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The web will kill them all: new media, digital utopia, and political struggle in the Italian 5-Star Movement

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Abstract
This article examines the role of discourses about new media technology and the web in the rise of the 5-Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*, or M5S) in Italy. Founded by comedian and activist Beppe Grillo and web entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio in 2009, this movement succeeded in becoming the second largest party at the 2013 national elections in Italy. This article aims to discuss how elements of digital utopia and web-centric discourses have been inserted into the movement's political message, and how the construction of the web as a myth has shaped the movement's discourse and political practice. The 5-Star Movement is compared and contrasted with other social and political movements in western countries which have displayed a similar emphasis on new media, such as the Occupy movement, the Indignados movement, and the Pirate Parties in Sweden and Germany. By adopting and mutating cyber-utopian discourses from the so-called Californian ideology, the movement symbolically identifies itself with the web. The traditional political establishment is associated with "old" media (television, radio, and the printed press), and represented as a "walking dead," doomed to be superseded and buried by a web-based direct democracy.

Keywords
Californian ideology, Gianroberto Casaleggio, cyber-utopia, digital sublime, digital utopia, Beppe Grillo, Italian politics, Italy, Movimento 5 Stelle/5-Star Movement, new media, old media, web utopia

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In February 2013, a veritable earthquake has hit the Italian political system: the 5-Star Movement, whose declared goal is to overthrow traditional parties and to promote the rise of a new form of web-based direct democracy, scored an astounding result at the national elections, becoming the second largest party in Italy. This article aims to examine how digital utopianism and web-enthusiastic claims have been shaping the 5-Star Movement's presence in the Italian public sphere, as well as its political message. By taking into account the way new media are represented by the movement as the carriers of an opportunity for radical change in Italian society, and by framing it within contemporary discourses on web- and cyber-utopianism, we will discuss how visions of new media interact with the broader worldview of the movement and its leaders.

Although the 5-Star Movement – in Italian, *Movimento 5 Stelle* or M5S – introduced numerous novel elements into Italian politics (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013), it is especially two elements which make it an highly relevant case for the study of new media. First, the electoral success of M5S signalled the definitive emergence of digital media as a primary vehicle for political debate and political agency in Italy: the web, in fact, functions as the main arena of discussion and internal cohesion for the movement. Such centrality of the web proved to be particularly disrupting in the Italian context, given the previously widespread reluctance of Italian parties to consider the web as a primary means for political communication (Vaccari, 2008). Second, issues of digital culture play a paramount role in the political message of the 5-Star Movement. In fact, the two co-founders and leaders of M5S, professional comedian Beppe Grillo and web entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio, combined their vigorous rallies against the Italian political and economic establishment with enthusiastic claims about the potential of the web and of new media technologies.

The article is organized in three parts. The first section provides a synthetic overview of the rise of the movement and of the personal story of its two leaders. In the second section, we examine the particular configurations of M5S's digital utopias and its particular emphasis on the web as a vehicle for revolutionary changes in Italian society. This is accomplished through a review of secondary literature and a qualitative analysis of two kinds of primary sources: the print books authored by the two leaders of the movement, Grillo and Casaleggio, and the articles published in the movement's weblog, www.beppegrillo.it, since its launch in 2005. While the print books provide a wide overview of the political vision of the two leaders, Grillo's blog has functioned as the movement's main political platform and discussion forum. Finally, the third section addresses the question of how cyber-utopianist claims have been inserted into the movement's political message, and how they have become an integral part of it. To answer this question, we argue that the rhetoric of the "digital revolution" helps reinforce the movement's claim to be an element of potential change for the Italian political system. In particular, the claim that new media will "kill" old media, such as television and newspapers, is tightly associated to the movement's own aspiration to defeat the old political class – in other words, to represent the new that will "kill" the old. In Grillo and Casaleggio's political message, the upcoming media revolution is represented as a mirror of the political revolution they are fostering. The utopian trajectory of new media couples with the narrative of political and social redemption against the establishment that the movement strives to embody.

Beppe Grillo and the rise of the 5-Star Movement

Beppe Grillo's career followed a complex trajectory; starting as a comedian and showman on Italian television, he then became an activist and campaigner in theatres, a Web 2.0 political communicator, and finally a fully fledged political leader. Originally from Genoa in northern Italy, Grillo emerged in the late 1970s as a comedian, hired by RAI (the Italian public broadcasting company) to work in prime-time TV variety shows, enjoying wide popular success as a volcanic and eclectic entertainer. In the 1980s, Grillo's humour progressively turned overtly political and anti-establishment, making him an awkward presence in the politically tame RAI. During a prime-time show in 1986, Grillo famously made a joke asserting that the leaders of the Italian Socialist Party (in government at that time) were thieves, creating panic in the RAI management, and leading to his immediate dismissal.

After a phase of intermittent work within "old" media, Grillo publicly decided in 1993 to avoid TV, and started to run successful one-man shows in theatres and public squares. In the 1990s, his polemical targets extended from national *malaffare* (corruption) of the Italian elite, to international and global themes, including ecology, globalization, financial speculation, and consumerism, in an original combination of abrasive satire and counter-information. Grillo's language is often offensive, and marked by frequent and liberating swearing (Pasquier, 2009; Ruggiero, 2012).

Ironically if one considers Grillo's later enthusiasm for digital media, one of his targets in this phase was personal computers, which he repeatedly described as a *truffa* (fraud) and smashed on stage. Grillo's communication appeared to be an uneven mix of flaky conspiracy theories (Fo et al., 2013: 154) and investigative journalism, tapping his TV-induced popularity outside the mainstream mass-media circuit. Notably, in 2002 he warned about the debt of Italian agro-multinational Parmalat, months before the case erupted in the public sphere as the largest financial fraud in Europe in recent decades.

Casaleggio and the digital turn

In 2004, having read some of his articles and books, Grillo contacted computer scientist and web strategist Gianroberto Casaleggio (Biorcio and Natale, 2013). Casaleggio started his career in Italian high-tech firm Olivetti in the 1990s, and had authored several books and newspaper articles about the disruptive and liberating power of the web. His work was strongly influenced by the digital enthusiasm of authors such as Nicholas Negroponte and Kevin Kelly, and was ideologically close to *Wired* magazine (Casaleggio, 2003, 2004). In the Italian context, Casaleggio was a pioneer of online communication and a member of the techno-intelligentsia that Barbrook and Cameron (1996) called the "virtual class." Casaleggio managed to convince Grillo of the potential of the web as a platform for his campaigns (Orsatti, 2010). In January 2005, Casaleggio's web company (Casaleggio Associati srl) launched the Beppegrillo.it blog, coupling it with a one-man show tour named with the site's URL. Grillo described the new project as an "instrument at our disposal to realize a true democracy" (Biorcio and Natale, 2013: 28). Grillo's blog hosts a wide variety of multimedia content: incendiary political *communiqués*, video interviews, and satirical mashups. The blog rapidly

became a platform to launch disparate campaigns, ranging from an attempt to make Italian MPs with a criminal record ineligible for office to a number of referenda about environmental issues (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013).

Beppegrillo.it enjoyed the synergy between Grillo's popularity and Casaleggio's effective web marketing. Casaleggio Associati took on most of Grillo's management, including his shows, his books, and best-selling recorded shows on DVD. Frequent and engaging posts and video interviews with scientists, journalists, bloggers, and ordinary citizens about environmental and political issues attracted high volumes of traffic, and fostered discussions – and triggered many flames – in the blog's comments. Many Anglo-American magazines consecrate Grillo's web presence by repeatedly ranking his blog among the top 10 world-wide, a particularly impressive result for an Italian website (Aldred et al., 2008; Van Gorsel, 2005).

Under the intellectual influence of Casaleggio, Grillo experienced in this phase a radical turn in his opinion of digital technologies, moving away from scepticism to fully embrace digital utopianism. In retrospect, Grillo acknowledges that, in that phase of his life, he realized that the web had the potential to "change his relationship with the world, space, time … information and knowledge" (Fo et al., 2013: 72). In his shows, Grillo encouraged his audiences to organize themselves independently in local groups using the Meetup.com platform, which constituted the kernel of his later political movement, mixing online hacktivism and face-to-face, offline discussion and mobilization.

In 2007, as meetups gained momentum, Grillo launched a controversial public protest called *V-Day*, where "v" stands for victory, for the cult graphic novel *V for Vendetta* and, more importantly, for the Italian insult *vaffanculo* ("fuck off"). During the event, Grillo collected more than 350,000 signatures for a bill about political corruption (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013). In this heated context, Grillo announced that, although he would not run directly for elections, he would support civic lists in local elections, named "friends of Beppe Grillo." The first *grillini* (supporters of Grillo) were elected in 2008 and 2009, predominantly in small city councils.

The birth and boom of the 5-Star Movement (M5S)

In 2009, Grillo announced the birth of the Movimento Cinque Stelle, grouping the civic lists into a movement with national ambitions. The five stars in the name represented "water, environment, transport, connectivity, and development," and one of the conditions for joining the movement is not to be or have been a member of a political party. Casaleggio co-founded the movement with Grillo, and exerts control on the movement's political and communication strategy – he is often called the "web guru" behind the scenes. The movement is structured around a *non-statute*, that is, a set of rules that regulate the hundreds of self-organized local meetups, using a franchise model. As no formal executive structure has yet been defined at the national level, Grillo and Casaleggio manage the movement predominantly in a top-down, centralized process (Biorcio and Natale, 2013). In this initial phase, the movement was largely dominated by male, young, northern, urban, educated, computer-literate members, who were close to (and disappointed by) the moderate or radical left (Biorcio and Natale, 2013: 56–8; Corbetta and Gualmini, 2013). In the regional elections in March 2010, the movement competed in five regions

and obtained about half a million votes, for a total 1.77% of the preferences. At the local elections in May 2011, the movement increased to 4.4%.

The local elections in May–June 2012 marked a considerable surge in the movement's popular support: Grillo's movement boomed into a political force with a total of 11% of the votes (De Lucia, 2012). As Bordignon and Ceccarini (2013: 5) point out, the movement managed to "capitalize on the window of opportunity offered by the economic crisis and the social discontent about the new government's austerity measures, in addition to the climate of increasing hostility towards the traditional parties."

In October 2012, a few months before the national elections, opinion polls forecast 16% in national support of the movement (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013). On his blog and in public squares across the country, Grillo campaigned relentlessly against party-driven politics, overtly banning his candidates from engaging with political talk shows on national TV or with newspapers. At the national elections in February 2013, the movement became one of the major political forces in Italy, obtaining 25.6% of the votes at the Camera dei Deputati (the lower chamber), and 23.8% at the Senate, becoming the second largest party in Italy. The elections established the movement as a third, independent political pole, beside the centre-left led by Bersani's Democratic Party, and the centre-right led by Silvio Berlusconi's People of Freedom.

In this ascendant trajectory (from about 2% to 25% in three years), the movement was pervaded by growing internal tensions, particularly between some local representatives and Grillo (and, less explicitly, Casaleggio). Disagreements between candidates and Grillo led to swift expulsions, raising concerns about the lack of internal democracy of the movement. These tensions were also due to the fact that the composition of the supporters shifted rapidly from the dominance of the environmentalist left-wing to a more complex and cross-ideological structure. According to Biorcio and Natale (2013: 60–70), several groups currently coexist within the movement, ranging from disheartened leftists, moderate right-wingers, disaffected non-voters, to individuals from disadvantaged socio-economic groups attracted to the xenophobic far-right aspects of the movement.

M5S and social movements

The M5S's ascent in Italy can be compared to the trajectory of the Swedish and German Pirate Parties, which Grillo mentioned as an example of how a movement based on internet participation could score important results in political electoral polls (Grillo, 2009). The Swedish Pirate Party was created in 2006 by a group of anti-copyright activists and hackers previously known as the *Piratbyrån* (the Bureau of Piracy). The group launched the Pirate Bay website at the end of 2003, which rapidly became the world's largest BitTorrent tracker. The Party had a moderate but significant success in local and political elections in Sweden (Miegel and Olsson, 2008). Based on this model, the German Pirate Party was also founded in 2006 and has obtained important electoral results, particularly since 2011 when the party overcame the 5% threshold for the first time to enter the state parliament of Berlin. In the following years, the party also managed to enter the parliaments in three other German federal states: North-Rhine Westphalia, Saarland, and Schleswig-Holstein.

There are several points of similarity between the Pirate Parties and the M5S. First, similarly to Grillo's movement, the Pirate Parties shaped much of their political activity in opposition to the political establishment and to traditional political parties (Niedermayer, 2013). Second, the Pirate Parties also made intensive use of the internet as a vehicle of political communication (Albers, 2010). Third, the M5S shares with the Swedish and German movements the use of cyber-rhetoric and the enthusiastic embracing of digital media, often in opposition to "old" media such as television, newspapers, and the publishing industry, which are seen as obsolete and inadequate to today's changing social and political spheres (Erlingsson and Persson, 2011; Löblich and Wendelin, 2012; Schweitzer, 2011). Moreover, similarly to the Pirates, Casaleggio and Grillo believe that "in the web copyright is not only useless, but also harmful" (2011: 120). Yet, an important difference between the M5S and the Pirate Parties is the fact that Grillo and Casaleggio's agenda is wider: the Pirates' political activity, in fact, mostly concerns issues of internet citizenship and copyright.

The M5S can also be compared with international social movements such as Occupy and the Indignados. In April 2012, for instance, Grillo mentioned the Indignados to support his claim that political change could only come through the use of the internet as a democratic tool (Grillo, 2012a). As many have noted, the Occupy and Indignados movements have been characterized by the combination of online activism with the use and occupation of public spaces (Castells, 2012; Dhaliwal, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Juris, 2012) – a strategy also employed by Grillo. There are, however, also important elements of difference between the M5S and the aforementioned movements. While Occupy and the Indignado movements are mostly regarded as leftist, the political collocation of M5S is more unclear and ambiguous, especially after the boom of 2012. This has resulted in ambivalent reactions to the rise of M5S within the Italian Left (Wu Ming, 2013).

Another key difference is connected to the issue of leadership: while the Pirate Parties, Occupy, the Indignados and other new social movements refuse any fixed or long-term political leadership (Milkman et al., 2012; Pino, 2013; Razsa and Kurnik, 2012; Stavrides, 2012), Grillo and Casaleggio's leadership has been evident in all phases in the development of the M5S, and was only occasionally challenged by members who called for more internal democracy (Fornaro, 2012).

Cyber-utopianism and digital rhetoric in the 5-Star Movement

Throughout the last two decades, the dominant political forces in Italy have largely ignored the digital revolution, observing it with suspicion and scepticism. Prior to the case of M5S in the 2013 political elections, national campaigns had been mainly orchestrated through "traditional" media such as television and the press (Mazzoleni, 1995; Statham, 1996). Since the development of TV in the 1950s and the foundation of RAI, public television channels have been dominated by political parties (Padovani, 2005). In recent years, the leading private TV network, Mediaset, has been owned or indirectly controlled by the former prime minister and media mogul Silvio Berlusconi (Balbi and Prario, 2010; Hibberd, 2007; Mazzoleni, 2000). Nor have the political biases of Italian

television been counterweighted by press media: as Peppino Ortoleva (1998) points out, Italian newspapers have been traditionally owned by private companies or have been under the influence of particular private interests, functioning as an element of pressure on the government and politics and taking up the role that lobbies play in countries where lobbying is legal and regulated, such as the United States.

The M5S partially subverted this state of affairs, thrusting web-politics to the centre of the Italian political arena (Vergani, 2011). Such radical change in the mechanics of political communication has come together with the increasing relevance of discourses on new media within Italian political debate. Casaleggio and Grillo have taken up some of the strongest arguments of cyber-utopianists and digital enthusiasts, introducing them to the centre of the Italian political arena.

New media and the digital sublime

In order to better comprehend the particular vision of digital media developed by the M5S and its leaders, it is useful to address briefly what so-called "cyber-" or "digital utopianism" is and what its main claims are. In media studies, a long-standing scholarly tradition aims to illuminate the role of technological utopianism in the reception of new technologies.

One of the key concepts within this tradition is the notion of the "technological sublime," as employed by Leo Marx (1964). Marx notes that the sentiment of wonder stimulated by the contemplation of technology and mechanization is a specific aspect of American culture. With the technological sublime, technological novelties and achievements are represented as the carriers of a quasi-pastoral message of faith in progress and modernity. James W. Carey and John J. Quirk (1970) took up this concept and adapted it to the specific case of the history of electrical media, using the term "electrical sublime" to characterize the enthusiastic responses in the 19th century after the introduction of the electrical telegraph. As Carey observes, "electricity promised, so it seemed, the same freedom, decentralization, ecological harmony, and democratic community that had hitherto been guaranteed but left undelivered by mechanization" (Carey, 1989: 123).

The notion of the electrical sublime has been widely influential in media history and media studies, shaping the work of many influential scholars in these areas of inquiry (Corn, 1986; Nye, 1994; Sturken et al., 2004). With the emergence of a literature on new media, this concept has also been applied to the case of digital media, as in Vincent Mosco's examination of the rhetoric of the "digital sublime." Mosco noted that digital media today "embody and drive important myths about our time" (2004: 2), just as some of the most significant cultural dreams of their age were embodied by the telegraph in mid-19th-century America (Czitrom, 1982), by the telephone in the late 19th century (Marvin, 1988), or by wireless and radio broadcasting in the early 20th century (Douglas, 2004).

The "digital sublime"- or "cyber-utopianism" (Morozov, 2011) – has been an important topic of interest in new media studies and related disciplines. Fred Turner (2006) identifies its roots in the countercultural movements of the 1970s, while others trace the emergence of cyber-utopias back to the Cold War (Barbrook, 2007). In recent years, as authors such as Patrice Flichy (2007) and Siva Vaidhyanathan (2011) well underline,

supporters of the digital utopia have mostly identified the internet as the carrier of a plethora of changes which should help bring about, so the argument goes, a more decentralized, democratic, and libertarian society. In this context, the internet is regarded not much, or not only as, a technical system, but rather as a cultural myth. According to Vincent Mosco, in fact, myths are "stories that animate individuals and societies by providing paths to transcendence that lift people out of the banality of everyday life" (2004: 3; see also Karim, 2001; Ortoleva, 2009). In this sense, digital media are embedded in a well-established, utopian narrative, by which they are represented as a liberating force, as the main actors of change within a free-market-oriented understanding of progress (Duguid, 1996). As discussed in the next section, the web plays such a mythical role in Casaleggio and Grillo's rhetoric.

The web as a myth

Digital utopianism plays a crucial role in M5S's worldview. In particular, the web (*la Rete*) is deployed in the M5S's rhetoric as a myth in Mosco's sense. Grillo and Casaleggio describe the web as a transparent, unified, coherent entity, with its own logic, laws, agency and disruptive agenda. The web, as a mythical panacea, can and "wants" to cure the social and economic ills of Italy, leading the nation towards a more desirable future. The web is a "supermedium" (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 7) which will radically change all political, social, informational, and organizational processes.

One of key endeavours of the M5S is the re-moralization of politics. In their view, the web reduces corruption in a technologically deterministic way, fostering radical transparency. For instance, in the context of EU funding fraud, Grillo asserted that "it would be great if this money could be monitored on the Web. […] One doesn't steal through the Web" (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 54). Unlike political parties, online communities are characterized by solidarity and transparency (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 46). Through its "eternal memory" the web imposes a strict but healthy discipline on society. The possibility of retrieving old news stories and the difficulty of removing content from search engines and mirror websites enforces a constant surveillance on individuals, who are constrained by their past actions (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 38).

Digital utopianism is usually characterized by a firm belief in self-organizing systems. As Morozov (2011: 286) points out, the new intermediating structures are often as centralized as the old ones; yet, inspired by the success of decentralized internet projects such as Wikipedia, cyber-utopianists tend to underplay the role of a few big corporations in the organization of the web. Ignoring the emergence of new intermediaries in the media landscape (including themselves and their blog), Grillo and Casaleggio claim that "the web does not want intermediaries" (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 10). Therefore, a "large part of the hierarchical structure which rules our society will disappear" (2011: 7). Notably, Grillo refers to the traffic in Delhi as a successful example of "organized disorganization," in which each mobile subject conquers its own space without rules constraining its movement. In this way, "without rules, there is still a rule" (Fo et al., 2013: 20–21).

An extreme and near-religious version of digital utopianism is the so-called "Singularity," the idea that exponential technological development will enable a world of

hyper-intelligent beings, transcending the current biological limitations of the human condition (Kurzweil, 2005). Because of the web, Grillo and Casaleggio believe that "the increase in collective and individual intelligence is accelerating and […] humanity will finally be able to address problems such as energy, global warming, and desertification" (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 146). For example, global warming could be solved by connected individuals, if only they had suitable apps (2011: 172); the web will reduce the amount of transport and material goods, implementing through 3D printing the idea of teleportation (2011: 133). Similarly to Kurzweil, Casaleggio claims that "in the future our brain will be global" (Fo et al., 2013: 70).

Singularity discourses are characterized by bold and frequent forecasts. As Barbrook (2007: 180) points out, the emergence of the information society in the U.S. in the mid-20th century was accompanied by a plethora of predictions about the future, largely inspired by McLuhan's visionary musings about the Global Village. In this sense, Casaleggio has developed his own peculiar futurology. In an animated short film, *Gaia, the Future of Politics*,[1] his company outlines his vision of the planet's future. In a technologically deterministic and bizarre sci-fi narrative, human history unfolds as a sequence of media-driven revolutions. The future will be dominated by sci-fi mega-corporations such as Google's Earthlink and Braintrust, a "collective social intelligence," and, after a series of cataclysmic disasters, the web will finally make man "the only owner of his destiny." Furthermore, in the short *Prometeus, the Media Revolution*,[2] Casaleggio predicts that by 2015 the web will dissolve all existing media, including television, radio, books, and newspapers. American corporations such as Amazon and Google will launch virtual reality services reminiscent of the memory-selling corporation in Philip Dick's *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale*. A new mega-information multinational, Prometeus, will "finance space missions" and will become "the new reality," finally triggering the Singularity and incarnating the myth of the web.

The Californian ideology and the web as electronic agora or marketplace

The M5S's digital utopianism has much in common with the so-called "Californian ideology," described by Barbrook and Cameron (1996) as "a bizarre mish-mash of hippie anarchism and economic liberalism beefed up with lots of technological determinism," which emerged in the 1990s in the U.S. from high-tech industry. The Californian ideology is characterized by a strong faith in the liberating and emancipatory power of the new digital technologies, and combines aspects of the anti-corporate ethos of 1970s counterculture with an entrepreneurial and laissez-faire approach to the economy and in the public sphere (Turner, 2006). Grillo and Casaleggio's cyber-rhetoric replicates this internal tension between the "electronic agora" of direct democracy and the neoliberal "electronic marketplace" driven by competition and efficiency, re-casting them from the North American to the Italian context.

According to Grillo and Casaleggio, the web as an electronic marketplace imposes new and efficient economic rules. Casaleggio praises the extreme economic competition online, stating that "in the Web, there is no number two. There is only the number one. There is only the winner" (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 5). Grillo remarks that even prostitutes do their business online, without the inefficient and unfair mediation of pimps

(Fo et al., 2013: 114). On the other hand, Grillo and Casaleggio also claim that "the Web is Franciscan, anti-capitalistic. Online, ideas and sharing ideas are worth more than money" (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 8). Ideas are only good or bad, beyond the left–right ideological spectrum (Fo et al., 2013: 89). Despite the fact that successful web companies need substantial cash flows to support their operations, the web only needs abstract, sharable ideas and not financial capital, fostering gift economies. For example, they claim that the web frees music from capitalist constraints, empowering independent musicians (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 157).

Furthermore, while Casaleggio and Grillo cheer the dissolution of bureaucratic models that dominated the 20th century (Turner, 2006: 239), they also denounce the social impact of neoliberal economics, based on unstable and "liquid" arrangements between employers and workers (Grillo, 2012b). With such an ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards capitalism, the rhetoric of M5S differs from North American digital utopianism, which since the 1990s has decidedly joined the libertarian right (Natale, 2012). Although Casaleggio sees the web primarily as the ultimate marketplace, Grillo tends to be more excited about its potential as agora, which will be populated by more informed and rational citizens: "The citizens who find information online do not watch TV, and do not read newspapers. They live in a parallel dimension. They are informed, the others are disinformed by Power" (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 10). Scams, hoaxes, and unreliable news notwithstanding, the web is "the medium that gets closest to truth" (2011: 88).

One of "web's laws", used as a slogan of the M5S, echoing the traditional "one person, one vote" slogan, is that on the web "one is worth one" (2011: 7). The myth of the web promises to enable a *real* direct democracy, opposed to the mediated, corrupt liberal democracy, which does not involve citizens in key decisions. For example, "ask an Italian whether he prefers an efficient hospital or to bomb Libya. […] His answer will always be different to that of politicians" (2011: 13). The egalitarian promise of the web is pushed by Casaleggio and Grillo to the extreme, claiming that "the concept of 'leader' in the Web is blasphemy" (2011: 11). Hence, an elected representative is not an independent agent, but has to function as a "terminal" that reflects the will of thousands of people.

This cyber-utopian view of direct democracy, characterized by Corbetta and Gualmini (2013: 197) as "web populism," is contrasted with a dying liberal democracy. The existing clumsy, expensive, and inefficient Italian political apparatus will be replaced with the electronic agora by tapping the wisdom of crowds (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 185). Similarly, the corrupting power of money and personal ambition will be washed away by crowd-funded politics. Casaleggio and Grillo claim that low wages, no perks, and the possibility of revoking delegates' mandate will ensure that rapacious career politicians will not exploit Italian institutions for their personal profit, as they have done in the past. The tension between marketplace and agora underlies the relationship between M5S's cyber-utopianism and broader political themes, analysed in the next section.

"They are all walking dead": old media, new media, and political change

Examining the case of the Occupy movement in Boston, Jeffrey Juris points out that "networking technologies did more than facilitate the expansion of network forms; they

shaped new political subjectivities based on the network as an emerging political and cultural ideal" (2012: 260). The use of mobile technologies and the web not only extends the ability to reach and involve people in the activities of the movement, but also shapes the way its members conceive of their activism and, to a certain extent, their positions on political and social matters. In the case of M5S, too, the relevance of the web as a communication forum has also helped shape the worldview of the movement and of many of its members, especially in relation to the perception that the development of new information technology might result in radical changes for the whole of Italian society.

This section will address the following questions: how do elements of cyber-utopianism and web enthusiasm interact with the broader political vision of M5S, and to what extent do they contribute to its formation? The answer becomes evident if we consider that the idea of change and rupture with the past is one the main elements, if not the main one, in the political message of the movement. In this context, the web and digital media, opposed to "old" media such as television and the press, function as a symbolic replication of the M5S's contraposition to the "old" political establishment. New media, therefore, are employed not only as a vehicle for political communication, but also as a "technological myth" (Karim, 2001) which operates to support the overall political ideology of the movement. To use Beppe Grillo's own words, television and political parties, parliamentary democracy and the printed press are nothing but "walking dead." The enthusiasm for new digital media reinforces the movement's claim that traditional political parties belong to a past which will soon be over.

The media war

The myth of the web is only one facet in the technological utopianism of the digital age. Another common narrative, in fact, connects the rise of new digital media with the crisis and the eventual disappearance of "old," non-digital media. According to this argument, the advent of a new digital age is connected with the disruption of the "old" media of the past (Balbi, 2005; Thorburn and Jenkins, 2003).

The idea that new media would "kill" the old ones has often played a leading role in contemporary cyber-utopias. Technologists of this ideological leaning, such as Stewart Brand, Nicholas Negroponte and Kevin Kelly, have often forecast the oncoming death of the print book (Nunberg, 1996) or of television (Spigel, 2005) and other old media as a necessary complement to the digital revolution. According to these cyber enthusiasts, the disappearance of these media should be greeted as evidence of technological and social progress. As Morozov (2013) notes, their vision enforces the perception that we are experiencing an unprecedented period of rupture. More broadly, as Duguid (1996) points out, the 'myth' of the disappearing old media reveals a vision of media change as shaped by a logic of "supersession," by which the introduction of new media comes at the expense of older ones, through a dynamic of substitution rather than coexistence and hybridization.

The enthusiasm for digital media which characterizes the M5S is strongly bound to this logic of supersession. In Grillo and Casaleggio's rhetoric, an actual war is going on between an old, analogue, unfair, polluting world, and a digital, ecological, web-centric,

and just world (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011). In Grillo's blog, the idea that there are "two Italys" emerges with great frequency. The country is seen as divided into two contrasting blocks: "one which finds information in the Web, the other which finds disinformation in newspapers and television" (Grillo, 2008b). These two blocks are, in the rhetoric employed by M5S, fighting a "media war" (Grillo, 2008a).

Such military language characterizes both Grillo's furious accusations against the political establishment and his invectives against television and the printed press. In one of his blog posts, Grillo goes so far as to point out that old media are fighting a "Third World War" in the attempt to survive the challenges brought about by the digital turn. According to his tirade, this war is not fought on the battlefield, but in the editorial offices of newspapers and television; the weapons are not bombs, but rather lies and cover-ups (Grillo, 2013b).

The end of old media and of the political establishment

In his rallies, Grillo contrasts the life of his digital movement with the "dead" analogue media and politicians. "We are alive, alive! We came out of the catacombs. […] We are alive in a country of dead people, of old people who occupy all spaces and believe they are eternal, who nourish themselves with power and have fucked life" (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 154). The refrain of the "walking dead," and the "mummies" (2011: 188) recurs with astounding regularity in the blog as well as in Grillo's and Casaleggio's books. These terms are employed in reference to both old media and the representatives of the political establishment: for instance, Pierluigi Bersani, the leader of the centre-left coalition during the political elections, is defined as a "talking dead" by Grillo in a post published shortly after the 2013 national polls (Grillo, 2013a).

Grillo and Casaleggio's cyber-utopianism is characterized by frequent and bold prophecies regarding the disappearance of non-digital media. In a post aptly titled "The end of old media" the rising volume of visits to Grillo's blog is compared to the number of visits to the internet sites of two "traditional" media, daily newspapers *L'Unità* and *Il Giornale*. The statistics are offered as an evidence of the claim that old media are dying (Grillo, 2005). In this way, Grillo identifies the success of his blog (and of himself) with the rise of new media, which are destined to "kill" the old ones.

Television is seen by Grillo and Casaleggio as the most dreaded symbol of the corrupt establishment. Netflix and streaming are destroying the DVD rental market, and TV will be their next victim (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 165). Newspapers are also regarded as part of the corrupt analogue *ancien régime*. The potential for more reliable and balanced news is to be found in digital citizen journalism (2011: 95). Other old media are equally doomed. Traditional communication companies have been one of the favourite targets of Grillo's indictments in the 2000s (Pasquier, 2009). He often compared and contrasted Telecom Italia, the country's main telephone service provider, with Skype, suggesting that the old, expensive, corrupt company will be annihilated by the new, transparent, and efficient internet-based medium. Similarly, print books are seen as obsolete, in contrast to the web and e-books, which are often mentioned by Grillo and Casaleggio as a key aspect in overhauling primary and secondary education (Fo et al., 2013: 105).

The M5S's "war" against old media cannot be fully understood if one does not take into account Grillo's own story. As reported above, Grillo's career has been characterized since 1993 by two different, but interconnected struggles: against the political establishment which had contributed to his dismissal from RAI; and against the media of television and, to a lesser extent, the printed press, from which he had been excluded. In this sense, Grillo's personal story – a narrative of redemption – contributes to explaining why claims that old media are "walking dead," doomed to disappearance or obsolescence, play such as a strong role in the M5S's version of cyber-utopian theories. His struggles are also the struggles of the 5-Star Movement; his battle against the political establishment is also the battle of the movement; his refusal to appear on TV reverberates in the rules that each elected member of M5S has to agree upon, which strictly prohibit any appearance on talk shows or on other TV programs.

As Giuseppe Mazza (2012: 182) observes, "more than a struggle between opinions, what is at stake is a struggle between communications media." From the movement's viewpoint, since television is influenced by the parties, and the parties use it against the M5S, television and talk shows are "weapons" (Grillo, 2012a) targeting the movement. The movement's struggle against the political establishment is also the struggle against TV and newspapers which are influenced or controlled by this establishment. In Grillo and Casaleggio's view, the web is going to kill not only the old media, but also the "old" party politics.

This is, ultimately, the goal of M5S: the superseding of party politics in favour of digital direct democracy (Fo et al., 2013: 79; Grillo, 2011). The inadequacy of the Italian political class is made manifest by their inability to use new media and to communicate via the web. For instance, Casaleggio and Grillo report how the Italian president, Giorgio Napolitano, when opening a YouTube channel, deactivated the comment function. Such behaviour is compared to Barack Obama's communication strategies: the speeches of the American president which are posted online always allows users to post comments, fostering rather than limiting the citizens' participation (Casaleggio and Grillo, 2011: 37–8). This demonstrates, in Grillo's view, how much Italian politicians have become out of touch with the web-informed society; how much, in other words, they have been superseded by the digital turn.

Conclusion

The emphasis on change and on the rupture with the past is one of the strongest rhetorical claims employed by politicians throughout the world to win elections and to communicate a positive message to their potential voters (Szarka, 2009; Panizza, 2004). The rise of the 5-Star Movement in Italy is an example of how the rhetoric of political change and the rhetoric of the digital revolution can interact with each other, merging into a unique, coherent discourse. In M5S's digital utopianism, the claim that old media are dead is indissoluble from the claim that the Italian establishment is likewise "dead" and that a political earthquake driven by the movement will erase and supersede traditional parties. The two claims mutually support each other: the establishment is dead because it relies on old media that are destined to become irrelevant; the old media are irrelevant because they are controlled by the establishment and, as a consequence, do not represent Italian citizens.

The examination of the rise of the 5-Star Movement in Italian politics and of its vision on new media, therefore, sheds light on how discourses on digital technologies may be framed in wider political messages. Fully integrated into M5S's political message, the digital turn represents a powerful narrative of change and disruption, centred around the mythical appropriation of the web as the catalyst of revolutionary change. The struggle of the new against the old is represented as a "war" (in Grillo's own words) which takes place at the same time in both the political arena and in the media system. The dynamics of competition between old and new media contribute, in this sense, to reinforcing the vision and the promise of a new political order, based on the abrupt dismissal of what, according to M5S's rhetoric, should belong exclusively to the past.

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Notes

1. Available at: http://www.casaleggio.it/media/video/gaia-il-futuro-della-politica-1.php
2. Available at: http://www.casaleggio.it/media/video/video.php

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