



An Organisation for Promoting
Understanding of Society

LISTENING POST

Milan (Ariele) at the Dawn of 2019

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part, the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they: in work, unemployed or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, 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 everyday lives': the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

As a premise some few considerations about the group:

All the members were since the beginning eager to share their experience, the expectations from the session seemed to be high and we started in an ambiance relaxed and friendly

At the very beginning of the session one of the members brought in some relevant themes underlining her urgency to share her experience, and the group worked around them for the whole session

Technology, social media and the impact they have on relationships were the main topics discussed in the session. Technological development is having a huge impact on relationships and the way we think to our future, but is our way of thinking adequate to these changes? Are we able to process, metabolize, give new meanings to our being together in the society? Face to these questions, disorientation and confusion seem to be the prevalent feelings experienced by the members

Oddly enough, we didn't touch any socio-political issue, no reference was made to some current events despite the fact some members were deeply involved in social activities (ONG volunteers), a widespread anxiety towards a complex and difficult political situation hovered around the group. Members often referred to particular personal experiences that seemed "not metabolized", problematic, as if they were not able to take a position about some common episodes of their daily life. Sharing those episodes in group sounded therefore like a tentative way to give meanings to those changes in the context they couldn't cope with, as if they were expecting from the group the much needed help to put them into a frame

Eventually, the climate of the group was constantly positive with a high capacity to listening and giving space to the others even when some intervention were redundant on time. No feelings of aggressiveness or refusal were expressed, and the group showed a high capacity of containment, which seemed to be the most important need of the members. At the end they seemed to be highly positively impressed by the LP experience

My impression as a convenor was the group was whirling around the themes in a search for common meanings, going through different phases:

a first regressive phase of disorientation and confusion towards an external context difficult to understand; in this phase the metaphor of "the bubble" emerged

a second phase where the need for attaining major awareness of the events emerged as the possibility to ordering information and settling boundaries between opposites; the metaphor for this phase was "the crossroad"

a third phase in which personal responsibility and ethic became the keystones for taking action; the keyword of this phase is "perspective"

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2, the aim collectively was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

1. IN THE BUBBLE WE FEEL GOOD: disorientation, confusion, defences

Two opposites emotions characterize this phase: the urgency to express owns feelings and a widespread embarrassment for a lack of meanings which are difficult to grasp. People feel abandoned in a menacing reality managed by invisible directors and faceless ghosts. Technology is the invisible enemy that makes us experience a progressive disintegration of the social bonds. We are constantly connected but we are deeply alone, on the one side we have much more freedom than in the past but in reality all the old rules and regulations of living together are close to an end, the last hope for most of people seems to be the taking over of a "strong man" able to re-establish order and law. Face to this increasing sense of disorientation and confusion people tend to close themselves in their individual "bubbles", shutting their eyes to the disturbing reality which is out of control and passively accepting almost everything happens.

... I closed myself in my role of a grandmother, playing with my niece, I can't get myself to be indignant enough to take action.

The bubble contains memories of the youth and childhood, a playful comforting time when everything seemed to be better even if it was not, a time when we had interphones instead of mobile phones.

... I was born in '39, when I was a child we used to play cowboys surrounded by ruins... I did my first experience on marketing at the end of the 50s, when companies where still hiring people easily, never had to struggle to find a job.

... I lived in between the mediatic and pre-mediatic era, I had my first mobile phone when I was 18 years old. At that time only the wealthiest had a computer, I grew up in the south of Italy and we had a lot of relationship, we used to meet up with our friends in

person.

A widespread sense of the end of an order prevails. The stories of personal life told by the members, however, seem to never come to the formulation of new hypothesis about the causes and the effects of change; members feel imprisoned in vague feelings of loss and uncertainty, which cover a deep disconnection between an external order that doesn't match with the internal images. Members seem to experience a "protomental" order made of "naked words" without significance, an undifferentiated state in which is impossible to establish symbolic meanings for things. Staying in the bubble is therefore the easiest thing to do, "in the bubble we feel good", as if we were cradling in an amniotic state that protects us from the sharper shards of reality, consoled by the fact that "the others", an undifferentiated crowd without a name, are the real responsible of our disease.

„Ä¶ what kind of world is this? Is it an evolved world or a rude one?...

„Ä¶ the free meaning of words has lost significance, what we most often hear in TV, in the media, in the streets are only kind of "naked words", „Ä¶ like we were using words without a proper awareness of their meaning, „Ä¶

The metaphor of the bubble ends up evoking the image of a society immersed in a "gaseous state". We are like fishes swimming in "sparkling water", we don't have a full awareness of this though, we share the space with other water molecules, but we do not merge with them (everyone stays in his bubble, we do not find shared words); we are under pressure, subjected to centripetal/centrifugal forces that undermine the equilibrium achieved (widespread aggressiveness), effervescence makes everything more unstable and volatile (difficult to bond).

2. FROM CONFUSION TO DEPRESSION: awareness arises

Taking distance from our well-known world, the world we contributed to build, in which we know how things work, is not an easy task; we are struggling with the speed continuous change requires in order to adjust with our inner world. Which is why we feel disoriented, lost, disconnected, dissociated. Seems like our behaviours were inadequate to grasp the bits of reality, members feel different from the most part of people around them in the daily life, like they were not able to understand what is going on around them in some situations. We are at a crossroad, and we don't know which way we should take.

I feel in anguish, something really different from what I was used to know is happening... things are not moving forward, is a decay of all the things we built in the past, which is something that happens in the history of mankind maybe, there are times in which both the external and the internal orders have to be revised... maybe today is one of this moments, things are happening very fast.

... we are at a crossroad, we could end up like Prometheus in total tragedy, or it could be an extraordinary occasion. What should I go, what should I do, I have no clue, this is for me a big question...

Being or feeling different, however, is not a value but something to beware if we want to avoid the sense of loss and isolation, the split between the inner and the outer reality. Through technology we got used to a virtual world where words are empty of significance, "naked words", and all behaviours are allowed; on the other side, in this

world we also feel omnipotent as long as we can avoid to take responsibility for our actions. But in such a situation the only hope is to stop, to stand and think at what we are doing and why, we have to question ourselves if we want to regain our awareness.

Looking at the social context I believe people are not aware of what they are doing, and they consequently tend to avoid responsibilities... the dismantlement of an old order could be in my opinion an opportunity, but the risk is that this is not happening in a structured way.

People experience change as the signal of the dismantling of an old order that didn't work anymore, and in some ways they feel this change is necessary, they are open to the possibility of a new order; but the risk is to destroy something without knowing what to build up in its place. We very much need "mediators of meanings", but the old ones, government, unions, schools are not doing their job, and the new generations seem to be unable to provide some new thoughts; we don't have a vision of the future, we are just surfing through information and relationships the same way we do in the web, jumping from one site to another, randomly searching for meanings, we are always connected but we never bond. We are living a revolution but we are not prepared to it, we are at the mercy of the events, not leading them, everything we do is reactive instead of proactive. Everything around us seems to be led by some external forces we don't control, as if technology brought us back to a sort of "magic thinking" which is of no help to overcome the sense of loss and isolation we feel. Therefore, staying in the bubble is more comfortable, the easiest thing to do to avoid to face a sharp reality.

We are more connected, always traceable, but we don't bond together... when you go out with friends in the evening, in example, you always have those "social" moments, everybody checking at their phones on the table, like you are in and out at the same time, you always tend to connect to something else.

Is a revolution, nobody was prepared to it... we don't have a real awareness of all the potentialities the social media, instagram, twitter, bring to politics.

3. RESPONSIBILITY, ETHIC, PERSPECTIVE

Face to such a complex, magmatic situation we should try to take distance to the real, in order to be able to regain a certain perspective. We should find new question to pose to ourselves, but we should also recover an optimistic perspective if we want to avoid the suffocating sense of a widespread impotence. Technology is certainly changing the way we relate to each other, but we should also admit it opens up new possibilities to some people that were before completely out of the picture. What are our points of reference today, what does it mean being a person instead only a consumer, where is the boundary between personal freedom and self-determination, the individual and the collective? Social wellbeing is not only an economic affair and we shouldn't take it for granted, social status should not only be related to work, performance and profit. Asking those questions means to get rid of those ghosts of social control hiding under our incapability to take action.

Thinking of bubbles and social networks, I'm not totally negative... if it were not for the internet I would have been still confined in this world of Islamic theology I was raised up, my parents are Iranian Muslims, I myself was living in a bubble... I think bubbles are not far from reality, technology is a justification for our weaknesses, I try to avoid to overuse it.

Technology is going to change the way we relate, for sure... I cannot say how could it be different however, the newborns live in a universe made of technology... we talked about social fragmentation, something which is happening now, something strong, but I don't believe the fault is only connected to technology.

Technology empowers us, should be controlled, but from whom is such a big question.

The positive aspect of our time is that a new way of thinking is developing, in which wellbeing is not only related to money... I believe this is a totally new challenge, to be able to understand and give meaning to new behaviours.

There are no ghosts behind Internet corporation, but human beings with a lot of power in their hands and not much ethic... if we really want to put people first we have to talk about ethic, not business.

Machines will not overwhelm the mankind, I'm positive about our future. From my Master I remember well a Vito Volpe's phrase, "we exist to the extent that we are seen from the others". Maybe we should consider that the use of the media has such an extent because allows the visibility you don't have in the real world, we don't speak to each other in reality, we don't relate, we are not kind enough to ask our mates how do they feel, to listen to people with a message you can send a like, you acknowledge someone.

I often ask myself at what extent you can count on people in reality. My last point is about the use of words, they are meaningless because of we don't seek real experiences, are we really living our lives or not?

Finally, maybe we should simply stop to complain and look into ourselves to recover the awareness and the sense of responsibility that could found a new less individualistic ethic, for a living together not only centred on individual personal wealth.

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In Part 3, the participants were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, 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, participants 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.

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