UTOPIAS IN CONFLICT
History, Political Discourse and Advertising
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Abstract

The concepts of 'utopia' and 'ideology' were key elements in political debate in the 20th century but they seem to have virtually disappeared from the scene since then. After the collapse of communism, the media and intellectuals announced the demise of utopia, coinciding with the end of history and ideology. The use of the terms largely remains pejorative in common parlance or conceptually ambiguous in the scholarship. Despite their inherent ambiguity, this paper reflects on the role played by utopias, hope and political imagination in the mobilization of people. The use of utopian rhetoric by social movements and advertising demonstrates that utopia still enjoys a robust life. Three recent examples of commercials are analyzed in order to understand how utopias may be used in many ways and how their reception depends on their accommodation within broader cultural and political narratives.

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The End of Utopia?

The concepts of 'utopia' and 'ideology' were key elements in political debate in the 20th century, but they seem to have lost their centrality in political discourse in recent decades. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, many intellectuals and the media announced the demise of utopia. The so-called 'end of utopia' coincided with the collapse of communist regimes and ideologies (Eagleton, 1991; Jacoby, 1999). Fukuyama (1992) went even further by declaring 'the end of history'. Inspired by Kojève's reading of Hegel, he conceived of history as a dialectical struggle between two antagonistic ideologies. With the breakdown of the USSR, liberalism no longer had a counterpart. Liberalism, for Fukuyama, was not merely the accidental winner of the ideological battle; he was also convinced that the combination of the liberal democratic system and market capitalism represented the definitive culmination of the ideological progress of humanity. With this political and economic structure now achieved, we are living in the dreamed-of utopia. At this stage, we do not need utopian visions or ideological debates to motivate collective actions towards change. This means that the historical dynamic has reached a final stage and no relevant political change can be expected after 1990. The only thing that remains to do is to administer resources and solve minor conflicts. Of course, history contradicted any prediction of its unfolding and the unforeseeable did happen: we saw the emergence of the Internet, new forms of terrorism, natural disasters, economic and demographic crisis, and so on. These are only a few examples of historical events that have inevitably changed our self-understanding. Thus, historical and social change warns us to be cautious and to constantly readjust our projects, expectations, hopes, desires, and forecasts.

But if history has not come to an end, what has happened to ideologies and utopias? Are they still playing a role in politics or have they now virtually disappeared from the scene? The words 'utopia' and 'ideology' are still in use in common parlance, but their sense is frequently pejorative. After the political catastrophes of the 20th century, we tend to identify 'ideology' with political bigotry when this is made explicit, or with undercover machinations behind apparently neutral political programs. There is a common assumption that 'what persuades men and women to mistake each other from time to time for gods or vermin is ideology'. (Eagleton, 1991, p. xiii). We also label daydreamers as 'utopian', as well as any political projects that are humanly unfeasible to complete. We avoid ideologies as we avoid radicalism. The same has happened with utopias. As Jacoby puts it, someone 'who believes in utopias is widely considered out to lunch or out to kill' (Jacoby, 1999, p. xi). It is ideology's flirting with power and utopia's flirting with disaster that prevent us from relying on them as relevant sources of political motivation.

The conceptual history of the terms shows that their ambiguity was already present from the beginning. The classical definition of the terms is attributed to the sociologist Karl Mannheim. He defined 'utopia' as a state of mind which is 'incongruous with the state of affairs within which it occurs' (Mannheim, 1996, p. 177). Further characteristics in Mannheim's definition are that: (i) utopia is oriented towards an object which does not exist in the actual situation; (ii) it transcends the immediate situation, and (iii) it may shatter (partially or wholly) the order of things. Ideology is assumed to have similar traits: it is a negation of the current state of affairs and has the potential to distort reality in favor of the interests of a hegemonic group. However, utopia has a distinctive goal: it tends to 'burst the bonds of the existing order' (Mannheim, 1966, p. 173). We could sum up Mannheim's distinction between utopia and ideology as follows: whereas ideologies seek to reinforce the power of dominant groups in society, utopias generally have been a means

to fulfill the interests of the oppressed. Mannheim reckons that this distinction can sometimes be very subtle. Mannheim's approach to ideologies and utopias was part of a larger project: the study of political ideas should lead to a sociology of knowledge that approaches political values and beliefs in the context of tensions among distinct political groups. Utopias and ideologies do exist, but they exist in conflict: their frictions reflect the current interplay of forces within a given society. Bearing this in mind, Mannheim distinguishes between evaluative and non-evaluative uses of the term. This is to say that no political rationale is free of values, beliefs, hopes or desires. Eagleton (1991), who has worked on the meaning of 'ideology', also states that there are many senses of the term. Some are evaluative, but some are cognitive and just take into account that ideologies, as social productions of ideas, can be held by different groups (hegemonic or not). When we make use of the term 'ideology', we often want to discredit our opponents. Our reluctance to admit that our point of view might be ideological is well explained by Eagleton's metaphor: 'Ideology, like halitosis, is in this sense what the other person has' (Eagleton, 1991, p. 2).

In this paper, I would like to focus more on utopia and political imagination. My reason for this is the near coincidence in time of several advertising campaigns using utopian language and of an upsurge of social movements in which the utopian element was present. This happened in an era that had been labeled the 'end of utopia' (Jacoby, 1999). Since Mannheim's definition and typology of utopias, the concept has died several times. Mannheim himself prophesied that the advancement of industrialized society and the rationalization of political processes would lead to the 'elimination of reality-transcending elements of our world' and this would mean 'the decay of the human will' (Mannheim, 1966, p. 222). In 1967, Herbert Marcuse published an essay entitled 'The End of Utopia'. The end of utopia, according to Marcuse, signaled 'the refutation of those ideas and theories that use the concept of utopia to denounce certain socio-historical possibilities' (Marcuse, 1970, p. 62).[1] For Marcuse, utopia, as an exercise of political imagination, is necessary to develop alternative projects of social experience. Nevertheless, he was quite pessimistic about the real chances of any alternative project to the ideology of capitalism in advanced industrial societies. In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), he had already stated the slim likelihood of success for what he called 'The Big Refusal'. In Marcuse's view, within the technological society of advanced capitalism 'a pattern of *one-dimensional thought and behavior* prevents any form of protest' (Marcuse, 1964, p. 12). The comfortable life in affluent society produces its own form of ideology, which inhibits any sign of reaction, since 'ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content transcend the established universe of discourse and action, are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe' (Marcuse, 1964, p. 12). Marcuse paid special attention to works of art. Even artists considered marginal or subversive in their time have been integrated as merchandise in the free market. In this integration, they lose their truth, their potential rejection of the social reality (Marcuse, 1964, p. 58). Who cares now about Van Gogh's painful delirium, his suffering at the margins of the good society, the radical novelty of his expressive style? Today we can have a poster of 'Starry Night' hanging over our bed, if the painting goes with the rest of our furnishings. If not, we can hang a reproduction of Klimt's 'The Kiss' or a colorful Gauguin. More recently, Bauman has expressed a similar idea by pointing to the extraordinary capacity of consumer society to absorb any form of dissent and 'then to recycle it, as a major resource of its own production, reinvigoration and expansion' (Bauman, 2007, p. 48). Consumer society, for Bauman, represents the end of the political, as it did for Marcuse. Consumerism and commodification numb political consciousness by appealing to sensuality and comfort.

To put it bluntly: consumerism and politics, in Marcuse's and Bauman's scheme, seem to be mutually exclusive of one another.

Jacoby writes in 1999 about an 'era of acquiescence' in which we are 'asked to choose between the status quo or something worse. Other alternatives do not seem to exist' (Jacoby, 1999, p. xi). Since the fall of communism, a new consensus has emerged, that political ideas should be restricted to pragmatic solutions to discrete problems. As Jacoby puts it: 'the twentieth century is not an unbroken story of a declining utopian vision. In the wake of the Russian Revolution, in the 1920s around the surrealists and again in the 1960s utopian ideas flared up – and burned out. [...] Although scholarly studies of utopianism persist, across the land a utopian spirit is dead or dismissed' (Jacoby, 1999, p. 158-159).

If capitalism has such power to gobble up any attempt at resistance, why reclaim the old-fashioned utopian discourse? It seems obvious to me that, as Marcuse posed it, capitalism is ideological but also has its own utopia. I agree with Ruth Levitas's statement that utopias cannot be reduced to literary fiction or political blueprints and that 'utopianism in the sense of visualizing, hoping for, and working for a better world is an enduring and essential element of human aspiration and political culture' (Levitas, 2010, p. xiii). This does not mean that utopian forms are always innocent. Utopias may be stimulating and positive, but they can also serve to distort and delude. There might be a path by which fostering people's hopes and desires for a better world (a utopian vision) results in the reinforcement of the status quo and the dominant position of social groups (an ideological strategy). The conceptual proximity between utopia and ideology, their political ambiguity, leads sometimes to the confusion of the terms.

Surely, utopian discourse ought to be the subject of much criticism, especially because of its flirtation with ideologies, understood here as intentional distortions of reality to legitimate political domination.[2] This inherent ambiguity of utopia and ideology may be an unavoidable problem; nevertheless, the potential of utopian discourse to mobilize and influence human action deserves careful examination. Human agents make decisions by weighing reasons, but such reasons are not their only source of motivation. John Dewey observed as early as 1927 in his work *The Public and Its Problems* that 'emotional habituations and intellectual habitudes on the part of the mass of men create the conditions of which exploiters of sentiment and opinion only take advantage' (Dewey, 1984, p. 341). For Dewey, habits of thought are important since habit 'does not preclude the use of thought, but it determines the channels within which it operates' (Dewey, 1984, p. 335). This is not far from Bordieu's analysis of *habitus* and *structures*: structures function as an environment that reproduces habits as abiding dispositions without the conscious participation of social agents or external conductors. Structures provide, so to speak, *common sense*; the meaning of individual action is given by the dialectical interplay between the individual seeking a meaningful life and the social possibilities of sense making (Bordieu, 1977, p. 72-80).

In his analysis of ideologies, Eagleton (1991) suggests that the concept itself has different levels of application: genetic (the production of ideas), epistemic (ideas and beliefs already existing in society), and political (relating to power). Levitas places desire at the heart of utopia, 'a desire for a different, better way of being' (Levitas, 2010, p. 209). We could interpret this in the same sense as Dewey's assertion: political persuasion involves argumentative and non-argumentative elements. As Jasper has recently claimed, our rationalistic traditions of analysis have systematically ignored the non-argumentative elements of decisions (Jasper, 2011, p. 298). In particular, he sees hope and the desire to have an effect on the world as the greatest spur to action (Jasper, 2011, p. 291). According to Jasper, feelings, emotions, affective loyalties, connection through collective identities,

rituals and routines, and group dynamics all play a crucial role, as well as argumentation and rational persuasion, in the mobilization of social movements. In addition, Gerbaudo (2012), who has studied the social movements emerging in 2011, concludes that some sort of emotional condensation precedes the physical precipitation of movements in public spaces.

To sum up: persuading political agents to assume a political project may involve an appeal to good reasons but also the fostering of people's desires and hopes for a better life. The appeal to reasons and the fostering of hopes and desires are traits that political argumentation has in common with marketing and advertising. Again, in Levitas's words, 'utopian images may be used for manipulative purposes. Much advertising uses images of the good life (the idyllic island, the sophisticated life of leisure and consumption, the cozy nuclear family) to sell products. Advertisements work, though, because they key into utopian images which are already present among the audience, reflecting their desires, their lack' (Levitas, 2010, p. 219). Utopian language and images may have abandoned the public political debate but they are still a means to influence people in many ways. Utopias still enjoy a robust life.

The three pieces of advertising analyzed in this paper make use of utopian language and images in a time said to be too realistic for any belief in utopias (Jacoby, 1999). An unavoidable problem of the analysis is to identify the motivations that lie behind the use of these utopian images because, as we have seen, ambiguity is an intrinsic feature of utopias and ideologies. As a result, we cannot always reach unequivocal answers. In this essay, the approach to these questions is philosophical, i.e., a reflection on the meaning of some social phenomena that are taken here as representative of our media culture.

The analysis of the three uses of utopian rhetoric in advertising has been conducted with attention to the following aspects: (a) a reconstruction of the internal narrative of the adverts; (b) an exposition of the external elements related to the setting of these narratives; (c) a contextualization of the utopian images with a focus on the audiences they intend to reach; and (d) the effect and reception of the utopian images on the audiences. I think these examples can show that (i) utopian rhetoric is or is not incorporated in the collective imaginary depending on their potential accommodation within it; (ii) their effect involves a plurality of elements that transcend their internal narrative and the original purposes of the advertisers.

Advertising and Utopia: Reasons to Believe in a Better World

The first case presented here is the campaign launched by Coca-Cola® in 2011, entitled 'There are reasons to believe in a better world'. The company declared that the main motivation for the campaign was clearly to spread hope and happiness all over the world:

> For every reason to fear, there is a reason to hope. For every reason to give up or give in, there is a reason to dig deep and try harder. And for every reason to doubt, there are countless reasons to believe in a better tomorrow.
> That's the message behind a topical Coca-Cola campaign that celebrates the notion that, despite ongoing economic uncertainty, political unrest, natural disasters and more, the good in today's world far outweighs the bad.[3]

According to the press note issued by Coca-Cola® in December 2012, the original idea was born in Mexico and Colombia the year before. In the advertisement, a youth

chorus sings while images and words are projected onto the background. The reaction in Latin America was so enthusiastic that the ad has been adapted in more than 70 countries worldwide. Each country has its own local adaptation. For instance, the Japanese version seeks to bolster a society that was devastated by an earthquake in 2011.[4] In Egypt, the campaign was adapted for Ramadan 'by reinforcing the greater good of humanity in a post-Arab Spring environment'. A 'dose of happiness' was delivered to European countries going through a deep economic crisis, such as Greece, Italy and Spain. Javier Sánchez Lamelas, marketing VP for Latin America, explained that the idea was to say to people around the world going through tough times that things will get better and that 'Coca-Cola is the brand that can provide this reassurance'.[5]

In the UK version, the advertisement begins with a list of reasons to believe in a better world supposedly supported by data that was obtained from a scientific study on the real situation of the world in 2010 (indeed, the original source is never quoted). We see a group of children singing all together while their teacher, a young man, plays the guitar. The children in the class, all about 8-10 years old, represent the cultural and racial diversity of the country. They sing 'Whatever', a hit from the 1990s and the British band Oasis. While they sing, reasons to believe in a better world are being opposed to the bad things occurring in the world, reasons to be pessimistic. Every reason, the good and the bad, is illustrated through evocative images. Here is an extract of the reasons listed in the advertisement:

> For every tank being built in the world…
> 131,000 stuffed dolls are made.
> For each stock market that crashes…
> there are 10 covers of 'What a Wonderful World'.
> For every corrupt person…
> there are 8,000 giving blood.
> For every wall that it is put up…
> 20,000 'Welcome' mats are placed.
> Worldwide, more Monopoly money is printed than dollars.
> There are more funny videos on the web…
> than bad news around the world.
> While a scientist is creating a new weapon…
> 1 million moms are baking chocolate cakes.
> LOVE has more results (on Google) than FEAR.
> For every weapon sold in the world…
> 20,000 share a Coke.

The emotional impact of the advertisement is positive. If the goal of the campaign is to put a smile on our face, it is definitely a success. What could be more inspiring than to see all those beautiful kids singing in harmony while moms are baking tasty chocolate cakes, cuddly stuffed teddy bears are being manufactured and lots of people are Googling 'love' on the Internet, perhaps thinking of their loved ones? However, if we analyze the images one-by-one, we see that the illustrations of reasons might not be so balanced. The images corresponding to the market crash show a hectic trading floor. The example of a corrupt person is a cartoon of an executive with dollar bills exploding out of his head. Shortly afterwards, we see many red balloons filling a blue sky to illustrate the fact that 8,000 people are donating blood (every year? in the UK? around the world?). The weapon created by a scientist is an enormous rocket being launched into the air. We are not confronted with an image that genuinely shows us what the weapon can do or what its

deadly effect might be. The visual language used in the advertisement refers to blood as a red balloon, not as a viscous fluid leaking from a dead body. As an example of funny videos on the Internet, we see a cute baby smiling. A groom slipping and falling next to his bride at their wedding ceremony represents its negative counterpart, the huge amount of bad news in the world. This is of course more humorous than tragic. The last two reasons are quite symmetric in their composition but their connotations differ hugely. We read 'While one weapon is sold in the world' behind an army on parade. The corresponding reason to believe in a better world ('20,000 share a Coke') is written on top of an image with lots of beautiful children holding a Coke distributed spatially in a formation similar to the military one but looking in the opposite direction, as if they were actually in dialogue, confronting one another. The good intentions of the campaign are not in question here. However, the juxtaposition of good and bad reasons is proposed in terms that clearly lend more weight to the bright side of life. Needless to say, you cannot fight a tank just by sharing a Coke.

Of course, it is possible to argue at this point that the weight you put on a reason is completely subjective: that the birthday cake your mom baked you was more worth remembering than all your bad days in primary school added together. The way we judge the real situation of our world depends on personal choice. The presumed reasons for believing in the campaign are not based upon quantitative facts, but upon the existence of human emotions and dispositions that have a positive quality. The use of utopian discourse calls for staying hopeful amid uncertainty, hopeful because of a few good feelings, and the notion that good sense will, in the end, win out over thousands of examples of evil. This could be a positive interpretation of the sense of the campaign. Another, less positive interpretation could be that the campaign uses utopia without aiming at a radical transformation of uncertain circumstances. Moreover, it suggests that things will improve if we keep reasonably attached to the values of the well-meaning middle class.

Advertising, Utopia and History: From Ironic Play to Commemoration

The critically acclaimed film 'Good Bye, Lenin!' (2003) by Wolfgang Becker contains a very powerful scene in which the young Alexander Kremer is desperately trying to persuade his sick mother that everything outside her room is as it has always been in the GDR. Precisely in this instant, an unmistakable sign that everything has changed forever appears at Alex's back: a huge Coca-Cola® billboard is being unfurled from one of the highest buildings in Alexanderplatz in Berlin. It is interesting to observe that if there is a brand that we, in our imaginary, identify with capitalism, that brand is Coca-Cola®, bringing refreshment and happiness to the world for 127 years.

A few years ago, in the Eberswalderstraβe, not far from Alexanderplatz, you could buy city souvenirs in a shop called 'East Berlin'.[6] The shop's sign is rather revealing: the typography paid clear homage to Coca-Cola®. Berliners, well-known for their keen sense of irony, are quite used to this kind of aesthetic play. The souvenir shop was simply representing a widespread phenomenon in former Communist countries, especially in the former GDR. On the day after the wall fell, chunks of it were already being sold as gifts and oddities. It has happened exactly as Marcuse foresaw: in a one-dimensional world, the hegemonic ideology incorporates its antagonist as a part of its discourse. In this case, the past antagonist becomes a lucrative investment for the future. Another example of the exchange value of the past can be seen in the Louis Vuitton® ad of 2007 showing Mikhail Gorbachev riding in a car along the Berlin Wall with a classic Vuitton bag on the seat beside him. Other celebrities photographed by Annie Leibovitz for the campaign were

Steffi Graf, Andre Agassi and Catherine Deneuve.[7] The advert has an ironic effect if we bear in mind that Gorbachev was the last leader of the Soviet Union, a political project that collapsed shortly after the wall in Berlin did. Some critics have gone further in their analysis of the photo and noticed something curious that would have passed unnoticed if it were not for their clinical eye. Inside the open bag, there is a book or a journal with a headline in Cyrillic: 'The Murder of Litvinenko: They Wanted to Give Up the Suspect for $7,000'. Dan Levin provided background for the headline in an article written for the New York Times in 2007: 'The reference is to Alexander V. Litvinenko, the former K.G.B. spy who died last November after being poisoned with a radioactive isotope, polonium 210. On his deathbed, Mr. Litvinenko accused President Vladimir V. Putin of orchestrating his murder; the British authorities have accused one of Mr. Litvinenko's associates, Andrei K. Lugovoi, of the crime, and have requested his extradition from Russia, which the Kremlin has refused'.[8] As the translation of the headline was circulating in the Internet, Pietro Beccari, director of marketing at Ogilvy & Mather, Louis Vuitton's agency, denied any intention to deliver a subliminal political message, since the intention of the portraits was simply to reflect on 'personal journeys'. The presence of the newspaper is said to be merely 'coincidental' and 'serendipitous'. Gorbachev has said that he was unaware of the presence of the headline in the bag beside him.[9]

Without a doubt, Germany's reunification has been one of the most important milestones in recent history. Many of us may remember the moving images of joy on November 9, 1989. That day in Berlin was the result of very complex processes taking place all across the GDR, especially in Leipzig, where the peaceful *Montagdemos* marched from the Nikolaikirche around the Runde Ecke to the Dittrichring (where the Stasi district headquarters stood), with more than 100,000 people walking behind a banner declaring *Wir sind das Volk* ('We are the people').[10]

The people of Leipzig are still very proud of the *Friedliche Revolution*, the peaceful revolution that led to Germany's reunification and that featured Leipzig as one of its main scenes. A meaningful example is the Deutsche Telekom® commercial of 2009. The commercial was shot on November 8, one day before the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the commercial, we see an ordinary rush hour on an ordinary day in the beautiful Central Railway Station in Leipzig. Suddenly a man sings, '*Guten Tag! Hallo!*' ('Good morning! Hello!') from the top of the stairs. '*Hallo!*' repeats the man. '*Hallo!*' answers a crowd of 1,000 Leipzigers. '*Freude!*' (Joy!) adds the man introducing the tune. '*Freude!*' replies the crowd exuberantly. Then, all together, they start to sing: '*Freude, schöner Götterfunken, Töchter aus Elisium. Wir betreten feuertrunken, himmlische, dein Heiligtum'.* At this point, the famous opera singer Paul Potts joins the man on the stairs and sings the same verse. Then, the Leipzigers, the first man and Paul Potts together sing the whole anthem, which is called '*An die Freude*' ('Ode to Joy'). The choice of the musical piece is no accident. The text was written by the poet Friedrich Schiller not far from the railway station, in Leipzig-Gohlis, a district in the north of Leipzig.[11] The music comes from Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. This piece has become the anthem of the European Union and it symbolizes the union of the people in peaceful, harmonious coexistence. The commercial ends with the text *Grenzen gabs gestern* (Limits belong to the past), in colloquial German. This is a nice play on words, since *Grenzen* means both 'borders' and 'limits'. People living in the GDR use to talk about the wall as 'die Grenze' (the border). Thus, the sentence picked by Deutsche Telekom® has two clear references: 'borders belong to the past' (a reference to the historical past, the wall as the boundary that divided the two Germanies) and 'limits belong to the past' (a reference to the present in communications, the company offers services that make quick communication possible). With this campaign, Deutsche

Telekom® offered the possibility to unify its diverse products and services (DSL, mobile phone, television, and so on.) in a single contract rate.

From my view, the commercial is interesting for several reasons. First, the commercial does not explain the advantages of picking Telekom® as a telecoms operator; it refers to one of the most important moments in Germany's recent history. That is different from what we usually expect from a piece of advertising, e.g., to convince us of the advantages of picking a certain product. We can interpret the commercial as a genuine and touching commemoration of the civil courage that brought Germany to reunification. In this sense, the commercial is very original: it promises to join and preserve this spirit of peaceful coexistence. Second, the advert shows, I think intentionally, a picture of civil society in Leipzig that differs hugely from the one existing at the time of the *Wende* (as people in Germany call the process of reunification). We see young families with children, elderly people, students[12] from Germany and abroad.[13] By doing this, the commercial is not only advertising a communications platform and commemorating the past, it is also advertising the city of Leipzig. It shows a city bound up with past demands for democracy (represented by the elderly generation) and also a city open to future generations and newcomers (represented in the picture by young families, students from Leipzig and abroad). And, of course, it is a city where everyone is ready to sing the 'Ode to Joy' jubilantly and spontaneously, on demand. Third, the commercial establishes a connection between the lack of limits in communication and the disappearance of the political boundaries that divided Germany into two nations in conflict. This may suggest quite different things. For instance, that the people's will to be united can be stronger than any political ideology. Alternatively, it may suggest that the existence of better communication networks can be a powerful counterweight to artificial political antagonisms. It might be interesting to recall how the peaceful revolution took place. The weight of the peaceful revolution was borne largely by the GDR population. It began with small meetings inside the Nikolaikirche and when the GDR authorities did not suppress these gatherings, the spark spread all over the GDR and the longing for democracy became impossible to extinguish. It might have been the intention of the Telekom® campaign to suggest that a united and well-connected civil society will be stronger against the ghosts of division.

The motto of the campaign was *Erleben, was verbindet* ('Living, what keeps us together'). In fact, Deutsche Telekom® announced that all SMS would be free of charge on November 9, 2009.[14] This contrasts with the history of the company itself. Deutsche Telekom® has its origins in a state company, the Deutsche Bundespost (the German Federal Postal Service). From 1947, the state company also ran the telephone network in West Germany. In the GDR, the telephone service was part of the Post Office Ministry. After reunification, in 1990, the Deutsche Bundespost was divided into three companies (Postbank, Postdienst and Deutsche Bundespost Telekom), all of which remained under state control. In fact, Deutsche Telekom® came into existence only in 1996 after the privatization of Deutsche Bundespost Telekom. In the years 2005 and 2006, Deutsche Telekom intended to fire more than 50,000 employees because of a deep financial crisis, but the conflict has been solved.[15] Today Deutsche Telekom® is present in 50 countries and has more than 140 million clients.

Advertising a New Utopia?

It is interesting to observe that what happened in the Deutsche Telekom® example is a clear case of the appropriation of the historical past by a private enterprise. But no one has pointed out this fact during the whole campaign: the commercial was very

successful in Germany. There has been no criticism of the company taking advantage of the historical legacy of a reunited Germany, which is a common good. Indeed, the reactions have been very positive and emotional. The commercial won an Elfie, the most important award in marketing in Germany.[16]

This is quite different from what happened with the advertising campaign of Movistar® (a subsidiary of Telefonica®) in Spain in November 2011. In the preceding months, Spain had faced unexpected upheaval, which started on May 15 in the squares and streets of the country's major cities. Waves of social protest, which came to be known as '15-M' or 'indignad@s'[17] (the outraged), resulted in the occupation of public squares for weeks, with the protesters representing a broad cross-section of Spanish society: students, the jobless, retirees, activists and the apolitical, the young and the old (Castells, 2012, p. 115). The popular outburst did not follow a definite ideology or program (Antentas & Vivas, 2012; Castells, 2012; Sitrin & Azzellini, 2014). What all of the protesters had in common were two fundamental convictions: (1) there is no hope for citizens in capitalism's current crisis, and (2) our duty as citizens is to reclaim the original meaning of 'democracy'. 'Shame on this democracy!' was the cry that rang out in the streets. The banks and corporations are the ones taking decisions while ordinary citizens foot the bill and struggle on, bearing the consequences of their irresponsibility. We have to take democracy from the hands of the politicians and bankers and give it back to those to whom it really belongs: to us, the people.[18] The political content of the movement was therefore twofold. On the one hand, the movement began among the hopeless, the desperate, those whose expectations had been systematically frustrated. They did not have any concrete plan for the future: they were claiming simply that the situation was too severe to allow things to get even worse. The popular reaction, however, was so powerful and categorical that a collective hope suddenly emerged. Extemporaneous communities were born under the May sun. People who had nothing better to do because there was nothing better to do, devoted their entire days to a new occupation: joining in an exciting, genuine debate on the essence of democracy. In this sense, outrage constituted a new hope, a real feeling of *togetherness* (Antentas & Vivas, 2012; Castells, 2012).

Castells (2012) suggests that the 15-M movement was indeed a 'rhizomatic revolution'. Its distinctive feature, and perhaps one of the keys to its rapid success, was that it appealed to a majority of the Spanish population. The movement was said to be horizontal, non-ideological, spontaneous, and lacking conscious organization or political leadership. Gerbaudo, however, has argued that it was not particularly spontaneous, since the campaign launched by *Democracia Real Ya* 'was supported by thousands of Internet users and also by 200 civil society organizations' (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 87). As the movement jumped from a Facebook page to the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, its impact expanded quickly to 57 other Spanish cities. Local assemblies and communication networks were built (Sitrin & Azzellini, 2014). It was possible to know what was happening elsewhere in the country and to coordinate joint action thanks to the use of social media (Gerbaudo, 2012). Thousands of videos in YouTube, some of them quite professional,[19] advertised the movement and invited people from Spain and abroad to join.

During the months of the Spanish Revolution, a feeling quite close to hope took hold in people's hearts. They discovered that it was possible to engage in a profound debate on Spain's economic and institutional crisis without intermediaries. It was an experiment in what real direct democracy could look like. It is hard to describe the emotional state resulting from 15-M and it is also difficult to know what has remained of it in the months and years afterwards. This might be why the advertising campaign of the

Telefonica subsidiary Movistar® over Christmas 2011, a few months after this high-spirited moment, caused such an uproar.

The commercial shows some sort of local assembly, emulating the rich diversity of people gathering in the popular assemblies of 15-M. The participants are discussing the most advantageous flat rates for potential clients of the mobile operator. Their dialogue goes like this:

> Man 1 (young, in his thirties): Let's talk one after the other, OK?
> Woman 1 (young, same age, Latin-American accent): I would ask them not to charge for text messages that give good news... for instance to wish someone a happy birthday or when someone gets married...
> Man 2 (about 60 years old, maybe a retiree): That is not always good news...[20]
> Woman 2 (about 35 years old): How are they supposed to know whether the news is good or bad?
> Woman 3 (about 70 years old): Nowadays, cell phones are so sophisticated that they can even tell your blood-sugar level!
> Man 3 (age between 35 and 45, in suit): I think it is just the opposite... it is better not to pay for something bad ... if you have a cold and you can't go to work.... [21]
> Man 4 (teenager): Is that bad news?
> Man 1: Why not ask them for all text messages to be free?
> Man 2: That won't happen...
> Man 1: We can ask, we have nothing to lose... OK, who votes for this?
> (Everyone raises their hands)
> In off: The people have spoken and this is what they asked from us. New flat rates for cell phones, agreed by all. Text messaging free. Pay less if you use DSL. Movistar: Life is so much more, when we share it!

The commercial caused indignation and was accused of being a vulgar parody of the Spanish Revolution. Telefonica subsidiary Movistar® argued that the commercial was originally thought of as an homage to 15-M. The company surely did not expect to offend people's sensibilities. In fact, many voices interpreted the company's campaign as an effort to ideologically discredit the Spanish Revolution. Others saw the commercial as a crude attempt to profit from the image of 15-M.[22] Almost immediately, the revenge of the 15-M protesters appeared on YouTube. In their new version, they changed the dialogue in protest against Movistar®: despite reported profits of €10.167 billion in 2010, the company had fired 6,000 workers in the same year (approximately 20% of its staff). Now the people spoke and this is what they said about the quality of services: Telefonica® offered the slowest and most expensive DSL in Europe in 2010. The criticism in several Internet forums was so intense that only a few days after the launch of the campaign, Luis Miguel Gilpérez, director of Movistar Spain®, admitted that the whole idea had been a mistake. The company had to apologize for having offended so many people.[23] But it was already too late: FACUA (a consumer watchdog in Spain), 'honored' the commercial as the 'worst piece of advertising in 2011'.[24]

Closing Remarks: Utopia in the Internet Age

'They don't represent us' was one of the most repeated slogans of the 15-M movement. The statement could also refer to any attempt by private companies to appropriate the Indignad@s' spirit. According to Castells, the Spanish Revolution

'positioned itself against intermediaries, be they political, media or cultural' (Castells, 2012, p. 121). Gerbaudo has opposed Castell's thesis by paying attention to the influence of social media in the orchestrating of what he calls the *choreography of assembly*. The metaphor of choreography stands for *liquid organization* and *soft leadership*. In 2011, the 'year of the protesters', the revolutions reclaimed their specificity as they were using the tools offered by social media to spread the word and promote instant communication. Gerbaudo adds nuance to the self-description of the movements by paying attention to the unavoidable mediation of immediacy: 'immediacy (by definition the absence of mediation) cannot be sustained without being thoroughly mediated' (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 163).

The claim of horizontality and decentralization and the use of social media characterize the social movements of the 21st century, particularly those taking place in 2011. They were experimenting with new forms of radical democracy as opposed to the hierarchical character of 'old politics'. As Castells sees it, they were living their own utopia:

> a new utopia of networked democracy based on local communities and virtual communities in interaction. But utopias are not mere fantasy. Most modern political ideologies at the roots of political systems (liberalism, socialism, communism) originated from utopias. Because utopias become a material force by becoming incarnate in people's minds, by inspiring their dreams, by guiding their actions and prompting their reactions. What these networked social movements are proposing in their practice is a new utopia at the heart of the culture of the network society: the utopia of the autonomy of the subject vis-à-vis the institutions of society. (Castells, 2012, p. 228)

Since the Internet belongs to the new utopia, it is interesting that two of the examples analyzed here correspond to big telecoms operators with millions of users. But is Castells right when he states that 'the role of the Internet goes beyond instrumentality' (Castells, 2012, p. 229)? These companies, if not political agents themselves, can claim to have contributed in a decisive way to the success of the movement. Their position, however, is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, they are a part of the economic system against which the protesters are reacting; on the other hand, they are facilitating the organization of protesters by supplying telecoms services. Similarly, protesters find themselves in a dilemma too. They need communication platforms to spread their message and organize logistics of protest. However, some of the telecoms operators are companies whose recruitment policies may be a part of the very problem they are denouncing. Since we are both citizens and consumers, we find ourselves in the situation of having to reflect constantly on the meaning of our political projects, but also on the means for their realization.

Through the examples presented here, we can appreciate the complexity related to the survival of utopias, their reception by civil society and the ambiguities involved in all the processes in between. In the case of the Coca-Cola® commercial, despite the good intentions declared during the campaign, the use of utopian language is intended not to mobilize people, but to hint that a better world depends on the correct weighting of reasons. The commercial from Deutsche Telekom® reflects the civil consensus in Germany that the peaceful revolution in 1989 has brought about a better state of affairs. Of course, Germany's reunification was not frictionless and not all conflicts have been solved 25 years afterwards. However, the motto *Grenzen gabs gestern* found a breeding

ground in a society that has fought to overcome political division. For this reason, the interplay between commemoration and prospects for the future that are contained in the motto was received enthusiastically. The last example, from Movistar®, reflects a social reality nourished by structural ambivalences. It was a revolution of hopelessness, an absence of hope turned into indignation. Indignation ignited collective action, and collective action bred hope in a possible deepening of the actual meaning of democracy. Big corporations, banks and the central government were held responsible for the crisis almost to the same extent. Despite the use of social media to 'choreograph' the revolution, Spaniards were not ready to forget the problems caused by Telefonica® and its recruitment policies, which continue to fuel indignation to the present day.* This explains why Spaniards, particularly the ones who had participated in 15-M, were offended by the 'appropriation' of their protest for commercial purposes.

Persuasion, the use of utopian images, and visions of a better future all have the potential to mobilize non-trivial human action. This may be why social groups and political agents of all sorts keep producing ideals and illusions and playing them off against one another. Utopias are like a two-way mirror: one side reflects what is wrong with the current state of affairs, while the other casts a ray of hope, illuminating a better situation that transcends the current one. What we may not recognize immediately are the intentions of those wielding the mirror. Therefore, we should be able, from time to time, to look through the looking-glass.

[Embed image here]

I want a country that reads more (far left).
I want a country where justice is speedy and free (far right).
I want a country where only kisses can shut us up (middle).
Mataró (Barcelona), November 9, 2014.
Photograph by Núria Sara Miras Boronat

Notes

1. Levitas identifies five different meanings of 'utopia' in Marcuse's works (Levitas, 2010, p. 173). I refer primarily to the use of the term in Marcuse's 'The End of Utopia'.
2. 'To study ideology', writes John B. Thompson, ' ... is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination.' This is probably the single most widely accepted definition of ideology; and the process of legitimation would seem to involve at least six different strategies. A dominant power may legitimate itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; *excluding* rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself. Such 'mystification', as it is commonly known. frequently takes the form of   or suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions.' (Eagleton, 1991, pp. 5–6)
3. 'Coca-Cola Offers Consumers 'Reasons to Believe''. Retrieved January 20, 2015, from www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/

4. Japan was struck by a terrible earthquake on March 11, 2011. The disaster left thousands of victims and caused a major tsunami (the waves reached 10 meters) and a serious nuclear accident at Fukushima.

5. 'Coca-Cola Offers Consumers 'Reasons to Believe''. Retrieved January 20, 2015, from www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/

6. The last time I saw the shop was in 2008. The shop may have closed in the meantime.

7. 'Louis Vuitton's hot new Russian supermodel'. NBC News, August 2, 2007. Retrieved January 22, 2015 from www.nbcnews.com

8. 'Louis Vuitton Ad Shows Gorbachev Accompanied by Subversive Text'. Dan Levin for the New York Times, November 5, 2007. Retrieved January 22, 2015, from www.nytimes.com

9. 'Louis Vuitton Ad Shows Gorbachev Accompanied by Subversive Text'. , Dan Levin for the New York Times, November 5, 2007. Retrieved January 22, 2015, from www.nytimes.com

10. As I write this paper, some racist organizations such as Pegida, Legida or Bärgida are subjecting the meaning of the *Montagsdemo* to revisionism in the major towns of the former GDR: Leipzig, Dresden and Berlin. This is also indicative of the fact that once political projects (such as civil courage and calls for greater democracy) have become part of a society's imaginary, they can be updated in ways that break with their historical past or even betray their original spirit.

11. Schiller wrote the poem in 1785 for his friend C.G. Körner. The poem was intended for a plaque in a Masonic lodge in Dresden. Probably the idea of brotherhood interpreted in that context is slightly different from the meaning we associate with the poem today.

12. Leipzig has a big university with more than 600 years of tradition. Friedrich Nietzsche, George Herbert Mead, Johan Huizinga, Ernst Bloch, and many other notable figures have studied or taught in Leipzig.

13. In the commercial, we see a couple of students from Asia. This is meaningful since Leipzig, the city where J.S. Bach lived for the greater part of his life, has a very important musical tradition. Many children from Germany move to Leipzig to be a part of the *Thomanerchor* (which celebrated its 800th anniversary in 2013). The city also attracts many music students from abroad, especially from Asia.

14. 'Deutsche Telekom: "Chor ohne Grenzen": Tausend singen mit'. Retrieved January 25, 2015, from www.help.ch/

15. 'Vom Staatsbetrieb zum Global Player. Die Geschichte der Deutschen Telekom'. Ariane Rüdiger for PC-Welt, March 16, 2012. Retrieved February 3, 2015, from www.pcwelt.de

16. 'Deutsche Telekom erringt Gold'. Press Release by Telekom. Retrieved January 25, 2015 from www.telekom.com/medien/

17. The social movement had various names. Supporters tended to use the specific date '15-M' in reference to May 15, but the media referred to them as the 'movimiento de l@s indignad@s' naming the movement after Stéphane Hessel's Manifesto *Time for Outrage: Indignez-vous!* (Antentas & Vivas, 2012; Castells, 2012; Sitrin & Azzellini, 2014).

18. In the months prior to 15-M a general climate of outrage was in the air, marked by indignation 'against politicians who cared only about themselves, and against bankers who had wrecked the economy with their speculative maneuvers, only to be bailed out, and to receive handsome bonuses, while citizens suffered early from the consequences of the crisis in their jobs, salaries, services and foreclosed mortgages' (Castells, 2012, p. 114).

19. See, for instance, this beautiful video entitled #SpanishRevolution calling for people to awaken. Retrieved June 29, 2015 from YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSS7J3lhRWA

20. This is an attempt to be funny. It has been a commonplace in Mediterranean countries that marriage is not necessarily a good thing, especially for men, since men lose their freedom when they marry. According to this commonplace, the main goal of a woman's life is to 'catch' a man and enter gladly into the sacred institution of marriage.

21. This is again something of a joke. Mediterranean people are said to be lazy. Unfortunately, an extended cliché says that Spaniards prefer having a 'siesta' to doing work. The ironic thing is that since the crisis began in 2008, many fewer Spaniards have a job, can afford medicines or even have a place to take a 'siesta'. We must keep in mind that in the period from 2007 to 2012, more than 3 million jobs were destroyed in Spain (Sitrin & Azzellini, 2014, p. 125). In February 2012, the unemployment rate for people under 25 reached 50.5 %. The average in the European Union was 22.4% (Antentas & Vivas, 2012, p. 56).

22. 'Críticas indignadas contra Movistar por copiar las asambleas del 15-M en un spot'. El Economista, November 14, 2011. Retrieved January 26, 2015, from http://ecodiario.eleconomista.es/espana/noticias/

23. 'Telefónica pide disculpas por usurpar la imagen del 15-M tras las críticas recibidas'. Alfredo Pascual, El Confidencial, December 1, 2011. Retrieved January 26, 2015, from www.elconfidencial.com/sociedad/2011/12/01/

24. 'Los consumidores eligen la 'asamblea-farsa' de Movistar como El Peor Anuncio del Año'. FACUA, March 15, 2012. Retrieved January 26, 2015, from www.facua.org

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