

# MRU's "Prospect On" Articles Series

## California Decoded

*marco.ruocco@mruproject.com*

*http://www.mruproject.com*

Marco Ruocco

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### 1 Preamble

In the year 1998, *"I saw a shimmering light, my head grew heavy and my sight grew dim: I had to stop for the night"* - in sunny California. I saw the same shimmering light again in the year 2000, being attracted there for a second stay (*"and I don't mean on vacation"*). I spent a total of four years in (the Hotel) California, later finding that the perceptions I had collected on site had a lot more to do with a couple of classic songs, so well known and unexplored at the same time, than what appeared in the dimension of shared belief in which most of my waking experience lied. Rare are the songs which are capable of scanning deep and through the truly unexplored realm of experience - in fashion of giant radio-telescopes pointed to the sky and not earthbound. Sometimes they get it right and report useful interpretations of what lies "beyond the ridge", although sometimes, I suspect, they achieve this by pure chance, or driven by a more earthly desire of *grandeur*. Nonetheless, their signal is clear, and when it clicks, it clicks.

### 2 Hotel California

The song starts off with a metaphor, reminiscent of Dante's Inferno as far as its location in the introductory verses is concerned. The tired traveller seeks for shelter in a Hotel attracted by bright lights, while driving through a not better defined Southern California landscape (I still do not know what flowers the colitas exactly are, but they must be sweetly perfumed and typical of the area). It seems just a necessary rest stop during a trip, but it will be revealed soon that is instead going to be a *permanent* stop.

After the Hotel has been successfully reached, the wel-

coming "She" (Lady California?), holding up to him the candle (a clear referral to the homonymous idiomatic expression), leads inside the building, while the Mission bell is echoing in the vicinity. She is rich, happy, with expensive cars and many boys *"which she calls friends"*. In fact it is not an anonymous desert motel like many others, but something beyond good and evil, and precisely recognized in an early, critical perception as either Heaven or Hell - a special place, in other words, off the standards, or off the norm.

The refrain of the song describes many distant, but perhaps near, voices, bound together as in a sirens' choir, assuring that there is plenty of room in the Hotel, any time of the year. It is the place in which travellers and strangers are always welcome (perhaps the Hotel has many guests from abroad, and probably from the Mexican border too), and are invited for the feast which is going on indefinitely. As becomes clear later, the cost to pay in return is very high: to remain bound there forever, in body and maybe in soul too.

The spirits inhabiting the place hold not in stock the spirit (the liquor, for a loaded double-sense) asked by the traveller - that spirit is rare and therefore misrepresented. The choir goes on in a *crescendo* of allusion, suggesting to bring in the Hotel your *alibis*: the friendly looking Hotel allows you to be there and not suffering from being anywhere else, for a perfect and happy peace of mind, chiefly self-satisfied.

They finally say it clearly: in the splendor of a Californian party setting (just the happy all-colors vodka jellies seem missing...), they admit to be prisoners of their own machination - while the feast is going on wildly since an undetermined starting time, the spirits therein conspire to make the Hotel the only place

in the world to care for, but although they try, *they just can't kill the beast*.

The beast is not anything transcendental or complex: it is simply the remains of the world outside the Hotel being progressively tamed, crooked and distorted, and substituted by an alternative ultimate party which for some reason does not conquer the entire scene, but leaves behind restlessness and dissatisfaction, of which they invariably moan.

The terrified traveller tries to escape - *I had to find the passage back to the place I was before* - which is not simply exiting from the nearest door, but it requires to undo the entire process of entering (although unintentionally) that very strange dimension.

Compare this song's ending passage with the conclusion of Dante's Inferno, in which Dante had to go through a narrow tunnel (the "*natural burella*"), opening just very close to the place where Lucifer was rooted upside-down in its damnation, at the bottom of the Inferno - allowing Dante and Virgilio to finally go back to the surface "*a riveder le stelle*" (that is, to see the stars again).

### 3 Californication

This time, it is not a solitary Hotel to having been unintentionally entered - it is rather the strange dimension of California, the same depicted in the previous song but here called with the poignant name of "Californication", to be seen as overwhelming and unstoppable in its greed. The authors of this song are the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

"Californication" is made of a series of deep and doom-evoking concept images - the one I prefer is the image of the Sun, once independent in its heavenly trajectory, that has now really just a single spot left in which to set, and it is the West. A second interesting image depicts a girl with an electric guitar, which does not pay attention to the ongoing earthquake which shatters the Earth, because the only perceivable end result of it is a good vibration (or vibe), for her to enjoy.

Those images, all of which I shall not list here, show a clear perspective on California in which Nature is tamed and turned to a subordinate role, or passively and inexorably induced to disappear altogether, with in addition an ongoing runaway process by which the worst has not been seen yet. And Nature is not Bambi or the Forest, but the upturning of the general verse

and direction of upward movement or buoyancy, or, rather, its annihilation, in favor of something else, or alternative, which craves to take its place, as an unlawful usurper.

As it was the case for The Eagles, the Red Hot Chili Peppers see California as a land which attracts and bounds, where everybody has been, and not just on vacation, as a globally shared and apparently immortal experience - and this is not seen positively, but probably as a form of a subtle common agreement, or properly a plot, untouchable by senses or reason, but present in a dimension which is not very remote either. It is there, coexisting with your everyday life, on another level, or, better, "*on the other side*" of things (to cite a verse of another famous song of the Red Hot in the same Californication album, that gives to it the title).

## 4 Epilogue

The only viable response to this dramatic state of things comes from a locally very famous pop band of the Santa Barbara, California, area. Toad the Wet Sprocket (aka the "Toads") simply say "Throw it all away" acting from the viewpoint of a more earthly dimension from which people (like me) sensed and were worried by all of this. The backyard of a students' house, probably a setting of many mesmerizing parties, is turned in a temporary receptacle of all bad things accumulated in a few years' mistakes, of which the soul was loaded. A big and warm bonfire, away from Californication and back to square one, to start again. If you still can.

## 5 Appendix - Cited songs lyrics

### 5.1 Hotel California - The Eagles

On a dark desert highway  
Cool wind in my hair  
The warm smell of colitas  
Rising up through the air  
Up ahead in a distance I saw a shimmering light  
My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim  
I had to stop for the night

There she stood in the doorway  
I heard the mission bell  
And I was thinking to myself  
This could be heaven or this could be hell  
Then she lit up a candle  
And she showed me the way  
There were voices down the corridor  
I thought I heard them say

Welcome to the Hotel California

Such a lovely place, such a lovely face  
There's plenty of room in the Hotel California  
Any time of year, you can find it here

Her mind is tiffany twisted  
She's got a Mercedes Benz  
She's got a lotta pretty, pretty boys  
She calls friends  
How they dance in the courtyard  
Sweet summer sweat  
Some dance to remember  
Some dance to forget

So I called up the captain  
Please bring me my wine  
He said "We haven't had that spirit here since 1969"  
And still those voices are calling from far away  
Wake you up in the middle of the night  
Just to hear them say

Welcome to the Hotel California  
Such a lovely place, such a lovely face  
They're livin' it up at the Hotel California  
What a nice surprise, bring your alibis

Mirrors on the ceiling, the pink champagne on ice  
And she said "We are all just prisoners here of our own device"  
In the masters chambers they're gathered for the feast  
They stab it with their steely knives but they just can't kill the beast

Last thing I remember, I was runnin' for the door  
I had to find the passage back to the place I was before  
"Relax" said the night man "We are programmed to receive  
You can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave"

## 5.2 Californication - Red Hot Chili Peppers

Psychic spies from China  
Try to steal your mind's elation  
Little girls from Sweden  
Dream of silver screen quotations  
And if you want these kind of dreams  
It's Californication

It's the edge of the world  
And all of western civilization  
The sun may rise in the East  
At least it settles in the final location  
It's understood that Hollywood sells Californication

Pay your surgeon very well  
To break the spell of aging  
Celebrity skin is this your chin  
Or is that war your waging

[Chorus:]  
First born unicorn  
Hard core soft porn  
Dream of Californication  
Dream of Californication

Marry me girl be my fairy to the world  
Be my very own constellation  
A teenage bride with a baby inside  
Getting high on information  
And buy me a star on the boulevard

It's Californication

Space may be the final frontier  
But it's made in a Hollywood basement  
Cobain can you hear the spheres  
Singing songs off station to station  
And Alderon's not far away  
It's Californication

Born and raised by those who praise  
Control of population everybody's been there  
and I don't mean on vacation

Destruction leads to a very rough road  
But it also breeds creation  
And earthquakes are to a girl's guitar  
They're just another good vibration  
And tidal waves couldn't save the world  
From Californication

Pay your surgeon very well  
To break the spell of aging  
Sicker than the rest  
There is no test  
But this is what you're craving

## 5.3 Throw it all away - Toad the Wet Sprocket

Take your cautionary tales  
Take your incremental gain  
And all the sychophantic games  
And throw 'em all away

Burn your tv in your yard  
And gather 'round it with your friends  
And warm your hands upon the fire  
And start again

Take the story you've been told  
The lies that justify the pain  
The guilt the weighs upon your soul  
And throw 'em all away

Tear up the calendar you've bought  
And throw the pieces to the sky  
Confetti falling down like rain  
Like a parade to usher in your life

Take the dreams that should have died  
The ones that kept you lying awake  
When you should've been all right  
And throw 'em all away

With the time I waste on the life I never had  
I could've turned myself into a better man  
'cause there ain't nothing you can buy  
And there is nothing you can save  
To fill the whole inside your heart  
So throw it all away  
Won't fill the whole inside your heart

Help me empty out this house  
The wool I've gathered all these days  
And thought I couldn't do without  
And throw it all away