if with that foreign dream gone, there can be no others rooted in the local. This appears still true for De Gregori in his 1992 *Canzoni d'amore* (Love Songs) in which he reflects on the DC's decades of government control and the corruption scandal that ended it. The *cantautore* finally appears to overcome the romanticized cowboy hero, presented as the gaucho of the "endless plains" of South America in "Adelante! Adelante!"[115] He says: "Running along the state

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[114] "I cowboys vanno a cavallo per i canyons della vita, / la loro gloria è una cintura d'oro e una fibbia arrugginita. / Il deserto è la loro stella, la loro stella non ha famiglia, / e il futuro per loro non ha mattino, il loro vino non ha bottiglia. / Il deserto è la loro stella, la loro stella fa che non tramonti, / e il futuro per loro è una cosa bella, / che quando arriva ci si fanno i conti. / I cowboys sono animali veloci, quando ritornano già vanno via, / le loro strade non hanno incroci, la loro vita è una ferrovia. / Che quando riparte il treno, tutti armati fino ai denti. / Ti salutano coi fucili, a cavalcioni [legs astride] dei respingenti. / I cowboys vanno a cavallo, nell'Arizona dei nostri cuori. / Non hanno figli e non hanno padri, non hanno armi e non hanno amori. / All'avventura vanno da soli, così si perdono raramente. / Sono cuori nella deriva, sono anime nella corrente. / E quando ritorna il treno che è sera, e il futuro si fa presente, / prima dei cowboys chissà se c'era, ma dopo i cowboys non c'è più niente." in Francesco De Gregori, *Scacchi e tarocchi*, Vinyl (RCA Italia PL 70845, 1985).

[115] "Di questo cavolo di pianura, / Di questa terra senza misura." Francesco De Gregori, *Canzoni d'amore*, CD (Columbia COL 472215 2, 1992).

highway / Is a train full of salt. / From Turin to Palermo […] And these streets without laws, / And these stalls without flocks, / Without parents to remember, / And without children to respect."[116] The lawless streets, the freedom to wander, is seen in a negative key in 1992, while the cowboy's train was, in fact, sowing the earth with salt, assuring a barren future in which nothing local could sprout.

While cowboys wander the 'Arizona of our hearts' in De Gregori's 1980s, Francesco Guccini resurrects the 1972 cowboys and indians of his "Piccola città," to provide the title of his 1984 live album *Tra la via Emilia e il West* (Between Emilia Street and the West). On the album sleeve he remembers the frontier in his hometown of Modena:

> "Emilia Street cut Modena in two: the street on which I lived crossed it, and on the other side, there were ample fields and the town's periphery. Those fields were like our domesticated 'West', with just a couple of steps and crossing a street there were suddenly cowboys and indians, horses and arrows; there was, in sum, Adventure, translated into 'the Po Valley,' by films and comics. Then, Emilia Street went on cutting Modena in two, but the West had a different face, and the 'American Myth', that of many generations before mine, spoke a different language, that of rock, of vinyl covers, of the face of James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause,* of books that had just been discovered and published in Italian. But the two references always existed, one foot here and the other there, the dream (better, the utopia) and the reality."[117]

Guccini sums it up: "the West had a different face," he says, it became the American myth that spoke the language of rock and vinyl covers. Yet, "The two references always existed, one foot here and the other there, the dream and the reality." Like De Gregori's "I cowboy," *Tra via Emilia e il West* is a farewell tribute to the myth, an explanation of its relevance, its meaning, its status. The players are all clumped together, without hierarchy or distinction: cowboy and indians, rock, film, comics, rebellion, the American myth, the Po Valley. Guccini describes the mythical elements so well, but the historical is all but missing. Though for Eco the cowboy dream had played itself out with horrifying

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[116] "Passa correndo lungo la statale / Un autotreno carico di sale. / Da Torino a Palermo […] E queste strade senza più legge, / E queste stalle senza più gregge, / Senza più padri da ricordare, / E senza figli da rispettare." in Francesco De Gregori, *Canzoni d'amore*.

[117] "La via Emilia tagliava Modena in due; la strada dove abitavo, da una parte, si incrociava con essa. Dall'altra parte c'erano già gli ampi campi della periferia. Erano un po' il nostro "West" domestico: bastava fare due passi, o attraversare una strada, e c'erano già indiani e cow-boys, cavalli e frecce; c'era, insomma, l'Avventura, tradotta in "padano" dai film e dai fumetti. Poi la via Emilia continuò a tagliare Modena in due, ma il West aveva volto diverso, e il "mito americano", quello di tante generazioni oltre alla mia, parlava lingua diversa, quella del rock, delle copertine dei dischi, della faccia di James Dean in Gioventù bruciata, dei libri che altri appena prima di noi avevano scoperto e voltato in italiano. Ma i due riferimenti esistevano sempre, un piede di qua e uno di là, il sogno (meglio, l'utopia) e la realtà." Francesco Guccini, *Fra la via Emilia e il West*, Vinyl (EMI 2-62 1186693, 1984).

consequences and subsequently revealed its foreign nature, for Guccini in 1984 it is still a paradise lost, a dream, a promise. It is still a representation of that which is, and that which could be. Indeed, even in his 2004 "Colombo" (Columbus), while the cowboys are gone, but the promise of America is the same: "He found a street of stars in the heavens of his soul. / He feels it and can no longer fail, he will discover a new world […] Even if it is a mirage, at this point he is weighing anchor […] And he navigates, navigates away, / toward a world still unthinkable in any theory."[118] It is a pure and lofty goal, a utopia, a mirage. America is ever an ideal land for Guccini, one that begins and ends not with the Native people, but with the Italian people.

De André's America, meanwhile, is increasingly the opposite of Guccini's, one that begins and ends with the Native people. Three years after *Rimini* and a year after the decade of civil terrorism comes to a close,[119] releases a self-titled album which is most commonly known as *The Indian* (*L'indiano*), due to its title-less cover and cover art. The album works towards lessening the power of the mythical West in Italy, towards reinstating a historical tale of centuries-long imperialism, by realigning the nature of the relationship between Native Americans and European pioneer-immigrants. It marks the beginning of a process of New-World historicizing that De André will continue to carry out as the 500-year anniversary of Columbus's landing in the Americas and Genoa's celebration of that anniversary approaches. De André seems to understand in his prior works and *L'indiano* that part of the power of myth is in simple naming itself, and thus cowboys—the English word in Italian so strongly associated with the myth—are never named. White men indeed are hardly present, it is a tale told by Natives and about Natives. This is apparent in the album's first impact, the cover, on which one Native American is alone

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[118] ha trovato una strada di stelle nel cielo dell'anima sua. / Se lo sente, non può più fallire, scoprirà un nuovo mondo; […] anche fosse un miraggio ormai salperà via. […] e naviga, naviga via, / verso un mondo impensabile ancora da ogni teoria." in Francesco Guccini, *Ritratti*, CD (EMI – 5987802, 2004).

[119] The last song of the album, "Se ti tagliassero a pezzetti" (If They Cut You Into Little Pieces) is a reference to one of the last acts of terrorism, carried out on August 2, 1980, while De Andre and Bubola were writing *L'indiano.* The Black Brigades enacted one of the most fatal bombing of years of the Strategy of Tension at the Bologna Train Station, killing 85 people and injuring 200 others.

on the prairie with the sun at the horizon behind him. His clothing is apparently traditional, his hair long and decorated with feathers, his chest bare. Yet his horse and his rifle are signs of the European invasion and the struggle to maintain his traditions as more and more artifacts of the invading culture that besiege him, as fewer and fewer of his people remain to support him and he becomes marginalized and excluded from even the prairie around him. The cover stands in stark contrast with the other images we have seen, there is no filter between the gaze of the viewer and the Native American's gaze, no intermediate cowboy, no sign that the native is a symbol of another struggle.

The album's eight songs deal with examples of cultural distinctions and impositions of the Native American in North America and Sardinian and European, as De André recognizes a similarity between Sardinian and Native American culture and between the imperialism that destroys their cultures.[120] The stories are told, for the most part, from the point of the victim or subaltern, blending and superimposing the Native American narrative on the Sardinian narrative so that, at times, their tales become one. For brevity's sake, I will deal here only with the Native American songs, the first of which is the first track, "Quello che non ho" (What I Don't Have). The song defines an Us and Them—Have nots and Haves, Dispossessed and Possessors—setting up the average listener, explicitly addressed, to experience the song from an inimical position as 'One Who Has'. The narrator, rather, is 'One Who Has Not':

> What I don't have is a white dress shirt
> what I don't have is a secret in the bank
> what I don't have are your pistols
> to conquer the sky/paradise to earn the sun.[121]

In the following stanzas, it continues: he is one who lives without getting away with things, without anything he does not need, without a watch to help him hurry away, without a rusted train to take him back in time, without gold teeth, without a corporate lunch, without the prairie around him, without powerful connections, without an address in his pocket, without the listener on his side, without the capacity to lie or cheat. In the final verse of each stanza the narrator reveals the function

[120] "È strano: ci sono dei recuperi ad un certo livello, una strana commissione fra cultura sarda e cultura pellerossa." De André interviewed in 1980. Sassi and Pistarini, *De André talk,* 234.

[121] "Quello che non ho è una camicia bianca / quello che non ho è un segreto in banca / quello che non ho sono le tue pistole / per conquistarmi il cielo per guadagnarmi il sole." in Fabrizio De André, *Fabrizio De André*, Vinyl (Ricordi – SMRL 6281, 1981).

of possessing these things and in three of the six stanzas, as in the one cited above, the function is either "to earn the sky/paradise, to conquer the sun" or "to conquer the sky/paradise, to earn the sun." This refrain is densely packed with implications. It reminds the reader that frontiersmen and soldiers used civilization and religion as a justification for taking native lands and lives; they were earning paradise by doing God's will, while, quite literally, conquering an earthly paradise in the New World. Conversely, the Sun Dance, a ceremony practiced by groups indigenous to the Great Plains in current Canada and the United States, was banned by the conquering nations, which meant essentially banning the passing down along generations of traditional song and dance and therefore was tantamount to truly conquering the Sun, the bringer of life. The banning of the Sun Dance on the grounds that it was uncivilized parallels the banning of the traditional Sardinian boar hunt evoked at the song's start by the sounds of rifle shots and yells. There was a movement to ban the hunt by Italian legislators who considered it uncivilized in the early 1980s and De André saw in it a vivid example of cultural impositions of norms and 'civilization' by a foreign power.[122]

The sun and sky are conquered with objects that are reminiscent of historical colonization, but that are flecked with contemporary details, reminding the listener that colonization is still happening, and sending one's gaze back to the Native American narrative while rooting him firmly in contemporary Italy. The pistols, for example, are not just pistols, nor are they the colonizers' pistols, though that particular gun is evocative of the frontier West. They are, rather, "your pistols" (*le tue pistole*). You, listeners. This is not the mythical West that absolves cowboys, it is a historicized remembering with implications for all citizens of imperial nations. The "rusted train," too, links the past and present in this way, as it not only summons a weather- and time-worn locomotive, but one with the capacity to carry its riders back in time. The native has lost his prairie and he has no train to take him back in time to save his people and ameliorate his present: "What I don't have is a rusted train, / that can take me back to where I started from. […] What I don't have is this very plain / On

[122] De André says of the peninsula's desire to ban the wild boar hunt in Sardinia, presumably as well in Maremma: "Far votare a Roma l'abolizione della caccia per la Sardegna equivale a far votare ad Orgosolo l'abolizione del calcio domenicale a Roma." De André interviewed in 1981. In Sassi and Pistarini, *De André talk,* 249.

which to run faster from my melancholy."[123] While European Americans, and Italians, may perhaps lament the arrival of the modern era and subsequent loss of the great American plains, they still have a 'rusted train' and a 'plain' on which they can go back in time. As we have seen across this chapter, they may simply pick up a comic book or write a song to return to a flat, mythical time, where the plains and all the freedom and heroism they have come to represent can be lived in the present.

It is significant that a series mundane objects demonstrate the almost magical power of dispossessing Natives of their culture. Taken as a whole, these objects are symbolic of the capitalist mode. The watch represents objective and scheduled time and the white-man's control of time as well as space (the prairie), gold teeth and bank accounts signify possession of capital, white shirts and paid lunches a corporate interdependence. But, these tangible objects alone are not the agents of power and control, even more important are the words and allies that the narrator does not possess. The narrator does not have friends with connections, and, significantly, does not have "you" as a friend: "What I don't have is you on my side."[124] Again, the lines have been drawn and you, the listener, are beyond enemy lines. The song pivots around the central idea that the tenets of capitalism as an imperial force and the tenets of a hunter/gatherer or agrarian/pastoral societies are incompatible, it pits those who have, those who conceive of wanting, having, and taking, as fundamentally opposed to those who have not, want not, take not but what they need. The song implicates the listener 'you' as well as the cowboy and his 'pistols' as inimical to the nomadic native man, who is crucially a 'man without.' He is without possessions, without desire, as well as existing without, as in fully outside the structures he opposes, as position that you, the listener, for all your sympathy, cannot claim.

Two songs later in "Sand Creek River" ("Fiume Sand Creek") the sounds of gunshots and shouts in the distance, the same which introduce "Quello che non ho," are accompanied by a horn, an oliphant or bugle. It portends two very different hunts: one, the bison hunt that caused the warrior Cheyenne men to be away from the camp,[125] the other the hunt of the aged, women, and children left behind at the Big Sandy Creek reservation massacre. The historical event occurred in 1864, when

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[123] "quello che non ho è un treno arrugginito / che mi riporti indietro da dove sono partito […] quello che non ho è questa prateria / per correre più forte della malinconia." in De André, *Fabrizio De André*.
[124] "quello che non ho sei tu dalla mia parte." Ibid.
[125] "I nostri guerrieri troppo lontani, sulla pista del bisonte." Ibid.

Colonel John Chivington led a group of 700 militia men, dressed in Union army uniforms, but not acting under any official directive (not that it matters), to massacre a group of more than one hundred unarmed and peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho whose chief, Black Kettle, had before leaving hung a US and a white flag in the camp and received assurance from local authorities of the security of his people. The song is told from the point of view of a young native boy who wakes in the moonlight to the sounds of the approaching militia.

Colonel Chivington was 43 during the Sand Creek massacre, yet, like De Gregori's Bufalo Bill ("I was so young and 20 seems so young"[126]), De André says "he was a 20-year-old general / turquoise eyes and turquoise coat."[127] Like Guccini's Amerigo, who had "the face of a 20-year-old without wrinkles / and with rage,"[128] De André says Chivington "was a 20-year-old general / son of a tempest."[129] Perhaps De André sought to evoke and call into question the image of the much more famous George Armstrong Custer, who became a general at 23. Custer's death in 1876 is remembered as a sort of heroic martyrdom that pairs well in the communal imagination with the comfortable memory of Sitting Bull's heroic victory. Perhaps De André wanted to turn the tables on the general perspective taken on the native victory and Custer's death at Little Bighorn, without, however conceding to tell the tale again and reinforce its mythical power. Indeed, Custer is less remembered

126 "avevo pochi anni e vent'anni sembran pochi." De Gregori, *Bufalo Bill.*

127 "fu un generale di vent'anni / occhi turchini e giacca uguale." De André, *Fabrizio De André.*

128 "quel mattino aveva il viso dei vent' anni senza rughe / e rabbia e avventura e ancora vaghe idee del socialismo." Guccini, *Amerigo.*

129 Calling Chivington a 20-year-old general is not just a simple oversight. De André in concerts would present the story of Sand Creek in minute details before performing the song. At a concert on September 13, 1991, a Piazza degli Scacchi in Marostica, Vicenza, he refers explicitly to the man by rank and name: "Colonnello Chivington." Romano Giuffrida, *De André, gli occhi della memoria: tracce di ricordi con Fabrizio* (Milano: Elèuthera, 2002), 63.

Furthermore, when asked where his passion for Native Americans comes from, he mentions that he was influenced by Westerns, a visit to Canada, and "dalla lettura di libri come *Memorie di un indiano Cheyenne* e *Seppellite il mio cuore a Wounded Knee.*" Sassi, *De André talk,* 246.

The Westerns he cites are *Soldato Blu* and *Un uomo chiamato cavallo,* both revisionist westerns with realism regarding the massacres of natives. Ibid., 254.

for his own massacre of Cheyenne at Washita River when he was 29. Or perhaps, De Gregori, Guccini, and De André all associate a certain rebelliousness, vigorous intrepidness, and self-assured idealism to that age. The defiance and daring are clear and simple, but the idealism becomes a thorny issue and therefore a sticking point for De André. Three Europeans (or European Americans) go West—Bufalo Bill, Amerigo, Chivington—all with the same youthful idealism of securing riches and glory in their futures,[130] yet only one is portrayed as a threat to indigenous life in the West. Truly, only one murdered innocent natives on November 29, 1864, but all three could equally send the action of the song forward in De André and Bubola's dreamlike and hazy telling. It begins with an arrival: "There was a silver dollar on the Sand Creek riverbed." It follows with a departure: "Now our children sleep on the Sand Creek riverbed."[131] The implication is clear, the desire for gold and silver caused a genocide in North America.

Within the space of four refrains, "Sand Creek River" tells the tale of a day and a massacre, as well as a longer tale of the West. For there is a repetition of three in the song, that creates the sense of a prolonged struggle, a return to struggle, a maturity of struggle. Across six stanzas, there is the sense of a narrator who is reborn across generations and across generations always faces the pale-faced enemy. The narrator first awakens to hear the bugles in the distance and three times he does not react to the approach or prepare to fight. Three times he simply closed his eyes and opened them to find himself still there,[132] still listening to them approach:

> Our warriors were far away on the bisons' trail
> And that distant music kept on getting louder,
> I closed my eyes three times
> And I found myself there again,
> I asked my grandfather if it was a dream

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130 Amerigo's questo for riches is clear in his emigration. Bufalo Bill says that his father guarded cattle, his mother was a farmer, he killed bison to be the best. Indeed, the historical Bill gained fame largely through hunting bison for sport. Chivington was a minister who moved west to set up missions, and who sought glory through the lord. "I have come to kill Indians, and believe it is right and honorable to use any means under God's heaven to kill Indians. ... Kill and scalp all, big and little; nits make lice." General John Chivington cited in Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Macmillan, 2001), 86–87.

131 "C'è un dollaro d'argento sul fondo del Sand Creek […] ora i bambini dormono sul fondo del Sand Creek." Ibid.

132 "chiusi gli occhi per tre volte / mi ritrovai ancora lì." Ibid.

And he told me it was.[133]

His grandfather tells him he is dreaming, perhaps simply to reassure him, or perhaps evoking early immigration to the Americas and Native Americans who at first could not conceive of any sort of culture that could effectively annihilate their own. Natives for centuries either did not understand or refused to believe that that their traditions and culture would not be allowed to exist in tandem with imperial traditions and culture. They sought conciliatory measures and agreed to increasingly smaller reservations where they thought they would live in peace. This incomprehension echoes in the narrator's childish innocent, in his dreamlike and blinking refusal of the approaching forces, and even in his own description of his death, which he believes is still a dream:

"I was dreaming so hard that my nose started to bleed
a flash in one ear and paradise on the other side
the larger tears
the smaller tears
when the snowy tree
flowers red stars."[134]

The larger and smaller tears are the tears of the adults and of the children, but also the tears of an individual and the accumulated trail of tears that followed the removed natives for generations. As the boy dies, the natural cycle of life and death, represented in the snow-covered tree, is replaced with a cycle of unnatural deaths during the spring of one's life, represented in the bloody blooms. As the stanza ends, the narrator's voice is abstracted, omnipresent, hovering outside of the boy as he declares: "now the children sleep on the Sand Creek riverbed."

The first cycle in the song ends with the night's end. The "dark cover" that had first "taken our hearts," according to the narrator, is gone. The sun rises on the camp and with it comes the end of disbelief and inaction, the beginning of recognition and anger, as a mature warrior narrator returns to witness the destruction:

When the sun raised its head between the night's shoulders

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133 "I nostri guerrieri troppo lontani sulla pista del bisonte. / e quella musica distante diventò sempre più forte / chiusi gli occhi per tre volte / mi ritrovai ancora lì / chiesi a mio nonno è solo un sogno / mio nonno disse sì / a volte i pesci cantano sul fondo del Sand Creek / Sognai talmente forte che mi uscì il sangue dal naso." Ibid.

134 "Sognai talmente forte che mi uscì il sangue dal naso / il lampo in un orecchio nell'altro il paradiso / le lacrime più piccole / le lacrime più grosse / quando l'albero della neve / fiorì di stelle rosse / ora i bambini dormono nel letto del Sand Creek."

there were only dogs and smoke and overturned tents
I shot an arrow at the sky
to make it breathe
I shot an arrow at the wind
to make it bleed
The third arrow, look for it on the Sand Creek riverbed.[135]

As he returns to fight the enemy, he represents a new type of native in the Great Plains frontier, territory of nomadic warrior bands like the Cheyenne and Arapaho, who were immediately more hostile to colonization than eastern tribes had been. But it is too late now for a war, the narrator's people are already gone. Furthermore, his land and food are disappearing, and the enemy has become so immense, so overpowering, that it is like trying to fight the Earth that surrounds him, like shooting at the sky and the wind. Perhaps he shoots his third and final arrow at the enemy, perhaps he is killed before he can pull the string, perhaps he renounces the fight. Whatever its trajectory, the arrow is powerless in the face of the dollar glimmering from the bottom of Sand Creek. In exchange for that dollar, Union soldiers lined the bed with Cheyenne children, and the narrator's final arrow sinks to the bottom of the river to lie with the future generations it would have defended. "My third arrow, look for it on the Sand Creek riverbed,"[136] he says. Just nine miles from modern-day Chivington, Colorado. There, if you go, you will find the symbols of the West: a silver dollar, the future generations of Native Americans dead, and a discarded weapon. There you will find the history of the West.

De André completes the album with "If They Cut You into Little Pieces" ("Se ti tagliassero a pezzetti") and "Verdi pascoli" (Green Fields) a song that recounts the Native American myth of paradise after death. "If They Cut You into Little Pieces" is a song of praise to liberty and her counterpart, imagination, but the last stanza returns the listeners to local violence that was in its death throes in 1980 as De André composed *L'indiano*. The narrator discovers Lady Liberty playing music on the river's edge, they dance, he plays guitar and mandolin, and they make love. But the next time he meets her, she is trapped in a grey suit, newspapers in one hand and her destiny in the other.

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[135] "Quando il sole alzò la testa tra le spalle della notte / c'erano solo cani e fumo e tende capovolte / tirai una freccia in cielo / per farlo respirare / tirai una freccia al vento / per farlo sanguinare / la terza freccia cercala sul fondo del Sand Creek."

[136] "la terza freccia cercala sul fondo del Sand Creek" Ibid.

I crossed your path at the station
as you followed your fragrance
trapped in a smoke-grey suit
newspapers in one hand and your destiny in the other
you walked side by side with your assassin.[137]

The image is at once that of a commuter and that of a Black Brigades bomber who on August 20, 1980 enacted one of the final and the most fatal bombing of years of the Strategy of Tension at the Bologna Train Station, killing 85 people and injuring 200 others. "Newspapers in one hand and your destiny in the other," De André sings. The destiny held in hand is perhaps a briefcase, which completes the commuter's ensemble or masks a bomb, like the one in Bologna, which was abandoned in a travel bag. Whether blown to bits in an armed-revolutionary's briefcase, or cut to bits by a life of soul-crushing administrative work, the briefcase is a symbol of violence against liberty. Liberty, however, cannot be destroyed by either the capitalist drive or by the violence of the *Anni di piombo*. The Earth itself, as long as it exists, will always return liberty to the individual:

But if they cut you into little pieces
The wind will gather you
The kingdom of spiders will sew your skin back together,
And the moon, the moon will weave your hair and your face.[138]

Liberty, indeed, will survive all of man's best attempts to snuff her out, just as she survives for both Native Americans and Italians in the next and final song, "Verdi pascoli" (Green Fields), the earth-like paradise of the Native American myth of the afterlife. In those green fields, under that blanket of stars, De André ends the album in a return to the mythical prairie, but this one is free of pistols, arrows, cowboys, indians, it is full of fruit trees, music to dance to, parents and children at play: a proper utopia.

Conclusion

Fabrizio De André becomes increasingly preoccupied with the idea of the false discovery myth of the Americas, what he calls a lie,[139] and the myth that develops out of it that initial lie. Aside

[137] "T'ho incrociata alla stazione / che inseguivi il tuo profumo / presa in trappola da un tailleur grigio fumo / i giornali in una mano e nell'altra il tuo destino / camminavi fianco a fianco al tuo assassino." Ibid.
[138] "Ma se ti tagliassero a pezzetti / il vento li raccoglierebbe / il regno dei ragni cucirebbe la pelle / e la luna la luna tesserebbe i capelli e il viso." Ibid.
[139] "È una menzogna che Colombo abbia scoperto l'America nel 1492" Archivio DA IV/09 (B.3; 1-36) agenda, 159.

from the music he writes, he takes the opportunity in the early 1990s, at concerts and in interviews, to condemn the festivities around the approaching 500-year anniversary of Columbus's landing. Even his notebooks from the early 90s are filled with references to the anniversary, which he sees as a flagrant insult to surviving Native Americans.[140] He says at a concert at Piazza degli Scacchi in Marostica, Vicenza on September 13, 1991: "The evening of October 12, 1992, I will certainly not be toasting the centennial… the quincentennial of the discovery of America. […] I will be in solidarity with the indians and I will remember together with them that which they remember as the day of greatest national mourning."[141] He will remember the truth that, as he says, "our children are punished in school for declaring," that when Columbus discovered America, it had been populated since time immemorial.[142] Yet, De André himself, as much as he denies the myth, as much as he criticizes immigrants who took native North American land and disrupted their culture, is nonetheless guilty of following that desire for the promise of something more. He moves to Sardinia and buys a farm in the 1970s, like Columbus to the US, he takes a boat from Genoa to Sardinia and settles there. De André is described in a 1969 music-magazine article, probably much to his chagrin, as taller than the average Italian and lanky and restless "like a cowboy."[143] He refuses to become the Western folk hero *a la* Guthrie or Dylan that the music scene might have hoped he would become. Yet, he does, just like Tex (the cowboy with good but naive intentions), defend the Native people, their traditions and their rights, while acting as a foreign occupant of their land, thus a threat to the very culture he defends.

Yet, perhaps if other popular *cantautori* had been, like De André, more critical of the US myth and less prone to propagating it in the Italian communal imagination, 1977 would not have been a

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[140] "Durante I festeggiamenti colombiani la nazione indiana sarà insulto." Archivio DA IV/09 (B.3; 1-36) agenda, 159.

[141] "la sera del 12 ottobre del 1992, non starò certo a brindare al centenario… al cinquecentenario della scoperta dell'America. […] starò vicino agli Indiani e ricorderò insieme a loro quello che loro ricordano come il giorno del più grave lutto nazionale." Giuffrida, *De André, gli occhi della memoria*, 63.

[142] "È una menzogna che Colombo abbia scoperto l'America nel 1492 […] la popolavano da tempo immemorabile. […] Ma se uno dei nostri bambini dà questa risposta a scuola viene punito." Archivio DA IV/09 (B.3; 1-36, agenda), 159.

[143] "Alto uno span outré la media deli italiani, con i sugli sessantasei chili di peso sparse con giudizio lungo il corpo dinoccolato, da cowboy, che sembra non riuscire a trovare mai la posizione adatta per rilassarsi." Sassi and Pistarini, *De André talk,* 107.

countercultural manifestation of cowboys and indians. Perhaps the initial 1968 revolution would have matured to become more self-aware and thus more powerful if the youth generation had not had a single utopic imagining in which it could plant its many diverging ideologies. Perhaps, if not for the predominance in the mental landscape of a foreign founding myth, the 1960s and 70s could have acted more effectively as a moment of national rebirth and renewed communal identity for the postwar and post-Fascist generation. Then, even if the revolution was doomed to fail, perhaps *cantautori* would not have still expressed their sense of being betrayed, lost, futureless, in the terms of disillusionment with a foreign myth. Perhaps they would have, indeed, felt less lost.

On the other hand, perhaps it all implies and stems precisely from this unwillingness to dig into recent Italian history so as to construct a contemporary national identity from the roots up. Indeed, recent Italian scholarship has argued along these lines. As Pier Luigi Sacco wrote in his 2011 *Italia Reloaded:* "In Italy conflict cannot assume a lucid, self-aware, critical dimension because we have unlearned, as a society, to confront in a mature way the opinions and interests different from our own, precisely because we have renounced the desire to responsibly come to terms with our own history."[144] Giuliana Minghelli in her 2013 *Landscape and Memory in Post-Fascist Film: Cinema Year Zero* argues similarly that neorealism, as much as it was a cinema of commemoration of the war and mourning for the years of Fascism, also sanctioned a process of national forgetting as it chose to narrate the stories of innocent Italians: partisans, proletariates, children, women.[145] The myth of the West is certainly a national amnesia apparatus in the US, but its popularity in Italy perhaps signals the increased state of national amnesia on the peninsula, as Italians focused their memories abroad, in a foreign myth, that reduced risk of contamination with their experience of nationhood since 1860.

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[144] "In Italia, il conflitto non può assumere una dimensione lucida, consapevole, critica, proprio perché abbiamo ormai disimparato, come società, a confrontarci in modo maturo con opinioni e interessi diversi dai nostri, proprio perché abbiamo rinunciato a voler fare i conti responsabilmente con la nostra storia." Pier Luigi Sacco and Christian Caliandro, *Italia reloaded: ripartire con la cultura* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2011), 36.

[145] Giuliana Minghelli, *Landscape and Memory in Post-Fascist Italian Film: Cinema Year Zero* (New York: Routledge, 2013).