

REPORT
OF
A LISTENING POST

“SWEDEN AND THE
WORLD AT THE DAWN
OF 2004” - Stockholm (2)

MONDAY 19th JANUARY 2004 from 7.00pm to 9.30pm

**BEHANDLINGSENHETEN AT SABBATSBERG SVÄGEN 1 IN STOCKHOLM,
SWEDEN**

CONVENOR

Britta Högberg

Listening Posts are based on the notion that a group of people meeting together to work in the way described below allows the unconscious expression of some characteristics of the wider social system and the experience of the Listening Post is itself, therefore, relevant to an understanding of society beyond individual and personal preoccupations.

The aim of the Listening Post is to enable participants as individual citizens to reflect on their own relatedness to society and to try to develop an understanding of what is happening in society at this moment.

The Listening post will provide an opportunity for participants to share their preoccupations in relation to the various societal roles they may have. Collectively they are invited to try to identify the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at this time.

REPORT

Part 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening post the participants were invited to identify, contribute and explore their experiences in various social roles. The fourteen participants came from different sectors in society, covering social roles like author, professor, judge, psychotherapist and consultant. Also different ages were represented, however most participants were in their forties and fifties. The opening was a vivid description of a scenario from a high school, which introduced the theme of changes in the Swedish society. There is a deceiving quality in Swedish institutions; things are no longer what you believe them to be. Violence was another preoccupation. Both violence as a solution to conflicts and the increase of unprovoked violence was discussed. Moral ideals like telling and respecting the truth have been abandoned and been substituted by technical ideals. Power and changing boundaries change seem to be in the hands of the whoever decides the rules; total moral collapse; shared responsibility turns into evaporated responsibility. Personal responsibility is viewed in terms of being responsible for all destructiveness in the society, leaving the individual with having to deal with feelings of powerlessness. Feelings of frustration, hopelessness, and the desire to be confirmed were expressed. Experiences of constant lack - lack of contact between generations, lack of identity and space, lack of future, lack of mental health - were identified. Such lack creates passivity, despair and loss of humanity. There is a desperate holding on to the idea that Sweden ought to be like it was 20 years ago; preoccupations with the desire to be confirmed leads to a striving "of being somebody" and encountering the one you in fact is feels humiliating. Feelings of being cheated and victimised were expressed.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

The aim in Part 2 was to collectively identify major themes. Three major themes were identified:

- 1: violence related to the breaking down of boundaries, values, honour, responsibility;
- 2: claiming or occupying an arena as establishing identity
- 3: lack that cannot be defined or described

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS

Analysis and Hypothesis 1.

Analysis: The violence that has emerged lately frightens the Swedish citizens. It seems related to the breaking down of the role of citizenship. This in turn seems to be related to a lack of authority in our institutions. Virtues like truth and honour have lost its influence and have been substituted with a form of technical ideology. This is expressed in strategies to reach individual goals, hence neither shame nor pride serve collective interests any longer. All responsibility is personal which put pressure on the individual and makes him/her feel

trapped. Finding a way out of this trap is exhausting. There are constant efforts to adapt, constant search for confirmation and a constant source of disappointment. Exhausted, the individual turns passive, gives up and feels doomed to loneliness. As all responsibility is personal, you can only blame yourself and the choices you have made. At the same time, the search for somebody to blame goes on. The paradox of feeling personal responsibility for overwhelming forces beyond your control pushes the citizens into a regressed state. This is probably a consequence of the denial of the changes that are taking place in the Swedish society. Realising that Sweden, by its relation to the world, has been thrown out of its paradise of security and neutrality is avoided. Thus the identity of taking a part in a good, decent society has been lost in a rupture of violence and corruption.

Hypothesis: The Swedish people have rested in its trust and dependency of the state. The national identity has been based on the notion of trustable, honourable politicians and civil servants. Violence, corruption and perversion within the boundaries of the Swedish society surfaced when Sweden broke its isolation. Defending against destructiveness by denying it is no longer an option. This is a narcissistic blow to the Swedish identity, individual as well as collective, which evokes a narcissistic rage that is channelled in the role as victim. As such, it is a matter of surviving and primarily serving your own interest (basic assumption: dependency transformed into basic assumption: me).

Analysis and Hypothesis 2.

Analysis: The Israeli ambassador attacked an installation of art at the History Museum. The exhibition was related to a conference on genocide that was going to start in Stockholm a week after the opening of the exhibition. Inviting artists to participate in a international event like this can be seen as an attempt to bring creativity and vitality into the “protocols”. There is a sense of something missing and the government turns to the artists to fill the gap. The idea of domesticate art might be naïve. However, it exposed a general trend of claiming of physical and symbolic territory. Gangs of young people are claiming different parks at night, finding physical or symbolic niches appear to be a way of forming an identity. The dichotomy of them-us appears at different levels, also in terms of differences between real and fiction, good and bad, friend and enemy.

Hypothesis: Changes of boundaries and break-down of institutions brought a loss of identity and uncertainty to institutional as well as to personal levels. The hyper rationality (protocols) of planning and evaluation is a social defence against the vulnerability produced by the loss of identity. This undermines a sense of belonging; defining and claiming territory is a primitive way of restoring a sense of belonging (basic assumption: fight)

Analysis and Hypothesis 3.

Analysis: The desire to “be somebody” leads to the loss of contact with the real self and causes confusion and fear. To “be somebody” can be understood as a wish for personal authority, which could be seen as the foundation of social relating. This leads to an increasing inability to take up adequate which leads to a loss of competence when performing role-related tasks. This stimulates the pain of not being able to reach another person. This pain is

avoided by keeping all social curiosity at bay. However, the holding back turns anger into depression and a vicious circle is established. Interpersonal relations also become difficult because of the rivalry of setting the agenda of interpretation. This appears between generations. People from different generations seem more disconnected than ever before. The generation born in the forties feels deprived of their future, which might be a combination of the pension system, the break down of the welfare state and a generation that always have refused to grow old. The younger generation feels deprived of the comfort and challenge that seniority bring them. Concerns about children and future parenthood emerge. There are signs that being able to stay home with the children is new status symbol, something for those who can afford it.

Hypothesis: Experience of depression and deprivation is related to lack of adequate boundaries and to personal and institutional authority. The murder of the Swedish foreign minister made this pain acute. She represented hope concerning building international relations and a future society. Unconsciously there are concerns regarding the connection between social undercurrents and the murder. Related to this, is the fear that the future of Sweden died with Anna Lindh. The trauma has to be denied and the society is left with in disillusion that separates rather than mourning that connects. (basic assumption: pairing).