

**"Italy and the World
at the Dawn of 2010"
Report of a Listening Post
held in January**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Initially the associations in Part 1 were of a coordinating nature (that happened to me too...) but they quickly became contrasting (yes, but...). The wealth of themes proposed in the first part of the discussion made it difficult to identify the main topics.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In the second part of the session, the group was divided into three subgroups who each produced a highly articulate summary. As a result, the convener proposed examining two topic areas that seemed to encompass many of the ideas that had arisen in the first part: firstly, mistrust and fear; secondly, the need for simplifications and summaries and the concurrent difficulty of elaborating them and sharing/accepting them.

1. the mistrust/ fear *continuum*

This topic emerged clearly in the early phases of part 1, and it developed into a series of brief stories of everyday life: episodes of surprise and disappointment as a result of unexpected and unpleasant reactions; or impolite manifestations of unreliability or gratuitous anger. The most common feelings voiced by the group were embarrassment caused by contradictions between their ethical-political choices and their real life experiences. This perplexity was heightened by fear of an incomprehensible violence that seems to be lying just beneath the surface, ready to erupt at any moment.

After considering minor cases of fraud committed by both Italians and foreigners, the group brought up the immigrants' riot in Rosarno, Calabria and the xenophobic manhunt that followed. The question that seemed to organise the group thinking was: where does this disturbing episode fit into my representation of the world?

In answer to the uneasiness provoked by such a serious social emergency, someone suggested that it is not impossible to decide where to place the blame. Calabria has been controlled by criminal organizations for a long time. In addition, there's no doubt who is to blame in the dispute between the judges and Berlusconi. Nevertheless, there are many contradictions: we 'normal' citizens too have little respect for the law; and minority communities and dropout groups don't do enough to integrate themselves. Lastly, it is not only the non-EU immigrants who scare us: Italians also commit inconsiderate and frankly illegal acts.

2. exhausting and ineffective search for certainties: confusion

The other emerging topic is the difficulty found in establishing one's own identity. The group admitted that it's unclear what it means to be Italian: which values make us Italian, and which characteristics express who we are? The image which was initially

used to represent the problem is a high fence that clearly distinguishes between what is personal and familiar, and what is considered distant and essentially alien. In the emotional background of the group, there was also the problem of the weakness and vulnerability that aging inevitably brings with it. Faced with the changes that the world proposes/imposes, the old people conjured up in the story of one of the participants close their shutters at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Does this mean we are a country of oldies?

The first part ended with the story of another episode of seemingly unmotivated fear followed by an incomprehensible explosion of violence. One of the participants described how her initial self-criticism at what she supposed was prejudice turned out to seem grounded. She was afraid of a group of punks with their dogs, but critical about her feelings. Then a sudden brawl threw a different light on her way of thinking.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In the third part of the session, the group worked on the material from both the first and second parts and tried to analyse the conscious and unconscious dynamics that prevail today. Despite repeated reminders of both the method and the *primary task*, the group had great difficulty both remembering the emerging topics and formulating relatively ordered hypotheses. In this part of the Listening Post, the participants worked in more or less the same way as they had in the first part of the session (free associations), only in the second part, when they were divided into smaller groups, were they able to produce something different. Back in the larger group the participants were no longer able to collectively coordinate their thoughts. For this reason the hypotheses proposed here rather than being the *group's* ideas are ideas elaborated subsequently *about* the group. The overall hypothesis is that some influential psychosocial factor hindered the working of the group. The emotional atmosphere was lively, even excited: an emotional climate that could be defined as anti-depressive or excited (a dysphoric and/or hypomanic state of mind).

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

the mistrust/ fear continuum

Analysis: The group's initial reaction to proposing fear as an emerging topic was that it didn't summarize their real feelings. According to this critical thought, the topic that should be considered was not so much fear as mistrust: excessive and unmotivated suspicion of others.

The mistrust/fear *continuum* was related to a pervasive and painful identity crisis, which was perceived in such a way that could refer to various hypotheses (which, however, remained implicit, individual or unexpressed). Fear can be explained by the loss of status. Fear is fear of ourselves: of what moves inside us. We are afraid of taking positions and of defining ourselves. The 'others' who unsettle us are foreign domestic servants: the outsiders we find in our homes. We have difficulty creating order in such physically and emotionally small spaces, crowded by increasingly unusual and heterogeneous people and things.

Hypothesis: Unconscious feelings of guilt (foreigners look after our houses and our parents, as we are no longer capable of looking after them ourselves), and a pervasive and disarming impression of impotence hinder the development of the elaboration processes and mental reorganisation.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

exhausting and ineffective search for certainties: confusion

Analysis: The search for synthesis is recognised as an understandable need for new certainties. However there is no leader able to act as guarantor in this process, and the search is not able to produce widely shared beliefs. Something makes it difficult to accept the very thing that is seen as necessary.

Democratically and politically open ideas don't stand up when they are compared with immediate experiences. Politically opposed ideas are, however, ideological clichés established by ideologies that are in no way new: they are spread with disturbing effectiveness by the one-way propaganda of the media (almost all owned by the premier: it's interesting to note that Berlusconi was named very few times: the powerful Unnameable).

Hypothesis: New, effective containers are anxiously being sought (authorities; cultural, ideological, political containers), but the mental cost of the containment process is not accepted (as it requires choices, decisions and the construction/acceptance of authority and limits).

The young people complained how difficult it is to find a partner and maintain long-term.

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