



## Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

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

In this part of the Listening Post we were invited to identify, contribute, and explore our experience in our various social roles. This part of the evening was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to our social context.

### Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was for us to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. The following represents some of these themes.

#### a. Genuine radical change, discoveries

Radical change is here: a real break, a change of paradigm. The accumulation, diversity and intensity of change experienced by the participants is what makes them say that we are facing a new paradigm for society.

It is important to note that there is surprise, and in some cases wonder...often followed by more ambivalent feelings, as we shall see below. This radical change can no longer be expressed in terms of the crisis:

- The 'crisis' has been going on for too long: they've been hearing about it continuously for 40 years. What we're talking about tonight must be considered a change in society
- that is causing a lot of past things to disappear: spelling, traditional lectures, certain teaching disciplines;
- it is imposed on us, we have no choice

The various forms of this radical change

- The presidential elections: they consider it the first time there have been primaries, democratic debate, a different discourse all at the same time...
- Large number of births (3 people felt the need to say, unprompted, that they had become grandparents for the first time and for 3 several people they are very close to had had babies), which appears difficult to understand given the chronic pessimism of the French (France has the highest birth rate in Europe). People are bringing different children into a world that is already very different, and will be even more different in the future. This procreation does not signal reproduction.
- Globalisation in our own lives (a Frenchman has married a Cambodian woman).
- Discovery of sign language, communicating without speaking or writing, looking attentively at the other person.
- The discovery that manipulating some people's narcissism can be effective (for a young manager).
- Discovery of the feeling of pride at creating jobs.
- Discovery of the pain of stopping work, and undoing bonds built up over more than thirty years.

At the source of this change of paradigm : the 'digital natives' or '*petites Poucettes*' in the words of French author Michel Serres (Serres, 2012).

- 'Digital natives' are very different from previous generations.
- They have never known a world without internet.
- They aren't a generation born 'with' all things digital, they live 'in' the new technologies.
- They are in the here and now (or more accurately, 'heres', because they are simultaneously in the real and the virtual world).
- They receive information and emotions every 3 seconds.
- They aren't concerned about the future of society, because they don't imagine it.
- They have jobs that previous generations hadn't even imagined.
- They are often small freelancers, they 'create' their professional life.
- They expect nothing of other people.
- Their window is Windows.
- Disconnected from the real world (the website most often consulted is the weather site, pilots can no longer navigate visually).
- They have become our contacts (even if some of them are still our students), whereas they used to be our children.
- They will soon be in power but will certainly have to face resistance from people 'who don't get it' but are already in place.
- And they are beginning to have children of their own.

On the other side is everybody else

- Contrary to digital natives, those people may be aware (to varying degrees) of the reality of the current situation (economic crisis, moral crisis, arrival of new forms of communication, new forms of violence, etc) but lack power in their capacity to express this, and especially to change it.
- The ones in control, with the power, can feel they have lost their legitimacy,
- Finance and money have become the norm for most of them.

#### **b. Emptiness, lack, vacancy, absence**

In counterpoint to or as a consequence of this change, the participants also consider the world around them very empty.

They observe that:

- There are no statesmen anymore;
- Question of the legitimacy of occupying certain positions (teacher, director, etc);
- There is a gap between the discourse/the perceived reality/actions;
- The state, organisations and even businesses are paralysed, waiting for decisions that don't get made;
- Jobs are at risk of disappearing because decisions are not made;
- Difficulty of saying things (Hollande is not good at communicating);
- Feeling powerless and in danger, and to save face and get through, use of lying and manipulation is more necessary than ever;
- Ignorance: we no longer know what to do; doubt over your own knowledge: what is the reality, the truth of a situation? "we're beginners as regards these new realities";
- There's no thinking any more, dogma is all (no questioning of the state budget);
- Reference to the man who thought his wife was a hat, the modern world can be so difficult to understand (this is a very real agnosia);
- Inhibition over risk-taking;
- Modification of the scope of action (retreat into our own little worlds) to avoid despair;
- Non-action "People stay on the sidelines", they are passive;
- Feeling of being 'out', no longer fitting in, being pulled backwards;
- This raises questions of transmission: what will we bequeath to them? What will be of use to them?

### c. Complexity, ambivalence

There is lots of hope and trust in 'digital natives', but at the same time an unvoiced anxiety. Everything is complex but not necessarily in a way that relates to conflict, rather to complexity and ambivalence.

- "We're not worried, they'll think of something, there are ways out of this", "the future is here and it isn't bad", but the ways out appear to be ways towards the future, but also ways they need to follow because they are not among the people who are going to change the world.
- Mythology, idealisation of children, but the participants also mentioned the difficulty of holding the newborn infant, that he would make their life more complicated, and mentioned babies who are shaken, children raped by their parents...
- There is an emptiness, but that means there is space to do things and they tend to trust the new generation, take a positive view of them.
- Reference to Marzano's book *Eloge de la confiance* i.e. In praise of trust: without trust society cannot exist, but trust is dangerous because it involves the risk that the recipient will not be worthy of it (Marzano, 2012).
- There is inertia, but as soon as someone takes an initiative, others are willing to follow.
- It is a difficult transition...but especially for 'them'.

The evening ended with a reading of the serenity prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;  
The courage to change the things I can;  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

### **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

*Impossible reproduction, idealisation of change, between dreams and illusion*

**Analysis:** In response to the inability of today's adult generations (who are generally in power as parents, teachers, managers, etc) to cope with what is seen as a new paradigm, there is a magic expectation: the new generation will change everything. The change currently being experienced does not appear to leave any room for reproduction according to the theories of Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964): the 'digital natives' are more than just a new generation, they are quasi-mutants who are going to dramatically change, and maybe save (economically, socially, politically), a society that is falling apart. The participants are torn between dreams and illusions.

**Hypothesis:** There is great temptation to regress into illusion, to avoid an elusive reality, which they are grasping less and less. Fear and aggression are sublimated into the process of idealising the digital natives.

#### Analysis and Hypothesis 2

*The worrying strangeness of a future that is already present*

**Analysis:** Events suggest that an even more radical change is happening today, due to new technologies and globalisation. But the feeling of a lack of control over the future – which is already present through globalisation, information technologies, etc... means that the generations currently in power no longer understand, are no longer willing or able to act (gaping hole, decision vacuum) and the people who will be in charge of the future (digital natives) are not yet ready (have not yet entered the market, or don't want to do so...)

**Hypothesis:** The current situation relates to the worrying strangeness (*Unheimlich*) of the classroom, colleagues, workplaces, everyone's everyday behaviour. These situations, which are experienced as foreign and incomprehensible although they correspond to familiar things, cause deep anxiety in the people currently 'in power' (parents, professors, managers and directors, etc). These people are losing their points of reference; their knowledge no longer provides a satisfactory, useful support.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 3**

#### *Ambivalence*

**Analysis:** The predominant tone of the evening was cheerful; there was laughter on all sides; trust and hope in the 'digital native' generation was clearly expressed several times. Nonetheless it was perceptible that wherever things are lively and new, there is an underlying absence, emptiness, death. Some of the more senior participants referred to the depressing tone and mourning processes of previous years' Listening Posts. This depression is sublimated in the expression of the serenity prayer.

**Hypothesis:** This ambivalence reflects the depression related to the loss of meaning and power that the current situation represents for most of the LP participants, and raises thoughts of their own disappearance as the new generations rise. It also echoes the depressive position in relation to their aggression towards these young generations who are potentially bringing 'salvation' (see [Hypothesis 1](#)).

**Convener: Maryse Dubouloy**

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[Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. C. \(1964\). \*Les héritiers, les étudiants et la culture\*, Paris: 2dition de Minuit](#)

[Marzano, M. \(2012\) \*Eloge de la confiance\*, Paris: Fayard](#)

[Serres, M. \(2012\) \*Petite Poucette\*, Paris: Le pommier](#)