

Extrait du School forging new paths

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# Charles Rojzman, a psychotherapist listening to the police

- English - Prevention of violence -

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## "An Active Pessimist"

For the first time, Charles Rojzman accepted the presence of a movie camera inside one of his *social therapy* sessions: an experimental training program designed for trainers in the police academy. The experience, as troubling as it was astonishing, has as its goal helping policemen rebuild relationships with the hostile populations of the inner cities (fr. *quartiers*). Between role plays, self-awareness, questioning of institutions and meetings with invited guests from the *quartiers*, the Rojzman method opens the path for "knowing how to live together." Here are the psychotherapist's explanations:

Question: How did this project come about?

After reading an article in *Le Monde* [major national French newspaper] in 1998, the director/producer Bernard Mangiante contacted me: he wanted to film my work. In Spring 2000, I convinced the Minister of the Interior to introduce my method in the police training academies. Bernard and I then agreed to do this film featuring the police: we thought that relationships between the police and people in the *quartiers* was of some import.

Q. It's the first time that your work has been filmed. What prompted you to accept it?

The urgency and necessity of making my work public, and more broadly available. I am also aware of the influence that the media can have on politicians.

Q. How did the policemen accept the presence of the film camera?

At first, without too many problems. We were able to create a climate of trust among some trainees. But the filming was punctuated by a questioning about their careers, the image they would give their colleagues. Sitting around a table while others are "in the front lines" was not always easy. They started to be afraid that it would look like this documentary was mocking the daily difficulties of the police.

Q. Were the policemen who participated volunteers?

Not all of them. At any rate, my usual pattern is to work with people who are not necessarily volunteers. If they send me volunteer policemen who are interested in preventive measures or who are not on the front lines, that's not especially interesting to me. Clearly, they're not going to send me policemen who [are violent]. But those are the interesting ones. It's always astonishing to see how people can become transformed. And it's this work on oneself that must push our archaic institutions toward change. The more people suffer from this "sick" system, the more they make others suffer. For the young people of the *quartiers*, it's the same: since they can't attack all the causes of their suffering, they go right to the weakest links, those with whom they develop a relationship of power and domination. In these ways, the foundations of vicious circles are built: the more violence there is toward the police, social workers, or teachers, the more the latter react through rejection, fear, lack of understanding, and at times, hate. This is a terrible dynamic from which we need to find a way out, before it's too late. As an "active pessimist," I am very concerned by what's happening.

Q. From the beginning of the [training] experience, the policemen already seem to show a lot of self-critique...

I should explain that we didn't film the policemen in linear fashion. In terms of the time spent, there were three days of training during which we worked to create the group so that each member could express themselves freely. The example of the role play is especially revealing of this prior work [and the formation of the group]: the policemen are able to reflect on their own attitudes [toward the people in the *quartiers*] that provoke them, and subsequently they are able to explain these attitudes and reactions. The goal of this work is also to help the police officers react better in a crisis situation.

Q. And does that happen?

I think so. This kind of process works perfectly with individuals who manage to stop themselves from seeing others as [the devil], and acquire the capacity to see how their own behavior contributes to the violence. On the other hand, it's more difficult to transform the ways organizations work. But that's the goal. It's not a matter of doing therapy with some policemen, rather it's a matter of changing organizations and, beyond that, changing a society that we could call "sick".

Q. How do we transform organizations?

To bring about these changes, one should do the same work with those who are in leadership positions in the hierarchy. This is a difficult task because they position themselves as victims and don't experience the need to question themselves [and the situation/organization]. Contrary to what we believe, those at the top are not conscious of the reality of these dysfunctions. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy often don't dare show how they experience reality, for fear they will be labeled incompetent but also because they know that the higher ups won't be able to resolve their problems. The inspector from the academy doesn't know what happens on the ground, the manager of a low-income housing complex doesn't talk about what he goes through every day with the director of his agency who, himself, doesn't explain his everyday to the higher ups in the administration. Everyone lies. In our cultural system of education, we learn to make believe that we are in control of everything. And problems become huge. Faced with these feelings of powerlessness, violence becomes the solution. I imagine how these types of situations can degenerate and lead to collective catastrophes.

Q. What are your "solutions"?

Today, people can't find answers to the complex problems of our society on their own. For me, the only solution of collective intelligence. One needs to be able to appreciate a situation, and qualities of self-listening and self-affirmation. The experience consists in creating an environment in which all those who are concerned about a problem can participate in a discussion, voicing their truths, and sharing information. But today, that collective intelligence doesn't exist: the policemen remain among policemen, the youth stay among youth, and let's not even mention the closed borders of ethnic groups.

Q. Today, is the balance sheet of "active pessimism" on the positive side?

Absolutely. I am not pessimistic about this work itself, but about the ways the system may evolve, especially politically. On the other hand, my optimism is based on individuals, who have an enormous potential for change and transformation.

*Post-scriptum :*

*Translated from French by Novella Keith.*