

**"France and the World  
at the Dawn of 2004"  
Report of a Listening Post  
held in January**



**Encouraging The Reflective Citizen**

A synthesis by Gilles AMADO

*The meeting gathered 10 people with a background in social sciences and, for most of them, a psychoanalytic experience. We then realized that in no way our thoughts can be said to reflect French population ones.*

Several themes appeared:

**1. THE POWER OF THE MEDIA**

It appears to be a tremendous power, dangerous in many instances. The main danger may be the selection they make of the information which is likely to please most of the readers/spectators. It deals either with superficial events or data or with the most spectacular ones irrespective of the most important ones around the planet. For example information about hunger, misery, day-to-day difficult conditions of life, especially in the poorest countries (i.e. Africa, India, . . .) are not dealt with accurately. Moreover, the medias prefer spectacular dramas to creation, limited but meaningful experiences of development and growth. Then they contribute to create a world (in the mind and in reality) which is both superficial and threatening.

**Interpretation**

The links between the media and economic and political forces pushes them to give people the most rewarding info. Financial people want audience, politicians want votes. At the psychological level, it resonates with the unconscious voyeurism drive, being itself some sort of projection of the inner intrapsychic conflict between life and death instincts. It deals also with infantile dependency needs (to be told what is true, what the world is about ,. . .) instead of actively searching for reality through real experiences and accurate data.

**2. THE FEELING OF HELPLESSNESS**

Especially vivid through the disaffection for political parties, corrupted, inaccurate, it leads to some sort of inertia and passive aggressive reactions.

## **Interpretation**

Such a feeling of helplessness can be considered as a defence against action and engagement, especially if we accept that social and political reality is made of social movements and is built today through the energy of lots of associations, therefore thanks to the courage of everyone to take his part in the construction of the future. We live in a world of complaints whilst we have all opportunities to act.

### **3. MASSIFICATION, PSYCHOLOGIZATION, INDIVIDUALISM**

We are confronted to a double movement of massification and individualism. Not only globalization is linked to the first one but also the new norm of being oneself, being in charge, being responsible, at any level of the hierarchy seems to drive the social life. The technical expertise does not seem to be enough nowadays, one has also to be psychologically and behaviorally "correct", i.e. both dynamic and listening, assertive and cooperative, etc . . .

The pressure on the self has never been so strong, leading to the "fatigue" of being oneself (see Ehrenberg), stress, depression and moral harassment upon those who don't fit with the new requisite behavioural models and expectations. Such a process reminds us of the reflexions of George Orwell and Hanna Arendt with a potential big brother over them. People therefore try also to find their way individually in all sorts of personal development workshops, more or less esoteric, and often encouraged by the organizations. The psychologization process of the "political" has never been so clear.

## **Interpretation**

It's hard to resist such massive pressures and we all know what group think (Janis) and totalitarianism mean for each of us. Nevertheless, voluntary slavery (La Boetie, 1668!) also exists as a potential risk in anyone, the desire to be led, conform, etc. In many ways, what is attacked in each of us is the process of individuation (see Margaret Mahler). The massified individual is the opposite of the individualized person, the one who has what Winnicott calls the capacity to be alone (in the presence of others).

### **4. THE COMING BACK OF FANATISM, RELIGION AND SECTARIAN GROUPS**

Even if we have to distinguish ethically such phenomena, they may figure the print of the beginning of this century.

## **Interpretation**

Such a movement may come out of the disenchantment and somehow bursting out of classical , social structures like ideologies, family and so on. We know, through the Kleinian approach (see also Isabel Menzies & Elliott Jaques) that social structures are a defence against psychotic anxieties. Is the schizo paranoid phase of development re-enacted through the explosion of social structures?

It seems more than reasonable to think this way. A consequence of this is that people would tend to find simple answers to complex problems, follow all sorts of charismatic and perverse leaders and gurus and abandon their free will in order to be able to give meanings to their lives. The access to the depressive phase would be easier for the most

educated people (even if this is not generalized - see the belonging of doctors, lawyers, etc to sects ) therefore increasing the gap between social classes.

Freud wanted the city to be governed by a sort of elite made of wise people, aware of themselves and of the complexity of the world (see *Malaise in civilization*). This somehow 'antidemocratic' position seems accurate but far from being accepted if we observe the number of countries which are governed by authoritarian and even tyrannic leaders.