

**"France and the World  
at the Dawn of 2012"  
Report of a Listening Post  
held in January in Paris**



**Encouraging The Reflective Citizen**

**Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

**Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

In Part 2 the aim was for us to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. We have outlined three themes that make up three stages in a single process.

**a. Crisis (?)/ repetition/ combination of events/ end of a system**

We observe a basically identical sequence of events in situations that seem to be quite separate from each other. An event takes place, it is experienced as a devastating explosion, then things seem to calm down, and the shock wave comes along showing the scale of the damages that seems to signify the end (the ruin) of the system in place.

- Finance-economy-social: Can we really talk about a crisis when the same events repeat and amplify themselves? If the 2011 financial crisis doesn't have the same origin (sovereign state debt) as that of 2008 (collapse of the housing bubble), it is the repetition and the amplification of its effects on the economic and social world (mass layoffs at banks; unemployment, impoverishment of the poorest, enrichment of the most wealthy...).
- Nuclear tsunami incident: following other tsunamis and nuclear incidents, an earthquake combined with a tsunami, which was followed by a major nuclear incident the ravages of which went above and beyond the normal devastation of a tsunami. We talk intensely about Fukushima and then there is silence.
- The DSK incident follows this same logic of repetition: his compulsive sexual behavior combined with his political ambitions lead to his downfall, which has major consequences for him and for France.
- Relations in a family have been severed for a long time. A period of mourning gives the illusion of reconciliation, but people inevitably repeat the behaviors that lead to a new, more dramatic rupture.

- Children in great distress (lack of family support, lack of roots, academic difficulties...) involved in an experimental caring system with psychoanalysts, and neither the adults nor the children are able to contain the children's violence (against themselves, adults, the system). The experiment has been definitively cancelled.

#### **b. Oppositions, contradiction, conflicts, paradox**

- The economic system crumbles, but the people present that evening maintain basically the same way of life, although not only they are conscious of the system's ruin, they are glad about it.
- For one participant, who has a small business, the crisis is actually an opportunity to try new things differently.
- It seems that technologies are not destructive in themselves: it's way they are used. For example, the events in the Arab world were made possible by social networks on mobile phones.
- It is stated that nuclear are not safe and we continue to build them.
- Despite her very feminist positions and her sensitivity to the issue of women's sexual subordination, one person was moved by the downfall of DSK.
- At French business schools (which, in a certain way) participate to the collapse because of their teaching), teaching and pedagogical experiments that incorporate issues of ethics, SR, and durable (sustainable) development are developed.
- One university professor was shocked by the cowardice of his colleagues (refusal of engagement) while Tunisians were putting their lives in danger (engagement and courage) during the 'Arab Spring'.
- Politics has disappeared in favor of economics. Politics has become the politician (disappearance of the common good in favor of the profit an extremely small number of individuals).
- Counter to a more and more global economy, local systems of production and commercialization are developing.
- In Syria in particular, men and women go into the squares risking their lives (thousands are dead) along with their children in order to reclaim their right to live there.
- And while everything is going badly, the crumbling of this world causes a certain satisfaction, optimism, and hope for many people in the group.

#### **c. Energy and engagement; the appearance of new 'stes' where speech is important**

- Stephen Essel's short book has sold many hundreds of millions of copies and created a quasi-planetary movement ('les indignés', 'los indignatos,' 'Occupy

Wall Street’).

- Politics (common good, living together, the inclusion and non-inclusion) seems once again concerned with living together and the common good.
- People are taking back speech in Egypt, in Tunisia, in Libya, in Syria, in totalitarian countries where a few oligarchs had confiscated liberties.
- ‘Les indignés,’ ‘los indignatos,’ ‘Occupy Wall Street,’ are reinventing the agora: they are the group building bonds to talk, to reflect. Their preoccupation is not with action, it is to talk, to exchange, to build bonds, rather than be in the thick of the action.
- Sites (squares: Tahir in Cairo, plaza Puerta del sol in Madrid, Wall Street) become symbols of the emergence of the political.
- ‘Strangely’, there is no square in France.

### Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their ‘psycho’ or ‘internal’ world, their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

#### Analysis and Hypothesis 1

##### *a. Crisis/ repetition/ end of a system, of a world/ paralysis*

**Analysis:** The events identified, whether they are financial, technological, social, or natural, grow in magnitude with each repetition. Finally, they reach such a paroxysm that they surpass the limits that define them. Their magnitude and surpassed limits mean that they join together and compound each other, contaminating not only nearby environments but also those farther away (the financial crisis is global and is becoming an economic crisis, Fukushima’s pollution has reached American coasts, we’ve found irradiated food from Japan in Europe...).

Not only has the system become uncontrollable, but the combination of globalization, internationalization, and virtuality does not allow us to represent the complexity of the system; thought becomes impossible in the moment and sometimes even after the fact.

Very few in charge of parts of the system played at being ‘sorcerers’ apprentices’, seized by the ‘folly of potency’ (*folie d’emprise*)<sup>1</sup>; they let themselves be taken over by their fantasy of all-powerfulness and by their paranoia. Their greed means that they have an interest in the system as it is, worsening in its dysfunctions, losing all moral compass.

On the other side there is rampart to protect people (the citizens); their indifference, their individualism and their depoliticization, their blind confidence in the future (things

will work out in time), their cynicism (this doesn't have to do with us) expose them to the destructivity of the dominants.

**Hypothesis:** It is the question of limits, of excessive drives, of the dis-intrication of the life and death drives, and of the disappearance of the object in play. Everything occurs as if there is only 'pure drive' that cannot find any object. The death drive governs. It seems to be the desobjectalizing (*la pulsion de mort désobjectalisante*)<sup>2</sup> death drive going about its destructive work described by André Green.

## **Analysis and Hypothesis 2**

### *b. Oppositions, contradictions, conflicts, paradoxes*

**Analysis:** More than half the participants surprised themselves by making statements in which we heard hope and optimism even while the events discussed were very dark. Like a relief to survive, to be alive despite everything.

This doesn't make sense to them. It is an incomprehensible statement.

**Hypothesis:** We find the split, which characterizes the border-line structures, built on opposition, contradictions, and paradoxes. In order to protect themselves from the death drive and its ravages, this is projected onto the hyper-profiteers, the mad scientists. The life drive is also projected outside of themselves searching new objects in order to introject them and the re-introjecting life drive.

This also brings to mind the mourning process. Passing through the sideration phase linked to the loss of the object (the neo-liberal society), and depression (which we covered many times in past years), people live as survivors with a certain guilt (towards those who did not make it). However, this is also represented as the potentially freedom of having disentangled oneself from moribund bonds.

## **Analysis and Hypothesis 3**

### *c. Energy and engagement, the appearance of new 'sties' where voicing is important*

**Analysis:** These eruptions of life are very unexpected. One person proposed an analysis of the situation in terms of paradox. Paradoxical situations, contrary to what is traditionally said (Bateson, Watzlawick), do not create paralysis and sideration, but can be sources of energy.

However, we note that the same actors are no longer center stage. They are now those who were excluded, the speechless, who rebuild bonds between themselves and make themselves seen to those who excluded them. Their objective is not to move into action and take power.

The whole world has taken to looking them (and maybe hearing them).

The words give back meaning to those who the system has knocked out, left without a voice.

However, the Egyptian experience (power seized by the military) and the Tunisian experience (power seized by Islamists), and the 'Occupy Wall Street-ers' invited to

Davos (recuperation? Dialogue? Will they accept the invitation?...time will tell) make us remark that this is very fragile and can be won back new powers (dominants ?).

**Hypothesis:** The chaos of the world created a momentary dis-intrication of drives; the disinvestment in the old objects created interstices where the effects could emerge, allowing in turn that speech having to do with other found its place. A sublimation process was able to happen in these sites (as can happen in the analytical space).

**Convener: Maryse Dubouloy**

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1. Gillibert, J. (1982). De l'objet pulsionnel de la pulsion d'emprise. *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*(6), 1211-1243.

2. Green, A. (1984). *Pulsion de mort, narcissisme négatif, fonction désobjectalisante*. Paper presented at the Premier Symposium de la Fédération Européenne de Psychanalyse, Marseille.