

# THE CONTEMPORARY UTOPIA OF Self-Realization

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*Utopia in classic literature is a place in which community is a value in itself. The individual is tied to a collective that gives him a meaning for his own life and his moral value is based on his participation to the utopian collective. Imaging a utopia in this perspective is a form of moral rebellion, which is possible only foreseeing a better future in a progressive historical timeline. Contemporary societies put in question such assumptions, starting from breaking the social and collective prerequisite. Postmodernity contradicts its salient characteristics: there is no more a space for an absolute common good when society is liquid and focalised on present, every individual is in search of a its own happiness instead of creating a community, short-time has become the timeline of contemporary culture. This paper will describe the utopian dimension of contemporary societies by showing its contradictory feature compared to the classic model, referring to the theories of pragmatic sociology and the rise of project as ontological dimension of contemporary life.*

**Keywords:** *Utopia, postmodernity, pragmatic sociology*

## **Introduction**

Resistance is a form of moral rebellion, which can be concretized only in the context of weltanschauung which predicts a better and a feasible future which as such has to be pictured by those who are involved in its realization. Imagination can play a ontological function which allow men to enter symbolic dimensions that go beyond the reality: this being dimension allow to think about new systems, new societies, new institutions which can be though as possible (Castoriadis, 1975; Benasayag, 2005). Images of a city, which is happy, ideal and different from reality like the one in utopias, are one of the way to express social and political imagination; in this way individual and collective dreams of a specific social group can be welcomed, worked out and represented (Baczko, 1979).

Utopia, defined as push toward betterment, can be named as a transcendental idea, which results in a effect in changing in the exiting social and historical order. The Utopia of classical political

tradition can be understood by referring to a moral justification significant within the repertory of the city of civiness, where the grandeur is the expression of the convergence of the collective willing. Men are bonded to their belonging to the utopian community, which goes beyond them and their moral value is judged by referring to them being a member of a collective entity leading towards the common good.

Nevertheless, classical concept of utopia is becoming difficult to use into the contemporary society, because the postmodern society puts it into fit referring to different point of view. This happens mostly because the direction of improvement is changing from the collective good one towards individual interiority of a person. In fact, contemporary utopia of self-realization can be defined in the form of anti-utopia because it turns over the primal collective feature: the utopian space is fragmented into the individual interiority (Bauman, 2003); the idea of absolute goodness, which is embodied through the classic utopia, contradicts the needs of lightness and liquidity, which is typical of contemporary postmodern societies (Bauman, 2000) and, finally, it insists on a short span because of the impossibility of programming a future that can be not imaged (Sennet, 1998).

This paper aims to highlight how the new shape of contemporary utopia cannot be understood within the repertory of the city of civiness (Boltanski, Thevenot, 1991), but the individual aiming for the goodness can be defined as the opposite of *grand* of the city of the project (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999), because he is separated by the would-be recognition of the collective value of giving. The individual action of giving opens a possibility of emerging a collective action from an individual action and it represents the peculiar feature of the worth of the repertory of justification of the city of project.

### **Utopia in the classic tradition**

The archetype of Utopia, like the one determined in the literary and philosophical tradition of classical politic philosophy, is founded upon four principles: the justice, in which the rectitude of a person is connected to the equity of laws in force in ideal society, the communion, the prosperity, based upon the conviction that society is rich only when all member contributes to its wellbeing with their work and they all can have access to the goods they need and, at last, the peace, got through religious respect and tolerance (Colombo, 1997). The model, obtained by the combination of these four principles, is a type of project of social organization in relation to

which it's not possible to think about a better one, like the Anselmo's demonstration of God existence.

Utopia is born in the sign of practices of intellectual resistance, which are grown up from Renaissance and Humanism between important leaders of European culture and it is put into practice as a public communication of a desire presented as legitimate and possible. It is a collective and emotive tension, which has to be imagined different from reality in order to make it possible and it can be realized only when single individual act towards that desirable situation, that is already present in what is going to be. Dream and, in certain sense, utopia will not grow in a happy and static present: preliminary condition that is necessary to think about a changing is that this changing can be thought as possible, because history and future are not a fact depending on temporal cycle. Moreover, it's necessary the awareness of a social order that is considered in someway unfair and unhappy and the consequence is that duty of men is act in order to change it.

Referring to Bloch's thinking, history is a process which is enlivened by a tension to go beyond the present in order to built the future realization of a possible reality, represented by utopia, which is identified not with the impossible, but with what is not yet realized. With regard to this, utopia is strictly connect to the idea of project, because this indicate something that is in realization but it's not present in a determined reality. They are anticipations of a possible, which is thought in order to become reality through the use of rational principles and individual action of a man oriented towards the collective common good. The temporal dimension in which utopia is placed is necessarily the future, because it's only in the future that idea of possible and implementable can have sense and worth (Quarta, 1993).

In order to do this, the utopian project foresees consequences on all institutions of society: culture, ethic, politic, economy, work, science, religion are changed in order to reach happiness, as a right and stable condition of mankind. It can be expressed through the form of myth and idealism, growing up from a condition that can be defined as imperfect and unfair: utopia is a project aiming toward the realization of an ideal and equal city, in which its principles are historically determined but recurring in different utopian models (Schiaivone, 2001).

Utopia is a critic conscience which is directed to enlighten the limits of individual wills; it is a ethic and moral project of totalizing social organization, whose purpose is defusing the potentially anarchical

significance of individuals, guided by the standard of betterment, as a human tension of achieving a better future. It is a journey based upon transcendence in relation to present and it's opposite to the eschatological principle because it's referred to the comparison with actual moment. Man can realized his own self only historically and he/she must be part of a collective being, in a determined space, which is still to be realized but belongs to the real world and not to the ideal world (Quarta, 1993).

Utopias oppose towards holy and myth grounded representations of a happiness which is based upon the rational pursuing of ethical principles in a community of individuals, according to the progressive process of disenchantment of the world which is growing in that period. Utopias are an answer to politic entering the modernity age: utopian community is an auto-built society, which does not imply a superior order upon the secular world, it realizes really human purpose, it is based upon free utopian consent of individuals. In the middle of utopian imaginary there is the man, which, thanks to his/her nature, is capable of determined himself/herself morally and socially, building a better world: the utopia of classic authors is based on the secularization of millenarianism upon a progressive anthropocentrism, which allows substitute a fertile willing from eschatological wait and find its foundation in the human reason (Baczko, 1979).

In spite of the close connection of transition from middle age to modernity, utopia, like was historically imagined, was always opposite of modern individualism, because its ideal was the supremacy of collective (from communion of goods and, sometimes, also of wives and children, in order to achieve the suppression of private property) and the loss of importance of actor as individual (Prestipino, 2002). Nevertheless, the issue of community and the supremacy of social upon individual was a very strong characteristic of the most ancient works too: from tradition of platonian republic, More and Campanella planned ideal cities where the private property is abolished, the children education is in common and everyone works, because everybody works allows each working less. Referring to this topic, Bauman (2003) puts in connection very different work like Orwell's one and Huxley's: this two books are connected above all by the strict control of the social systems they've imagined. These systems are opposite of the individual liberty value, which is on the contrary the focus of postmodern society (Bauman, 2003).

By now, characteristic of utopia, as it was defined by classic political philosophy, can be referred to city of civiness, which is pertinent

into the theoretical approach proposed by Boltanski and Thevenot in "De la Justification" (1991). In this work, authors analyse the procedures by which an individual justify their action, thanks to the reference to a series of standard models which are activated according to the situations in which they are involved. In the social situations, judgement is depending on a public critic, which is based upon justification's regimes founded on principles, which have intrinsic validity. These legitimate orders can be used to gain consensus or to sustain a critic: justification is the strategy by which competitors confirm their position in what the authors call economies of worth (o citè).

Referring to the classic political tradition of philosophy, these regimes are called cities, defined as the possibility of design a legitimate order that is founded upon justice's principles. In the political tradition, order is founded on just one basic principle, while in the modern society there're a series of different regimes of justification, which can stand into the same social space, though their importance change depending on the situations in which an actor is involved. This is caused by the fact that cities are historical models, which established itself and then disappear during historical cycle (Boltanski, Thevenot, 1999).

Referring to this theory, the model of justification, which is proper of classic utopian tradition, defined as a whole of ideologies and moral rules that can enlighten on how a determined evaluation and distribution of goods can be judged as fair and legitimate (Boltanski, Thevenot, 1991), is the city of civiness. The most important connection is the supremacy of collective, in which the grandeur is represented by a social group; the great one is the representative of this group, who express the collective will of the group that is leading. These features are defined beginning from the theories of Rousseau and it shows as order of worth the respect of collective interest, thanks to the reference to principles of solidarity and equality. The only way to reach peace upon egoistic individuality of people is to address to a external and superior authority; its only aim has to be the persecution of the common good. People on their own have no value, until they act to reach the common wellness and they gain status only when they're seen as a member of a group (Boltanski, Thevenot, 1999).

In conclusion, the most important characteristic of city of civiness and, in general, of classic utopia is the attention given to a man not as an individual, but as a member and a representative of a group, which transcends him (Boltanski, Thevemot, 1991). To prove this, it's important to enlighten that in many of utopian works, which are

aimed to represent the ideal city, institutions, occasions of collective reunions and, in general, the supremacy of common good are often very well described. This is because the individual wellness has a value only when is a persecution of the collective good.

### **Things are changing**

As I previously said, changes, which have defined the entrance into the period by some authors called postmodernity (Giddens, 1994; Kumar, 1995; Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2000; Magatti, 2003), has provoked a cultural and ideological shifting, which is ratified in its starting by the '68 movement (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999). This change in culture has consequences also into the idea, which individuals of so called postmodern society give to the tension to betterment; in fact, this idea has change its form and its importance in society. The hypothesis highlighted in this paper is that the change happened in society and, more specifically, into the culture proper of western modernity has changed what people identified with utopia, shifting the tension to betterment from collective and societal wellness into an individual and egocentric try of self-realization.

During the golden age (Hobsbawm, 1994) there was a equilibrium into societal institution of advanced capitalistic societies, represented by the model of societal modernity (Magatti, 2003). It can be identified as one of the realizations of utopian models, which were experimented during the decades after World War II. In fact, in the period of societal modernity, the capitalistic and socialistic model created societal orders, which were ideologically presented as equilibrated instruments of social cohesion, as they were solutions in order to reach the principles of harmony and peace proposed by utopias since their born.

Focalizing upon the societal modernity model, it reached the climax of its success during the decades from '50 to '70; it was one of the form of social cohesion which was more near to what was supported in the utopia, thank to complex and rich welfare system, built to sustain each member of society during his/her lifecycle (Magatti, 2003). Nevertheless, in order to explain the theoretical approach of this paper it is interesting to enlighten its decline, beginning with riots of youth during the '68 and continued with the slow and progressive coming out of fordist model of business, which has built the bases for the societal order so called postmodernity (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999).

Postmodernity, in fact, can be defined as the coming out of the societal modernity's condition, happened beginning with seventies, when there were the beginning of a change which is still in progress. The acceleration and radicalization of social process, which were characteristic of modernity, has led the intellectuals to coin a new definition, exactly postmodernity, in order to highlight the direction of a change which is characterized by the end by the conviction that nothing can be know surely and that history, science which studies the path of mankind in times, cannot defined a teleology, a direction and a purpose in this movement (Giddens, 1994). In fact, theoretical approach here presented has began with the hypothesis that the so called capitalism, defined as complex system of economic and social relation which is peculiar of western modern nation, has provoked into the idea of social system and life target of individual men. This change was managed by alteration of economic organization and it provokes a more general cultural change, which has consequences upon everybody is involved into this system of production.

During the last decades, this was a change into the capitalistic systems which has brought to the born not only of a different organization of work, but also to a more deep consequences upon the morality and the models of justification of individual that are involved into it (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999). Boltanski and Chiapello, in "Le nouvelle esprit du capitalisme" (1999), call spirit of capitalism the ideology which justifies the involvement into the capitalistic system and which make it fascinating thanks to the promises of collective advantages. Ideology, into the thinking of the authors, is used regarding to the approach of Ricoer and their aim is integrate the Marxist idea of ideology and the cultural one, proposed by Levi-Strauss. In fact, the term ideology is used in order to enlighten the three function which it plays into the spirit of capitalism: integration, legitimation and distortion (Chiapello, 2003).

Critic is the catalyst of this movement toward justification; it makes possible and necessary the creation of a moral system on which capitalism can found himself. This ideology is used to prove that the capitalistic system is acting in order to reach the common wellness. The spirit of capitalism cannot be preached only on what he is able to offer – the capacity of accumulation – but it needs its critics in order to elaborate the moral justification he hasn't.

The ideological involvement in order to promote the social change and to reach material wellness was peculiar of societal modernity and actions was directed to give better opportunity to individual to shown their capabilities (Bell, 1991). In the postmodern societies there are no ideologies or big cause to fight for. The failure of the

great ideological stories has compromised the trust in the capacity of politics and mankind to change the world, acting through collective instruments (Kumar, 2000). This cultural change enlighten the supremacy of the individual: the study of the spirit of capitalism highlights, in fact, a new organization of the predominant system of values, which is now based upon the progressive spread of idea of project, strategic feature of the so called model of justification named city of project (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999).

### **Utopia in contemporary society**

Contemporary society has diverted the attention towards the individual and it makes collective dimension a variable to which is not paid attention; collective dimension is no more able to transfer such emotion as that were usual during the societal period: it is anymore the structure of values like homeland, family, community. The aim of the life of individuals involved in the new societal system is changing from the social cohesion and participation, proved by engagement into the different institutions and intermediate bodies which were typical of societal modernity (family, trade unions, party, school, etc), toward the self-realization, which is guided by an individual discovery of private aims of life, regarding to a personal path of experiences and relations, in a context where the competitive principle of the market is spreading into all societal dimensions (Furedi, 2005).

This change of prospective from social toward individual (Taylor, 1991; Giddens, 1994; Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2000) has to be put in connection with transformations happened into the capitalistic, cultural and institutional system which were typical of the societal modernity (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999). This change is not only defined by the spread of project model into labour market, but there is the rising of a new model of justification (Boltanski, Thevenot, 1991) into the society, by which all existence's dimensions are going to line up: from couple's relation (Giddens, 1994; Bauman, 2004; Cruzzolin, 2004) towards lifecycle's paths (Lasch, 1999). Postmodern people experiment the value of the project, which is defined as an episode included between a beginning and an end and which is going to be the feature of postmodern organization of society (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999).

Referring to the issues of utopian representations of classic politic philosophical tradition, a new model of contemporary utopia, based upon the individual wellness, is going to emerge, in which the aim of the betterment is not comprehensible at a collective level but it is



identified by key words like wellness, pleasure, self-realization. In this model the way of judging is always connect to a person as an individual, not as a member of a specific society or social group.

This doesn't mean that utopia of self-realization has been expelled from imaginary dimension: it's strictly connected with imagination, but the difference is the place where this human faculty is explicated. In the traditional utopia it is mostly bonded to an external and collective dimension, in which a person is integrated, while in the contemporary utopia focused upon the intimate self-realization the focus of the imaginary narration is shifted into the capabilities, that an individual can express and on what he wants from himself/herself (Bauman, 2003).

Opposite of classic tradition, utopia of self-realization is a project which is focused upon present dimension or short-term loan: future dimension is something which is not strategically useful to prosecute in postmodern societies where programming cannot be founded upon a series of projects, which are constantly changing their shapes and temporal duration (Sennet, 1998).

In the same way, it's not possible to codify a shared hierarchy of values into a community, because moral and ethic are subjected to the relativism of manifold cultural and individual points of view; in the postmodern world there is a disorder of different concurrent systems and their legitimacy is bonded to the respect of practices which validate them. There isn't the possibility of an absolute knowledge and a universal hierarchy of values; authority foundation is shifting from the external dimension to the internal dimension and everyone is responsible for his/her own choices (Sennet, 1974).

Therefore, every individual lives his/her own lifecycle path's constantly researching wellness, pleasure and happiness according to his/her own personal wishes and values: happiness is becoming a private question and it's depending to the *hic et nunc* of individual, which is persecuting it (Lacroix, 2001). Other's happiness is no more a requirement for own happiness, if is not considered as an individual form of satisfaction derived by aesthetic pleasure or pathos of a distant suffering (Boltanski, 1993).

Moreover, happiness is becoming an emotion which is going to be acquired day by day through a long series of momentary and episodic feeling connected to always different experiences: happiness is no more a static condition based upon the still-life, but it is a psychological and physical wellness of a postmodern individual based upon a series of different momentums (Lacroix, 2001).

In the postmodern imaginary, there is no neverland in which it is located the perfect society in which everyone can harmonically fit; this place is substituted by an endless and, that's it, fascinating series of different experiences and places, in which the intermittency and variety of mansions are taking place of a life vocation. The desire for a better tomorrow is reduced to a more prosaic research of immediate and quotidian satisfaction of own desires, constantly referring to a present mad of momentums, which have to be live as they were the last (Ehrenberg, 1991).

### **The city of the project**

As I already said, the transformation in capitalism happened during the last decades, have not only started the changing and spreading of the new contemporary utopian spirit just described, but they have favoured the growth of a new system of justification, so called city of the project (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999). This system can be defined as connexionistic, because it is described though the metaphor of the network and it is based on the growing number of people that find their justification into the activity of mediation, which is the core business of this world made of relations.

The birth of this project culture is connected to the growth of a representation of economic world and, more in general, of society which is based upon the metaphor of network, happened during the eighties: the connexions of singular nodes allow a multiplicity of different trajectories and there are no homogenous space limited by boundaries, which can allow to distinguish the interior from the exterior.

The definition city of project is built upon a terminology recurrent into management literature: project organization is a business in which the structure is made by a host of projects. In these projects different individuals can join for a while, all of them involved in a series of different activities. The feature of the project is being characterize by having a clearly prearranged begin and end; work teams are constantly create and instituted, in according to the priority and needs of the enterprise. By analogy, you can call society of project when there's a system of bonds which are based upon a world in network; the connections force nodes to create relations which respect the practices of action justifiable as projects (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999).

In the city of project, the principle of equivalence, which can be used to measure the worth of a person, is the activity, defined in a very different sense compared to industrial city. In this last one, an active person was a man or a woman who was employed with a stable and

productive wage, while in the city of project the active is not defined by the opposition between work and unemployment, stability and instability, waged and unwaged.

Activity is directed to the creation of new projects, which are, each in turn, connected with the ones created by others; individual is an actor in this world who explores the network and increase his/her own probability of meet people and things, that can be useful for the generation of new working possibilities. The project isn't a prearranged institution and activity is shown into the multiplicity of different involvements, which are more valued when they're different from each other.

To summarize, worth can be measured on dynamic growing of activity and a grand is a person who has always something to do, something which is in progress with other people and who has the desire of meeting new people (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999). The great one of the city of the project has the feature of being adaptable and flexible; he can switch from one project to another with competence and with a lot of adaptation's capability. He's a polyvalent person and he's able to change activity or instrument, being employable in different roles in a business and fitting into new projects. The great one is an active and autonomous person, he risk to have growing new contacts who can give him/her new possibility and he/she works to gain information to avoid redundant connection. In spite of his/her raising mobility, he/she's not stateless, but, thanks to his/her wide connections, he/she is able to act locally, because the structure of network implies that actions are always embodied into the contingency of a present situation.

His/her capability is relational too: he/she is a person who can manage face-to-face situation and he/she can perform without being stuck into the information published in his/her curriculum. He/she is a true person and he/she's able to avoid merely the play of his/her social role, from which he/she can going away to make himself/herself fascinating. Nevertheless, these qualities are not sufficient to outline completely the worth status, because they can be used to act a mere egoistic and individual strategy for gaining own success.

In the logic of city of the project, the great one is who not only have the qualities that I have already said, but is who use them to reach the common wellness (identified by the growing of connections into the societal network). He/she guides his/her own team, playing behavioural strategies substantially opposite to the hierarchical chief; he/she gives trust and listen to others with respect and

tolerance. His/her collaborators trust him/her because he/she dispenses connections that he/she was able to build during his/her wanderings in the network. He/she helps his/her collaborators to develop their employment's capabilities (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999).

### **Conclusions**

The difference between the great one of the city of the project towards the individual involved in the self-realization utopia can be enlighten in the difficulty of compare the contemporary utopia with this model of justification. In fact, referring to this theoretical approach utopia of self-realization can be seen as the degeneration of the model of the city of the project. This one is based upon the reconstruction of a new form of social bond, which is founded on concept of network, while the utopia of self-realization is far from any type of boundaries, unless if it can be closed in according to own personal desires.

In the framework outlined by utopia of self-realization, there is no space for the foundation of a collective bond, unless if we focused upon episodic and intermittent contacts. Looking at this approach, there's no space for a collective solution to a social problem; the resolution is demanded to individuals and their behaviours, increasing exponentially the number of issues with which are charged individual choices.

This has inevitable consequences from personal point of view, because a person is more over exposed personally to them, without any social protection. So the price to pay in terms of safety is high: contemporary individual is constantly in search of own pleasure and freedom, but he/she lives his/her present with an anxiety that depends on performativity religion who has to play (Ehrenberg, 1999).

The lonely subject of postmodern theories doesn't think himself/herself in historical or temporal terms: postmodern self is an erratic entity, made of a series of kaleidoscopic identities played in a neutral time. The lacking of a meaning in this lifecycle's path give a feeling of uncertainty and it creates a psychological and existential uneasiness, which has contradictory consequences on society: the research for a universal truth (Bauman, 1987), the predominance of private emotion (Lacroix, 2001), the distorted medicalization of existential uneasiness (Ehrenberg, 1998) in a world where the risk category is increasingly becoming strategic to understand the macro-social trends (Beck, 2000).

As all social phenomena, it's important not to forget that radicalized

individualism is a tie which creates uncertainty and instability (Ehreberg, 1999), but, at the same time it can be seen as an opportunity to find a way out: it depends from the awareness of a person, in fact, to try to change things, simply referring to the altruistic dimensions of giving. Man, in fact, is not only simply directed to discover his/her own wellness at any cost, but he has the possibility to choose in conscience the wellness of the others, in addition to his/her own, in every little choice of daily life.

By this way, it can be regained the possibility of a new way of creating a social tie, outlined upon the characteristic of the city of the project and founded on networks: it is the personal will to give the foundations of lasting and meaningful connections, gained through mediating and tailoring a net, which aim is the inclusion of everybody beginning from a merely individual choice and action.

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