3 The Privatisation and Recollectivisation of Hope

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As was noted in the introduction, utopian thought can have better or worse times, but a general longing for a qualitatively better mode of existence is omnipresent in humanity. Yet this longing can manifest itself in various forms with greatly varying political implications. Why some manifestations become dominant, is then a key question for contemporary analysis. In this chapter, we analyse this issue using a rough distinction between two broad ways to channel the desire for better existence: First, actual (collective) utopias articulating ideas for structural societal transformations; and, second, private forms of self-development, dreams and 'escapes', often expressed without any transformative implications. Here we focus on the latter, what we call 'the privatisation of utopia', reasons for its recent prominence and possible ways forward.

Much of recent research on utopias and social movements supports the observation of a general decrease in collective utopian struggles (e.g. Estlund 2014; Kamat 2014). Further, a large number of studies on social subjectivity discuss the individualization of societies, and also individualization of political dreams and aspirations (e.g. Bauman 2001; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 1–30). People still have, of course, hopes and expectations concerning broader societal changes, but the lack of real alternatives to liberal democracies and capitalism, and the lack of sustained energy for long-term political action make people lay their concrete hopes on themselves rather than broader societal transformations. But manifestations of private hope, such as 'downshifting' or attempts to assume self-control through entrepreneurship, function as part of the contemporary system of governmentality, thus being false emancipation. Yet while noting the current 'utopia fatigue', our argument is not devoid of optimism: the will to a better existence always has the potential to be reoriented towards collective utopias.

The chapter begins with a general introduction to the state of utopias. We discuss ideas such as the 'end of history', along with different critiques of utopias, which demonstrate a given hostility towards radical social imagination within the contemporary mindset. Then we move on to discuss concrete mechanisms of privatisation of utopias. The privatised life-narratives of

entrepreneurship will be discussed in one section and the neoliberal 'lock-in of imagination' in the subsequent one. Towards the end of the chapter, we will discuss the potential role of social science in the task of 'recollectivisation' of utopias.

State of utopias: Anxiety

As noted in the introduction, utopia can be seen as an expression of the desire for a better being, omnipresent in humanity (Levitas 2010, 9). As also noted, similar ideas include 'utopian propensity' (Manuel & Manuel 1979), 'the principle of Hope' (Bloch 1986) and 'utopian mentality' (Mannheim 1979, 173-236) as widely existing elements of human life with various manifestations. According to Vincent Geoghegan (2008, 17) 'we can speak of a utopian disposition, a utopian impulse or mentality, of which the classic utopia is but one manifestation. This impulse is grounded in the human capacity, and need, for fantasy; the perpetual conscious and unconscious rearranging of reality and one's place in it. It is the attempt to create an environment in which one is truly at ease'.

This desire (or hope, or propensity) for a better being can be articulated in different ways, depending on ideological, political and cultural factors. Currently, with the position of liberalism as the triumphant ideology after the struggles and contradictions of the twentieth century, these articulations tend to be individualistic. This is partially an outcome of the tendency to see utopias in the absolutist sense, as essentially dangerous 'blueprints of society', as was discussed in the introduction. This anti-utopian sentiment, or 'anxiety of utopia' (Jameson 1991, 331), leads to thinking that 'the social or collective illusion of Utopia, or of a radically different society is flawed first and foremost because it is invested with a personal or existential illusion that is itself flawed from the outset' (ibid., 335).

Contextualised in contemporary society, anxiety of utopia leads to a lack of means to think beyond capitalism. Mark Fisher coined the concept 'capitalist realism' to describe the tendency to see capitalism as the only possible mode of society. The 'realism' in Fisher's concept 'is analogous to the deflationary perspective of a depressive who believes that any positive state, any hope, is a dangerous illusion' (Fisher 2009, 5). Capitalist realism is then a mode of thought

in which it is impossible to hope for different and better futures. Fisher (2009, 16) elaborates: 'Capitalist realism as I understand it cannot be confined to art or to the quasi-propagandistic way in which advertising functions. It is more like a pervasive *atmosphere*, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action'. It is a cultural framework within which it is possible for us to think, and which sets the limits of imagination.

The flourishing of dystopian entertainment in our popular culture in recent years can be seen as a symptom of the anxiety of utopia described above. They are cultural expressions of the deep-rooted anxieties of our society. (See also Laakso in this volume). As Fredric Jameson (2016, 54) writes: 'The recrudescence and reflowering of dystopias in our present culture suggests deeply rooted anxieties which are a good deal more fundamental than the fear-mongering widely practiced during the Cold War and expressed in various antitotalitarian tracts such as Orwell's *1984*'. Utopianism can, according to Jameson (2016, 54-55), function as psychotherapy for these anxieties. 'We hammer away at anti-utopianism not with arguments, but with therapy' (Jameson 2016, 54). Jameson relies on the conventional psychoanalytic perspective according to which 'the best treatment for neurotics lies in indirection' (Jameson 2016, 54). The psychotherapist cannot tell their patients outright what is the matter with them. This will cause only resistance and raise up the defence. Instead she has to help them in their self-analysis for finally finding the 'right solutions'. In psychotherapy too, according Jameson (2016, 54), it seems best to lead the patients down the wrong path from which self-knowledge can rise like a happy accident.

However, the 'anxiety of utopia' can be framed in a different manner too. Again, according to Jameson (2016, 54), on a lower and more general level it is about 'the existential fear of losing our individuality in some vaster collective'. So, what really is feared is a collective vision of future society, not better state of being as such. What seems to have happened, then, is the re-framing of utopian desires. In the twentieth century, utopian desires for better being were typically framed in a collective manner. Both fascists and socialists framed their desires of better being with a social vocabulary. Today, the same desire for a better being is typically framed in an individualistic manner (Bauman 2017, 4).

Mechanisms of privatisation of utopias: The subjectification, ethos and life-narrative of entrepreneurship

The widespread anxiety of utopia has not come to existence without a reason and would not have been as dominant as it is without an atmosphere feeding its diffusion. But post-cold war geopolitics is only one, and plausibly superficial, level of explanation to the phenomenon. Cultural mechanisms lie beneath and function in tandem with political developments. So, the question is: What makes people in general direct their hopes through private rather than collective means?

Different kinds of avenues of hope are popular in different times. Whereas the ideas of changing societal and political structures and practices for the collective interests of certain group, such as the working class, were popular utopias at the turn of the twentieth century, currently the focus is on the 'personal'. If we look at the key messages of mainstream policies and social movements, manifestos for a better working life, and art projects for 'social change', for instance, we can see that the utopian hopes and actions are placed onto an individual level to a great extent (e.g. McGuigan 2009; 2016).

The conception of self-invention is this current form of 'utopianism' deviates greatly from how it is understood in collective struggles. In collective endeavours, self-invention means personal development for the purpose of social change, becoming a revolutionary subject. In the privatised ethos of hope, self-invention means personal – spiritual, corporeal or cognitive – change for becoming a better, stronger and healthier individual, without any explicit resonance to broader socio-structural transformations. (Callow 2015).

If one wants influence on welfare within this privatised framework of hope, the solution is doing sports, starting a special diet, and going to yoga and mindfulness lessons. Cultural change begins and ends in personal development of tolerance and sensitiveness for diversity or cultural civilization (e.g. admiring or practising arts). Striving for political change means personal

consumption choices and radical statements in social media. When the question is about economic change, the given answer is to be entrepreneurial.

It is easy and quick to aim at change through self-transformation. It brings more experiences and affects, which produce satisfaction and a feeling of mastering one's own life. When these positive emotions meet the growing demands on an individual's personal success, self-responsibility and a controlled risk-taking, a kind of tense field of teleological self-development is born, which largely crystallises around the concept of 'entrepreneurship' and in the subject of 'entrepreneur'.

The success of the entrepreneur as the key figure of privatised hope is fundamentally based on three traditional elements of entrepreneurship discourse: Profit-making, risk-taking and creativity (see e.g. Hisrich et al. 2017; Schumpeter 1934). According to the conventional definition, entrepreneurship is a human quality, which intertwines the potential pain of risk taking, the pleasure of using and developing one's own creativity, and the chance of basically unlimited, personal (economic) success. Nikolas Rose argued in the early 1990's that 'entrepreneurial subjectivity' – government of the individual through economic freedom, responsibility and necessity – is typical for 'advanced liberal governmentality' (Rose 1992). Many critical social scientists rediscovered the concept of 'entrepreneurship' again in the 2010's (e.g. Bröckling 2016; Olaison & Sørensen 2014; Pyykkönen 2014). Common for them is the claim that 'entrepreneurship' is vastly rising, if not already the hegemonic citizenship ethos in today's 'Western societies'. It is not only such in terms of business or work life ethos, but also extensively in terms of citizen-subjectivity in general, as the 'entrepreneurial spirit' or 'internal entrepreneurship'. Somewhat following Rose's Foucauldian path, these current social scientists claim that entrepreneurship is the 'subjective matrix' of current neoliberal governmentality, which places its conduct in developing and strengthening individual freedoms and economic capacities for enabling the greater success of 'free markets'. In other works, current governmentality works through freedom, and the entrepreneur is its key figure (Foucault 2008, 225–226).

This ethos requires and includes a personalised 'entrepreneurial utopia' (Sørensen 2009): One needs to understand oneself as a process of continuous spiritual, conceptual, attitudinal and behavioral construction and development. The horizon of this process – a productive, independent, happy and self-sufficient human being – is utopian in the sense that it can never, or at least it should not, be completely reached. More than anything else, the unbuilt hopes are a driving force for continuous personal development.

This process of change attaches to the individual impulses and dreams. The often repeated slogan of entrepreneurship educators and consultants is 'have the courage to dream and the bravery to venture forth' encapsulates this side of the concept well as it promises that personal utopian dreams can come true with an appropriate mix of impulsiveness and risk taking. It links implicitly to the 'overall common good' through getting its rationality from the neoliberal discourse of economic growth and competitiveness (Pyykkönen 2014). It reflects the characteristics of the neoliberal ideal citizenship (see e.g. Foucault 2008): the entrepreneurial individual, who successfully manages oneself without being a burden to society and whose life desires intertwine with the 'liberalisation' of economy and public sector austerity (Kelly & Pike 2016). Sadly, this seems to be the most radical feature of individualised utopia formulated around entrepreneurship.

The entrepreneurial design of a privatised utopia would not work, if individuals would not generally think that the sacrifice required by entrepreneurship is in their own best interest (Olaison & Sørensen 2014; see also McRobbie 2016, 35–38). Hence, in pro-entrepreneurship discourse, the risks and potential negative sides are usually represented as natural characteristics of the phenomenon, which the entrepreneur-subjects have to internalize as part of their subject-building. Challenges and obstacles are central in the discourse: This way the subject of heroic narratives and representations of entrepreneur is very similar to the pioneer in the classic Western narratives. The entrepreneur lives for the danger, risk-taking and gambling for collecting success and riches when the time is right – or loses it all. The possibility of bankruptcy is part of the game.

The tensions of risk-taking and surviving become nurtured by this individualized entrepreneurial utopian ethos constituted in the discourse used and produced by policy-makers, entrepreneurship organizations, self-help consultants and business gurus. In this narrative, the positive sides of entrepreneurship overcome not only its negative aspects, but also the ones of 'ordinary wage-labor'. Not all entrepreneurs internalise this hype, but elements of it often jumps up in one's face in entrepreneurs' pro-entrepreneurship stories in the media:

> 'I can decide about my own working time. It is the best thing. I can sleep in the mornings, if I am tired and start the day later. I can have a day off in the middle of the week and I can basically do my work wherever I want. […] I can develop all sides of my work and practically do whatever I want. […] I can put all my brilliant ideas directly into practice upon my own decision. […] Currently I never have to rush, because I do not intentionally create a rush for myself.'. (Ahokas 2019)

> 'Being an entrepreneur makes personal freedom possible. It is something that an employee can rarely enjoy. It is freedom to decide what to do, how to do and where I do. And how much I do. Entrepreneurship gives me a privilege of coming to work happy and inspired by my work.' (Stolt 2014)

The main attributes of the entrepreneurship discourse are personal freedom, creativity, and power over daily routines and time management: 'doing what you wanna do'. The entrepreneurship discourse persuades individuals with the idea that an entrepreneur, unlike the wage labourer, is not dependent on the relations in production. Other key phrasing often repeated in the discourse are creativity and ability to take care of oneself. Nevertheless, these universally positive sounding features have their roots in business ideals and vocabulary, not any kind of 'laissez-faire' freedom or creativity.

> 'A person with entrepreneurial spirit has a lot of those elements, that business world *requires*. A person with entrepreneurial spirit *is ready to take* responsibility, *is* motivated, *can* motivate himself, *has* clear aims, **is** aware of his goals, *develops* himself independently, *takes care* of his health. In other words, a person with entrepreneurial

spirit *thinks about himself* and *builds career* as ME Ltd. weather he runs a private business or not.' (Siefen 2010, italics by authors.)

Personal freedom, autonomy and creativity are traditional propellants in all kinds of utopias – at least in those based on the voluntariness of people to a remarkable extent. For an individual, a utopia refers to a pleasant, rewarding and ideal state of being. It can be achieved through making certain things and choices. (Jones & Ellis 2015.) However, what distinguishes the collective socially driven utopias from entrepreneurial ethos is that the latter is stripped from the collective good and solidarity. Fundamentally the utopianism of privatised and commercialised 'entrepreneurial hope' functions on an individual level: Ideological entrepreneurship discourse promises a better personal future only for the 'true believers', i.e. those willing to perform with an entrepreneurial spirit, both in their work-life and life in general.

Collective and individualized utopias differ in terms of their background rationalities: Whereas the rationality of collective utopia is a new kind of political and economic system, the rationality of private entrepreneurial utopia collapses into the political economy of the 'competition state'. The subject of collective utopia is a subject of structural change, but the entrepreneurial subject of private utopia is a subject of the structural status quo.

A further element of persuasion in the individualist hope narrative is that it recognizes an alternative to the dominant ethos, yet this alternative is similarly individualistic and entangled into the entrepreneurial hope narrative. This alternative is the idea of 'fleeing the rat-race'. Narratives of individuals 'reclaiming control of their lives' and choosing a simpler lifestyle abound in the contemporary social landscape, typically in the form of a businessman opting to 'downshift' and focus on meditation and other 'meaningful' things in life. While these narratives might not replicate the capitalist virtues of consumption and work ethic, they replicate the entrepreneurial virtues of personal freedom, autonomy and risk-taking. Not only are those virtues enforced, but seeing such 'escapes' as the existing alternatives means seeing all existing choices in all cases as choices for the individual, with no systemic alternative to the existing social order being presented. The outcome of such private escapes is similar to 'the

utopias of escape' (as discussed by Lakkala in the previous chapter): incapacity to see the prospect of societal transformation. The false dichotomy between entrepreneurialism and escapes as the choices in achieving a better mode of being does not then recognize any possibility of collective efforts of imagining and changing institutions.

Mechanisms of the privatisation of utopias: Retrotopia and neoliberalism

The dominant private and personal life-projects which incarnate in the rise of the entrepreneurial mentality, of course take place within a broader cultural context. The privatisation of hope requires not only discourses encouraging an individualistic and entrepreneurial spirit, but also a cultural mood directing people away from collective expressions of desires. The analysis then needs to be complemented with other key phenomena in the contemporary mental landscape feeding to the idea of the futility of collective dreaming. We suggest that two such phenomena stand out as most significant. The first is what can be called 'a nostalgic turn', or a temporal reorientation of political imagination. The second relates to the cultural outcomes of neoliberalism.

What is most characteristic about utopias, is a forward-looking temporal orientation; they portray what could be, rather than what has been. Indeed, the critical and motivating function of utopias requires that they describe a possible future. Yet exactly this capacity of looking forward seems to be challenged in the contemporary mental landscape. As has been noted by several authors writing about the state of utopias in the current era, contemporary cultural imagination seems to be more focused on backward-looking (nostalgic), than forward-looking (utopian) (Leone 2015, Grainge 1999). Perhaps the most notable social scientist to write about the issue is Zygmunt Bauman, who coined the term 'retrotopia' to describe this temporal turn (Bauman 2017). According to Bauman, in the age of retrotopia, societal hope is increasingly expressed in terms of 'returns' (ibid.), these being calls to re-establish an imaginary past. As the alarmingly ascending far-right waives the flag of 'return to the nation-state', so does the social democratic left express its politics in terms of 'return to equality'.

Quite like fictive futures and no-place/good-places, these histories are imaginary. There never was an 'original' ethnically coherent community, quite like there never was an 'original' egalitarian welfare state. Hope expressed in terms of returns does not, then, show only a conservative wish; rather, it shows a temporal reorientation of hope. According to Bauman, the nostalgic approach to politics is 'felt at every level of social cohabitation'. (Bauman 2017, 3). The implication of the emergence of nostalgia is that the future seems beyond our power to change. This does not mean that people would not prefer the capacity to imagine forward, if they possessed the collective skill to do that: paradoxically, the ongoing era is characterised by a nostalgia for a time when we were not nostalgic (Boym 2001). This too reflects the performative power of a Fukuyama-style scholarship: 'the end of history' is not only a descriptive concept, but the prevalence of its use begins to influence human conduct and imagination. Yet again, this temporal reorientation should not be seen as absence of the will for better existence, but rather a symptom of the privatisation of this will. The collective mode of the will for a better existence is not a sum of individual wants in a way market theory prefers to explain the aggregate of individual preferences. Rather, the aggregate of highly individualised - even if progressive - desires can form a society collectively longing for an imaginary past.

The nostalgic approach relates closely to neoliberalism as the dominant social form of organisation and imagination. Neoliberalism is usually seen as an economic system, but its effects are not restricted to the economic sphere. Indeed, it should be seen as a process with multidimensional outcomes (e.g. Springer, Birch and MacLeavy 2016). The *material outcomes* of neoliberalism are indeed the first aspects: Neoliberal policy; services and state-owned enterprises being privatized; social security systems slashed; and labour markets liberalised. This causes an increased sense of precarity and sharp polarisation of incomes, wealth, and access to services (Fiorentini 2015, Schatan 2001). Yet focusing on only the economic outcomes misses a dominant feature of neoliberalism, an attempt to reorganise the sphere of democratic politics. Indeed equally important outcomes of neoliberalism, as the immediate economic outcomes, are what theorists of political science call 'policy lock-in', or what was often described as the 'disciplinary' aspect of neoliberalism (Bruff 2012, Gill 1998, 2002). Neoliberalism not only operates on the level of immediate politics, but aims at changing the

framework within which politics operates. Neoliberal politics thus typically goes to the level of constitution: for example EU treaties, trade agreements, etc. are designed so that their modification is extremely difficult, if not impossible, by the means of normal democratic procedures; and even if this should take place, it would unleash a set of punitive measures. This system of politics is governed through increased expert power, which in itself also restricts the open political space, as several issues are depoliticised as merely 'rational'.

The third aspect of neoliberalism, which we want to emphasise here, relates to the psychological outcomes of neoliberalism, if the latter were the economic and political outcomes. Namely, we can ask, does neoliberal policy lock-in also cause a lock-in of imagination. This is a rarely made point, even though the other psychological outcomes of the competition-oriented neoliberal society are well documented (e.g. Verhaeghe 2014). If social reality proves extremely difficult to change, does this difficulty lead us to stop even imagining what such a change could be like? Neoliberal politics have often been characterized as operating on a there-is-no-alternative mentality, yet the analysis has been seldom extended to seeing the there-is-no-possible-alternative-future aspect of these politics, even though this follows quite logically.

The lock-in of imagination is further fostered by descriptions of social reality, which naturalise social ontologies thereby marginalising both co-operation and social change. Indeed, the neoliberal worldview is strongly grounded on an ontology based on the individual agent and her personal interests, needs and desires (Harvey 2007; McGuigan 2009, 176). This further leads to a conception of social reality in which these atomistic desires communicate only to form temporary agreements, not societal change. Especially neoclassical economics sees equilibria as the direction of motion in social structures (seen as mere aggregates of individual wants), meaning that changes always cause corresponding reactions to balance these changes. Following a similar ontology, political ideas are often represented in the form of 'political compasses', which means presenting politics as a matter of placing individuals on pre-defined (and apparently objective) axes forming a balanced space. Both ideas are performative in naturalising an explanatory tendency, in which individuals are seen as ontologically separate from each other, with pre-existing wants or political ideas, merely seeking their position within

a self-balancing structure. Indeed, if society is seen this way, it is difficult to see, what could be the starting point for an impetus for collective action aiming at social change.

The role of a social scientist

Above, we have discussed mechanisms which function to close the collective (utopian) imaginative space and enforce privatised forms of searching for a better mode of existence. These mechanisms, despite their appearance as self-control, are fundamentally mechanisms of current neoliberal governmentality. Subjectivities based on 'entrepreneurialism' eventually function to uphold a radically unimaginative society, in which it becomes normal to see politics as a social equilibrium balancing disconnected desires, or dots to be placed in space determined by fixed axes.

Yet if the human desire for the better can be channeled differently, according to circumstances, it is also possible for it to reassume collective utopian modes of thought. But as the economic framework is unlikely to change rapidly, this brings a given responsibility to different parties to foster the skills of collective imagination. Social science then necessarily has the choice, whether it sees its purpose as only a producer of empirical data based on hegemonic ontologies, or as a force which can and should support attempts to channel utopian desires through collective means.

Social science always contributes to the generation of the social world through the production of knowledge. Yet while there is a good understanding of the necessarily engaged role of the social scientist, such action research often sees its task as finding solutions to a given specific social problem, such as a social issue experienced by a given group (e.g. Buettgen et al. 2012). As valuable as this is, a more seldom taken approach would be to take people's actual desires as a starting point and then ask, how could these desires be translated into social change? In this process of finding collective expressions for the desire for a better way of being, a possible approach would be for instance to try to locate their sense of escape or other dreams attached

to entrepreneurship, and ask, what kind of broader social change would be relevant for these dreams, and work to fulfill them.

As noted, while the entrepreneurship discourse and its affective life-practices give personal hope and idealism for a better life, it seems hard to sketch any horizons of societal utopias from them. Yet this does not mean that these hopes and ideas could not become collective and socially progressive. The entrepreneurial utopia would need a wide acknowledgement of collective interests and precarious lives of sole entrepreneurs, and some kind of collective strategy of improvement of their situation through societal changes. The current collective struggles of the self-employed creative workers to organise unions and make general covenants for subscriptions, for instance, indicate that these kinds of changes are already taking place (Bodnar 2006) and that something which Erik Olin Wright (2010, 321–336) calls 'interstitial utopian transformation' is possible in the contexts of private forms of hope as well.

This strategy could be called a recollectivisation of hope. This could also practically take place by studying small-scale initiatives for alternative organisations, and asking, how could these initiatives be upscaled (cf. ibid., 273–373). So, the question would be: If, for instance a community-level initiative involves any new social relations, institutions, etc., what would these new institutions look like on a larger level? This approach also gives way to the more traditional role of the action researcher in supporting the organisation of alternatives – this is worth emphasising because of the intimate connection between imagination and organisation, when it comes to constructing alternatives (Khasnabish & Haiven 2012; see also Touraine 1981).

This leads us back to the notion of utopianism. Utopianism must take an indirect approach, concentrating 'not on visions of future happiness, but rather on treatments of that are stubborn resistance we tend to oppose to it and to all the other proposals for positive change' (Jameson 2016, 54). The main point of utopianism is to open up the social imagination. This means not to create fixed visions of future society or social blueprints but to create an indirect path to self-knowledge of the current society, to assist in the realisation of current fears and anxieties and thereby grasp hopes and desires. '[E]very utopia today must be a psychotherapy

of anti-utopian fears and draw them out into the light of day, where the sad passions like blinded snakes writhe and twist in the open air' (ibid., 55).

Another method could be the active production of 'counter-images'. Social science does not need to begin from observing the social reality, but it could assume active reflections on what could be as a method. This can then extend in two directions. First, assisting anyone in the actual process of constructing such counter-images, i.e. What has to be conceived within a society? What are the limits of the possible? and; How to stretch these limits? Second, reflecting and criticising the present through the means of these counter-images. These ideas come very close to such modern classics as the work of Michel Foucault (1977; 1982) on the research on counter-memory, counter-conduct and resistance, and those of Alain Touraine (1981) on sociological intervention for social movements actors to become more aware of their social position and relations, their role in social change and potential consequences of their collective actions.

Conclusions

While we took as a starting point the omnipresence of 'the desire for a different, better way of being' (Levitas 2010, 209), such desires can lose their capacity to inform actual utopias and become restricted to projects of self-realisation. Privatised hope fails to be a tool for social change, rather it is a tool for upholding existing conditions. When individual choices have no systematic connection with goals of social change, they remain directionless. While the immediate outcome of privatised utopias might be satisfaction, they represent political stagnation and a system of governance. This is particularly harmful when accompanied with inequality-generating policies, which enforce a longing for a better existence. When such alternatives are practically available only to the few, and private desires fail to be collectively communicated and formulated as social change, general frustration in society is bound to increase.

The forms and paths taken by the desire for the better are dependent on political, social and psychological conditions, largely shaping the context of imagination. Societal conditions can indeed be very disabling towards this kind of doing-by-imagining / imagining-by-doing. This disabling takes place through creation of both social conditions and given subjectivities, and the interplay between the two. A political landscape showing little possibilities for change has an effect on imaginative skills. This is further exacerbated by a given individualistic and competitive spirit, leading to entrepreneurial subjectivities. The privatised framing of the desire for a different and better way of being is based on seeing such entrepreneurialism and private escapes as the available choices in search for the better. No possibility of collective efforts of imagining and changing institutions or structures is then recognized.

The key issue is, whether people find common aspirations, shared language and ways to organise these aspirations. Imagining utopias is a *skill*, and therefore not an automatically existing element of human condition. As a skill, it needs to be fostered, and conversely, it can also be lost. It is a crucial question, what are the mechanisms of upholding and developing this skill - in learning by doing (organising), learning from other collective pursuits, pedagogics, and so forth. Social science can have an explicit role in all this by studying and developing the elements of change and helping to foster imagination by rearticulating and contextualising existing hopes.

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