Utopian Registers of the New Italian Epic
Wu Ming and the Socially-Symbolic Act

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Introduction

'Myths', says Robert Bui (also known as 'Wu Ming 1'), one of the four members of the Wu Ming collective, 'are stories that keep communities alive and together. We couldn't interact with each other without the bonds we create by swapping stories, and myths are stories with the strongest symbolic value, stories that hint at the mysteries of how we all came to be here, how we're managing to get along in some way, and what the future looks like'.[1] This brief statement, found in an interview with media scholar Henry Jenkins, introduces the main *ethos* behind Wu Ming's narrative enterprise. Established in January 2000, Wu Ming developed within a large community of European artists and activists known collectively as Luther Blissett, whose wide-spread hoaxes, media pranks, and protests against censorship gained online recognition as radical, unorthodox forms of artistic expression. What ensued for Luther Blissett was a campaign 'to raise hell in the cultural industry', by telling the world 'a great story' and giving rise to 'a new kind of folk hero'; the new 'folk hero' being the many Luther Blissett participants whose solidarity against systems of repression forged a unifying identity.[2] After the ending of Luther Blissett in 1999, Wu Ming, a small faction of (originally five) writers,[3] broke off and began involving themselves with composing mostly written narratives, while retaining the radical agenda that inspired their fellow European artists.[4] The term 'Wu Ming' is a tribute to Chinese dissidents who commonly employed the term in 'demanding democracy and freedom of speech'; and the name marks a refusal of the 'celebrity-making machine' that 'turns the author into a star', and translates to either 'anonymous' or 'nameless'.[5] Living up to their name-sake, Wu Ming construct their stories through collective collaboration, having no single authority or voice governing the creation of myth, thereby democratizing their agenda. Their

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[1] H. Jenkins, 'How Slapshot Inspired a Cultural Revolution (Part One): An Interview with the Wu Ming Foundation', *HenryJenkins.org*,
http://henryjenkins.org/2006/10/how_slapshot_inspired_a_cultur.html (4 August 2014).
[2] Wu Ming, 'Wu Ming Foundation: Who We Are and What we Do', *WuMingFoundation.com*,
http://www.wumingfoundation.com/english/biography.html#1 (4 August 2014).
[3] It is worth pointing out that Wu Ming is also a band of musicians, and that writing is not their *only* preoccupation. Yet, for purposes of this article, I will strictly focus on their writing. An analysis of their music and its role in forming their political ideals would be worthy of a later study.
[4] Wu Ming, 'Wu Ming Foundation: Who We Are and What we Do', cit.
[5] *Ibidem*. The online biography explains that although they are not anonymous themselves (their names are not kept secret), they 'use five *noms de plume*' composed by the name Wu Ming 'plus a numeral, following the alphabetical order of [their] surnames'. The effect of this, arguably, undermines the 'celebrity-making machine' referred to above, and avoids the assumed credibility often given to one authorial, authoritative voice.

project constitutes a form of 'grassroots myth-making';[6] and, as Marco Amici suggests, Wu Ming claim myth-making, or mythopoesis, as their central literary praxis. That is, they construct 'literature with the purpose of acting at the level of the social imagination, in the sphere of symbols and in the dimension of myth'.[7] Crises of the public imaginary mobilized Wu Ming's myth-making project, cultivating new stories of social life, and generating an urgency for social resistance.[8]

Wu Ming's myths associate them with a literary tradition emerging in contemporary Italian literature known as the New Italian Epic, toward which Wu Ming's narratives present valued contributions. According to a 'Memorandum' published online by Wu Ming 1 in 2008, and circulated in paper form in 2009, the New Italian Epic is predicated on the following idea:

Oggi arte e letteratura non possono limitarsi a suonare allarmi tardivi: devono aiutarci a immaginare vie d'uscita. Devono curare il nostro sguardo, rafforzare la nostra capacità di visualizzare. Non c'è avventura più impegnativa: lottare per estinguerci con dignità e il più tardi possibile, magari avendo passato il testimone a un'altra specie, che proseguirà la danza anche per conto nostro, chissà dove, chissà per quanto, e chissà se verremo ricordati.[9]

Wu Ming's narrative contributions to the New Italian Epic assist in fostering a shared perspective on collective struggle, a unifying myth that 'keeps communities alive'.[10]

Coupling the idea of a 'new kind of folk hero' with the desire to share myths of 'strong symbolic value' reflects the 'Epic' part of the New Italian Epic. The New Italian Epic enacts the epic device as a 'way to reread history critically by engendering new myths (mythopoesis)'.[11] According to Claudia Boscolo, 'the return to an epic narrative mode is tantamount to admitting that Italian society urgently needs to recover the capacity for self-representation, to provide an accurate reflection of itself, in the wake of its dark history and recent political scandals'.[12] Proclaiming the urgency for Italian society to 'recover the capacity for self-representation,' the Epic operates, therefore, in giving an 'accurate reflection' of society, which necessarily includes its 'dark history'. In this regard epic becomes a suitable narrative device for 'self-representation', allowing writers, poets, or performers to speak 'on behalf of the community'.[13]

Offering self-representation that 'keeps communities alive' by enabling the '*capacità di visualizzare*' a critical history culminates in what Fredric Jameson refers to as the 'socially-symbolic act'. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson suggests that 'all literature, no matter how weakly, must be informed by what we have called a political unconscious, that all literature must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community'.[14] That is, all levels of textual production – the formal arrangement, character relations, and language – create 'registers' of political

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[6] Jenkins, 'How Slapshot Inspired a Cultural Revolution', cit.
[7] M. Amici, 'Urgency and visions of the New Italian Epic', in: *Journal of Romance Studies* 10, 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 7-18.
[8] Amici, 'Urgency and visions of the New Italian Epic', cit., p. 9. Amici explains further: 'In this way, the writer who focuses on exploring the symbolic context and on creating narratives that work within the sphere of myth plays an important role: the act of narrating becomes a contribution to the will to change'.
[9] Wu Ming *New Italian Epic: letteratura, sguardo obliquo, ritorno al futuro,* Torino, Einaudi, 2009, p. 60.
[10] Jenkins, 'How Slapshot Inspired a Cultural Revolution (Part One)', cit.
[11] C. Boscolo, 'The idea of epic and New Italian Epic', in: *Journal of Romance Studies,* 10, 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 19-35.
[12] *Ivi,* p. 20.
[13] *Ibidem*.
[14] F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially-Symbolic Act,* London, Metheuin, 1981, p. 70.

consciousness, narrativizing a shared system of biases, values, and ideologemes.[15] Literary texts, therefore, on several levels symbolically reflect the social and political contradictions inherent in a particular society; antinomies, stemming from the systemic instabilities of late capitalism. In other words, the aesthetic of a text is – whether conscious or not – effectively ideological: 'the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal solutions to unresolvable social contradictions'.[16] That is, according to Jameson, the narrative aesthetic reflects the ideological dispositions of a given community, and has the capacity to resolve social, economic, and political contradictions at the symbolic level, manifesting in a 'socially-symbolic act'.[17]

We will keep this idea of 'imaginary' and formal solutions in mind as we proceed further in understanding Wu Ming's initiative. As we look further in the Jenkins interview Wu Ming 1 introduces another function 'myths' perform:

Myths have a very important function: they can incite abused people into fighting back, as stories of injustice and rebellion, repression and resistance, are handed down from one generation to the next [...] On the other hand, myths persuade suffering people to endure their situation and hope for a settling of scores, as in the myth of the Final Judgment, when the last shall be first, or the myth of revolution, when the poor shall take over and eat the rich.[18]

From this statement, we can deduce the social and political utility of the Wu Ming's project; for, as stated previous, myths 'speaks on behalf of the community',[19] and, in this case, empowers 'suffering people to endure their situation' by offering them myth-representation through shared narrative. Community, in this case, gestures toward an organic unity cultivated by a shared experience of oppression within a system of increased subjugation and power consolidation. The community's bonds are secured by identifying with recognized, common struggles of existence. In order to effectively produce a reflection of this community, the narrative has to be committed to the shared ideology and, with it, the ideologemes existing within society. Let us consider Louis Althusser, a French Marxist from 1970s, who designates 'ideology' as a representation of the 'imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'.[20] This definition of ideology elucidates its function in the 'socially-symbolic act'. For, indeed, if Wu Ming seeks to 'speak on behalf' of the 'suffering people', by providing them with an 'accurate representation', then this representation ought to be informed by ideology, in the Althusserian sense – that is, it is necessary to portray the 'imaginary relationships' of the Italian community to their 'real conditions of existence'.

Using myths, therefore, to reflect the social conditions of Italian society, and enabling a symbolic solution to oppression, Wu Ming's narratives and those comprising the New Italian Epic embody socially-symbolic acts. Commitment to shared experience furnishes literature with an inherent ideological and political unconscious resting

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[15] According to Jameson, *ideologemes* are small 'intelligible unit[s] of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes' (*The Political Unconscious*, cit., p.76). Or, as Paul Fry elucidates, they are 'ways of thinking about the world as expressed by disparate and conflicting classes' (P. Fry, 'Lecture 18-The Political Unconscious', in: *Introduction to Theory of Literature: Yale Open Courses*, http://oyc.yale.edu/english/engl-300/lecture-18, 26 June 2014).
[16] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, cit., p. 79.
[17] *Ivi*, p. 81.
[18] Jenkins, 'How Slapshot Inspired a Cultural Revolution', cit.
[19] Boscolo, 'The idea of epic and New Italian Epic', cit., p. 20.
[20] L. Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1970), *Marxists.Org*, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm (4 August 2014).

beneath the narrative surface. That is, even if texts do not *explicitly* articulate the positions or shared viewpoints of a community, the ways in which character relations are arranged, language is utilized, and problems persist register a socially-recognizable political unconscious. The Italian community inscribed into the New Italian Epic is the 'multitude of characters and events that are crushed by the homologizing narratives of history and capitalism'.[21] In other words, they give a voice to the voiceless; they speak on the behalf of the disenfranchised Italian people whose voices are lost by dominant global history and silenced by the disparate discourses of conflicting class relations. And, in Wu Ming's case, they make use of their collective unity and open access, online collaboration to secure and represent a social consciousness.

This article will, therefore, rely upon Fredric Jameson's Marxist perspective, which emphasizes the structural dynamics and historical context that underlie social relations; considering, furthermore, the material conditions and class tensions that manifest in the ideological content of a text. We thereby situate the aesthetic and interpretive perspective within an ideological structure and apply Jameson's Marxist interpretive methodology to one Wu Ming story titled '*I trecento boscaioli dell'imperatore*' ('The Emperor's Three Hundred Woodcutters'). This short story contributes an eco-critical narrative to the New Italian Epic, and presents a test case for the political unconscious inherent in the Wu Ming initiative, both in its formal, 'generic confinement',[22] and in the story's reflection on social contradictions. It reflects upon the revolutionary 'destiny' of one community by imagining symbolic solutions to otherwise unresolvable tensions. The ideology that informs the text embodies the overarching viewpoint upheld by Wu Ming: that preserving 'myths' of 'suffering people' and helping them 'imagine ways out' are essential for inciting a revolution and affirming Italian identity. And, what we discern, through this analysis, is that the project of myth-making, and the medium through which it is executed, constitutes a 'socially-symbolic act'.

'Boscaioli': A New Italian Fable

Recall, for Jameson, that 'the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right'.[23] That is, the generic, narrative devices utilized in the aesthetic perform ideological acts, offering the tools to register the social ideologemes. Remember furthermore that Wu Ming self-identify with the project of myth-making, reinforcing Italy's epic narrative as a way to 'reread history critically by engendering new myths'.[24] The writers of the collective are interested in interrogating the 'homologizing narratives of history',[25] by critically assessing dominant versions of history from an alternative, and previously-ignored standpoint.

Written in 2004, the short story '*I trecento boscaioli dell'imperatore*' was written on behalf of the 'Greenpeace forest campaign: writers for the forests' – an initiative to usher in writing from authors who are sensitive to issues of deforestation and devastation of natural resources.[26] With concerns for environmental destruction, Wu Ming construct a myth in order to resolve the ecological complacency within the social imaginary. As a myth, it offers a symbolic register for animals and forests affected by endless consumption. For this story, therefore, Wu Ming rely on a unique

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[21] M. Jansen, 'Laboratory NIE: Mutations in Process' in: *Journal of Romance Studies,* 10, 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 97-109.

[22] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, cit., p. 104.

[23] *Ivi*, p. 79.

[24] Boscolo, 'The idea of epic and New Italian Epic', cit., p. 20.

[25] Jansen, 'Laboratory NIE', cit., p. 101.

[26] Greenpeace: Scrittori per le foreste, *Greenpace*, http://www.greenpeace.it/scrittori/progetto.htm (3 October 2014).

set of narrative tools to convey a socially-symbolic act. The story's alternate title is *'la favola che pone fine a tutte le favole'*,[27] announcing explicitly that the fable genre supplies the necessary genre (and imaginary) ingredients for this story. Readers commonly associate fables with moralizing fictional tales; in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the fable is most prominently used to refer to a 'short story devised to convey some useful lesson',[28] Typical to religious texts, the fable (much like the epic) is used less frequently in contemporary literature. Yet, Wu Ming utilize this otherwise antiquated fable genre as an effective narrative strategy to dramatize and resolve the contradictions that emerge in contemporary social life. This tactic coincides with Jameson's notion of 'generic confinement',[29] suggesting that a specific generic form creates the narrative enclosure within which a socially-symbolic act can be achieved. As we will see below, the theme of talking animals and trees – common throughout the fable tradition – is a necessary formal feature for carrying out the socially-symbolic act and resolving unresolvable contradictions.

The story introduces a group of woodcutters whom the Emperor calls upon to work '*il doppio, il triplo, forse il quadruplo'*, to continue to cut down trees and wood, not for '*il premio'*, but to the '*maggior gloria del tuo Signore'*.[30] They persevere through the arduous wood-cutting task, traveling to the North, South, and East, learning that the Emperor wants the wood in order to '*raccogliere tutte le storie, i racconti, le leggende e le fiabe', and write them 'dentro un libro, anzi, molti libri, tanti che se li metti uno sull'altro fai una torre più alta della Campanara'*.[31] Through their laborious journey, the woodcutters enter into different forests where, as they learn, the trees stand to preserve a mythologized piece of their history. As a result, cutting the trees from these forests would effectively eliminate the origins that make up their history. As they encounter Yggdrasill, the '*corsiero di Odino'*, at the story's conclusion, they are chastised for their futile efforts:

Dice Yggdrasill: l'Imperatore ha messo da parte tanta carta come non se n'è mai vista, una montagna, che a mettere i fogli uno sopra l'altro si può raggiungere la luna, eppure tutti quei fogli non gli serviranno, ora che i boschi sono stati abbattuti. Nemmeno i menestrelli, i letterati e i cantastorie possono farci nulla, perché di storie da ricopiare nella calligrafia degli amanuensi, leggende di dei ed eroi, favole antiche e recenti, di tutto questo non è rimasto nulla, né ricordo, né memoria, né origine.[32]

This brief speech by Yggdrasill provides the lesson we are meant to extract from the fable: that the storytellers lose the ability to '*farci nulla'*, and paper from the forests would do the emperor no good. After all, without the stories, and without the myths, '*rimasto nulla, né ricordo, né memoria, né origine'*.[33]

Typical to the tradition of a fable, the lesson is handed down from something imaginary – in most cases (including this one), the source is a talking animal. The solution and, indeed, resolution arriving at this fable's conclusion is realized in the capacity to thwart the woodcutters' futile efforts, and offer a lesson about what consequences may arise. Yet this capacity is afforded merely through a talking animal; the problems that are described in the story can only be resolved symbolically through

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[27] Wu Ming, 'I trecento boscaioli dell'imperatore', Spring, 2004, a short story written for the Greenpeace Book Campaign. It can be downloaded from Wu Ming's official website, http://www.wumingfoundation.com/italiano/downloads.shtml (3 October 2014).

[28] 'Fable, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2014.

[29] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, cit., p. 104.

[30] Wu Ming, 'I trecento boscaioli dell'imperatore', cit., p.1.

[31] *Ibidem*.

[32] *Ivi*, p. 3.

[33] *Ibidem*.

the 'steed of Odin'. Jameson argues that a narrative's function is to invent 'imaginary or formal solutions to unresolvable social contradictions',[34] carrying out these solutions within the socially-symbolic act. This 'fable to end all fables' similarly conjures imaginary solutions by way of talking animals, trees, and forests. Thus, the contradictions are not *in* fact resolvable; rather, they can only be solved 'symbolically', in the confines of a fable fantasy. The aesthetic of the fable production is inherently ideological. The social and political contradictions in this story are otherwise built into the political unconscious of contemporary society, and underscore the eco-social concerns of the New Italian Epic.[35]

So, what are the contradictions expressed in this story? In this case, we can see that the woodcutters are tireless laborers, producing infinite stories for the glory of the Emperor, requiring papers to be stacked so high that they could reach beyond the bell tower and height of the moon. Yet, regardless of the ambition to preserve fables and legends, the process by which this preservation is done ultimately ends in destruction. Thus, we arrive at an inherent contradiction: preservation of stories, if continued by cutting down trees, ends in the destruction of the same stories that they aim to protect. In other words, if the forests are the sources of legend, and also supply the finite materials used to inscribe the stories into books, then the system of fable production is thoroughly unsustainable, since there will be no more stories to preserve. The contradiction dramatized in this story is not limited to the production of fables; this contradiction exists throughout much of our experience of late capitalism. Money supplied by the generation of debt, infinite consumption on a planet of finite resources, the persistence of economic and social inequality – all existing contradictions embedded in the real conditions of advanced capitalism and the pervasive ideology of contemporary social life.

Furthermore, we not only have an expression of ideology, but we have the attending ideologemes that exist in the class relations within and beyond the text. In this case, we observe the dominant discourse perspective, which is the Emperor's blind eagerness to preserve fables for his own self-interest, regardless of its consequences. In the same narrative, we have the experiences felt from the tireless laborers and the natural forests – a critical, opposing perspective against the Emperor's marked ambitions. Thus, these small 'intelligible unit[s] of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes',[36] or 'ways of thinking about the world as expressed by disparate and conflicting classes'[37] are couched in the dialectic contrast between the Emperor-capitalists of the world, and the Woodcutter-laborers who oppose them. The woodcutters and the talking animals embody the social substratum impacted from 'unresolvable social contradictions' existing in a society of late capitalism, where nature, memory, and the oppressed 'multitude' are 'crushed by the homologizing narrative of history and capitalism'.[38] The talking animals and fable lessons afford the imaginary solutions to these contradictions, and narrative is used to advance the revolutionary imperative.

For Wu Ming, the paradox expressed in this story has a direct impact on their

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[34] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious, cit.*, p. 79.
[35] M. Amici, 'Urgency and Visions of the New Italian Epic', cit., p. 9. Amici, referring to the 'Memorandum', expands this point: 'Wu Ming 1, in a conjectural jump from one of the features of the New Italian Epic to the future of the planet earth, tackles topics such as the extinction of the human race and the ecology of mind, expressing the urgent need to produce an ecocentric thought, which will allow us to learn another way of life and to decelerate the process which, sooner or later, will lead us to extinction. An ecocentric philosophy, from this point of view, could be a step beyond populist catastrophism and help us to realize that we, the West, are pushing our species ever faster towards extinction'.
[36] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, cit., p. 76.
[37] Fry, 'Lecture 18-The Political Unconscious', cit.
[38] Jansen, 'Laboratory NIE', cit., pp. 101-102.

initiative. We will remember that Wu Ming 1, in the Jenkins interview, expresses the function of 'myths' to 'keep communities alive and together', offering 'stories that hint at the mysteries of how we all came to be here, how we're managing to get along in some way, and what the future looks like'.[39] For the Wu Ming, origin stories, myths, and memories are the foundation of their agenda – and the preservation of such delineates interlacing tradition of the New Italian Epic. In a sense, we can suggest that their whole undertaking involves the creation of new Italian fables, legends, and stories. The woodcutters fable can be read, as Jameson suggests, as 'a symbolic meditation on the destiny of a community'[40] – in this case, the Italian community sharing a *common* experience of political exploitation and instability.

Wu Ming self-identify as authors of an Italian myth, organically illustrating the 'perspective of the defeated, the subaltern',[41] formally presenting itself in this story, and throughout the New Italian Epic; thus, the contradictions that could exist for their project − contradictions that could result in '*né ricordo, né memoria, né origine*' [42] − are the inherently unresolvable social disparities that this story solves 'symbolically'. In other words, the best way to circumvent these contradictions is in the fantastical 'generic confinement'[43] of a fable, where imaginary solutions are provided by imaginary talking animals and trees. The fable manifests, therefore, as the ideological genre *par excellence*. Naturally for Wu Ming, speaking for the voiceless necessarily includes natural forests who are literally unable to speak. So, the fable's talking trees and animals speak for them, fortuitously granting imaginary solutions. Ultimately, Wu Ming's initiative heralds a 'Utopian compensation' for, on the one hand, 'increasing dehumanization on the level of daily life',[44] and, at the same time, for the destruction of nature. How this 'Utopian compensation' presents itself in other regards for Wu Ming, beyond problems of deforestation, will be broached in the remainder of this essay.

Conclusion: Collective Resistance and a Narrative Utopia
The story examined above, though brief, reinforces the initiative of Wu Ming, and the general unifying ideology behind the New Italian Epic. Recalling the Memorandum, the New Italian Epic cannot 'suonare allarmi tardivi', and exists to help sufferers '*immaginare vie d'uscita*'. This story of the woodcutters presents Wu Ming's resistance to instability and refusal to accept the predatory self-interest of Emperors. Wu Ming refuse to allow their community's myths to dissolve, to perish in the manner that they would for the woodcutters. They express their opposition in the story; but, indeed, beyond the narrative, Wu Ming likewise performs their opposition in and through the enterprise of 'grassroots mythmaking'.[45] If they did not have the stories as a means to represent and reflect shared experience, then they would lose the capacity to keep their community alive. Thus, Wu Ming had to ensure that these epic stories could be passed along, enabling a shared unity with an online participation network of writers and readers. There is no 'emperor' who wields control over the Wu Ming, and there is no destruction in building the New Italian Epic; there is only the revolutionary empowerment and emancipatory unity presented in shared identity.

For Wu Ming, their 'imaginative activism' was preceded by several decades of

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[39] Jenkins, 'How Slapshot Inspired a Cultural Revolution', cit.
[40] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, cit., p. 70.
[41] A. Dawson. '"We Get More Ambitious": An Interview with Wu Ming', in: *Social Text Journal*, (30 November 2009), http://socialtextjournal.org/wu_ming_interview (4 August 2014).
[42] Wu Ming, 'I trecento boscaioli dell'imperatore', cit., p. 3
[43] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, cit., p. 104.
[44] *Ivi,* p. 42.
[45] Jenkins, 'How Slapshot Inspired a Cultural Revolution', cit.

cultural resistance in Italian political history. One can find this foundation in the 'avant-garde of televised culture' that produced 'avant-garde resistance', as well as the 'violent but creative revolts of the 1970s' stemming from Italy's 'anomalous condition during the Cold War, and [...] experience of political crisis and social anti-State movements'.[46] Wu Ming recognize traumas inflicted upon Italian society, where political instability, corruption, and the attending resistance manifest throughout several generations, and continue to haunt contemporary experience. Wu Ming, therefore, carry on this tradition – or, myth – of resistance created in previous moments of struggle and upheaval. The New Italian Epic preserves the imaginary relationship and collective consciousness of the Italian society felt throughout the society's several generations – the experience of recent historical traumas and persisting struggles. Being an collective society with online, open access to their myths, the cultural position of Wu Ming reinforces a collective unity among the Italian society, disseminating myths on a massive, widely-accessible scale: 'The accent is put on cultural activism, on building participatory communities through transmedial storytelling'.[47] The stories of Wu Ming and their association with the New Italian Epic reach a high state of relevance on a global scale, as the web-based myths reach a wider audience, no longer neglected from global discourse. Instead, the voices of Italian society can be heard by a new generation of readers, and engaged with in a global conversation.

Returning to Fredric Jameson, beyond Wu Ming creating the socially-symbolic act with 'imaginative activism', their myth-stories and those of the New Italian Epic offer a 'whole Utopian compensation for increasing dehumanization on the level of daily life'.[48] Jameson elucidates this point further in the conclusion to *The Political Unconscious*:

[A]ll class consciousness of whatever type is Utopian insofar as it expresses a unity of a collectivity [...] The achieved collectivity or organic group of whatever kind – oppressors fully as much as oppressed – is Utopian not in itself, but only insofar as all such collectivities are themselves figures for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian plan or classless society.[49]

For Jameson, an aesthetic that is 'effectively ideological is, at the same time, necessarily Utopian'.[50] The participation online community generated by Wu Ming rests upon a desire to preserve the collective Italian consciousness, keeping the community alive while representing the shared conditions of the individuals whose social condition is consumed by political corruption and economic instability. Their engagement in myth-making as a form of creative revolt symbolically resolves the contradictions in society, through narrative imagination and fictional representation. This does not, therefore, suggest that these narratives achieve or create Utopia for this society. Even if the solutions to late capitalist antagonisms and postmodern despair are conceivable in a classless society, these do not constitute the main aim of Wu Ming. Rather, the collective, web-based aesthetic of Wu Ming is itself Utopian insofar it 'expresses a unity of a collectivity'. They do, nonetheless, ensure the Utopian compensation by enlivening the 'destiny' of the community for a wider cultural audience. Through the

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[46] M. Jansen. 'Italian Literature: Epics of Reality', in: T. Vaessens & Y. van Dijk (eds.), *Reconsidering the Postmodern: European Literature Beyond Relativism*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2011, p. 83.
[47] Jansen, 'Italian Literature: Epics of Reality', cit., p. 86.
[48] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, cit., p. 42.
[49] *Ivi*, p. 291.
[50] *Ivi*, p. 286.

participation-based, online engagement with and beyond the Italian community, developed through shared narratives and socially-symbolic acts, they achieve the Utopian compensation for the contradictions of late capitalism, and assist in fostering the revolution that their myths work to incite.

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RIASSUNTO
Registri utopistici della *New Italian Epic*
Wu Ming e l'atto socialmente simbolico

Wu Ming, un collettivo di scrittori fondato nel 2000, cerca di promuovere l'impegno collettivo e la rivoluzione sociale attraverso una 'mitopoiesi di base'. Costruendo miti che riflettono i problemi e le contraddizioni dell'attuale società italiana, Wu Ming crea una coscienza unificatrice attraverso un'esperienza e un'identità condivise. Creando nuovi eroi popolari, interrogando la storia e resistendo alle visioni dominanti del sistema sociale, Wu Ming si impegna dunque in una mitopoiesi della resistenza politica. L'opera di scrittura politica e di mitopoiesi del gruppo produce quella che Jameson definisce un 'atto socialmente simbolico'. In *The Political Unconscious* Jameson suggerisce che tutta la letteratura debba essere letta come 'una meditazione simbolica sul destino di una comunità', e che la forma narrativa e simbolica inventa 'soluzioni' immaginarie a contraddizioni sociali. Basandosi sulla prospettiva marxista di Jameson, il presente contributo analizza un racconto di Wu Ming, 'I trecento boscaioli dell'imperatore'. Attraverso questa storia, e con una più ampia analisi dell'operato di Wu Ming, si sostiene che questa culmini in un atto socialmente simbolico. Le storie create da Wu Ming riflettono sul destino dell'oppressa comunità italiana che il collettivo di scrittori rappresenta, rendendo possibile una 'compensazione utopica' all'interno dei confini narrativi.