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Alternative view of segmented documents via Kairos

14 January 2019 | Draft

Multi-option Technical Facilitation of Public Debate

Eliciting consensus nationally and internationally

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Produced on the occasion of [Act IX](#) of demonstrations by the *Gilet Jaunes* (Paris, 2019), immediately prior to the launch of a *Grand Débat National* by Emmanuel Macron

Introduction

At the time of writing, the French government of Emmanuel Macron is about to engage in a three month *Grand Débat National* (January-March 2019). This is being instigated around the country as a means of clarifying issues raised by the remarkable uprising of the *Gilets Jaunes* ("Yellow Vests"), widely publicized world wide. This exceptional process, whose organization is yet to be fully clarified, is seen as enabling all citizens to submit their grievances and suggestions locally, to be further clarified regionally and nationally, with the expectation that a degree of consensus will emerge. This is anticipated by the authorities as a guide to future governance.

Although it is readily assumed that there are precedents for the successful organization of such processes, it is far from clear that this is the case. The development of social media has suggested other possibilities but these too give rise only to limited consensus on specific issues. Such coherence, whilst it may be acclaimed as successful, has as yet to prove adequate to the challenges. Consensus and unity may themselves call for new thinking as separately argued (*Comprehension of Unity as a Paradoxical Dynamic*, 2019).

Popular assemblies (or people's assemblies) of different scope have been organized or proposed in the past, including those seen as a complement to the formal processes of the UN General Assembly -- possibly in anticipation of a **United Nations Parliamentary Assembly**. Some have been associated with uprisings (Sveinung Legard, *Popular Assemblies in Revolts and Revolutions*, *New Compass*).

Over the years, some use has been made of **groupware technology** to facilitate such events, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the size and ambitions of the event -- and the availability of such technology (*History of Participant Interaction Messaging 1979 to 1995*, 2007). The latter notes early experiments at large-scale events: UN **Earth Summit Global Forum** (Rio de Janeiro, 1992); **Parliament of the World's Religions** (Chicago, 1993); **World Futures Studies Federation** (Turku, 1993), **United Nations Environment Programme**, Infoterra Meeting (Moscow, 1979). These were all severely constrained by the technology of the time, as with a seminal predecessor organized at a meeting of the Society for General Systems Research (London, 1979), as described separately (*Metaconferencing: discovering people / viewpoint networks in conferences*, 1980).

It is however remarkable that little attention is given to such possibilities in recent and future events, now that the relevant technology is so widely available. Participants may however make use of social media facilities independently of any facilities which may (or may not) be offered by event organizers. Ironically some elite events, such as the annual **World Economic Forum** in Davos, make heavy use of such technology to facilitate networking, whereas only the most limited use is made of facilitative technology at the **World Social Forum** -- as the people's counterpart.

It could now be said that social media and their many online fora already provide a degree of approximation to what might be possible on a different scale and with greater ambition. Despite its availability in various forms, what is however striking is the modest use made of such technology to facilitate public debate -- or even to discuss the possibility of using it (as suggested by [Global Sensemaking](#)). A notable feature in the past has been the relative disinclination of many participants to make use of any such modality provided. This tendency has been modified by the widespread use of social media during the course of formal events, whether or not this is encouraged by the organizers. However this trend has been modified by the vastly greater importance now attached to social media communications -- whether or not participants seek to gather physically at any time.

Any consideration of alternative modalities would appear to call for far more explicit recognition that fora of most kinds respond to the desire of participants to talk or "network" -- whether in face-to-face situations or via social media. Critics of the French *Grand Débat* have already noted that it will enable much discussion but offers only the crudest facilities to enable any clarity or consensus to emerge from the volume of discourse. This could be recognized as echoing the processes of parliamentary assemblies world wide.

Possibilities suggested by the *Grand Débat* in France

The national crisis of democratic representation in France provides a remarkable case study of relevance to such issues in many other countries. This is especially the case in the light of the historic role of France in articulating and enabling democratic processes elsewhere in the world.

Circumvention of suspicion of public authorities? In the case of the French initiative, it is somewhat amazing to note that almost no mention is made of the creation of any government platform to facilitate the processes of the *Grand Débat National*. This is partly explained by the degree to which the *Gilets Jaunes* uprising has been instigated via social media platforms of various kinds with minimal formal coordination between them. There is therefore extreme suspicion of any initiative -- claimed by the government to be for the benefit of the population as a whole -- given the possibilities of covert manipulation by the authorities.

At the time of writing it is alleged that some 70% of *Gilets Jaunes* surveyed consider that the *Grand Débat* is a waste of time, despite the commitment of French authorities -- perceived as covertly exploiting any participation in support of a pre-defined agenda. Increasingly surveys are showing that the *Gilets Jaunes* have come to the realization that the conventional democratic voting process and debate is less effective in eliciting change than demonstrations (Isabelle Sommier, *Gilets Jaunes: L'idée que seule la violence paye est tres présente*, *Libération*, 13 January 2019).

"Battre" vs "Débattre"? As a consequence, in his most recent (and ever stronger) warning to the *Gilets Jaunes*, now explicitly framed as "accomplices" of those deliberately engaging in violence on the occasion of demonstrations, the French Minister of the Interior, [Christophe Castaner](#), used a play on words which is especially meaningful in French (*L'avertissement de Christophe Castaner aux "gilets jaunes"*, *FranceInter*, 11 January 2019). He contrasted the evident tendency to fight (*battre*) with the desirable alternative of debate (*débattre*) -- as offered by the government invitation to the *Grand Débat*. The relation between the two words and processes is the subject of etymological commentary in French (Jean Pruvost, *Battre ou débattre: quand le débat tourne À la bagarre*, *Le Figaro*, 5 May 2017; Nathalie Reinhardt, *Débattre plutôt que de se battre*, *Les Ateliers Gordon*).

A trace of this association in English is of course evident in that engagement in debate is typically recognized as an effort to "beat" the other -- "doing battle" -- preferably non-physically, but physically on occasion. Missing from any such comparison is the sense in which those elected to parliamentary assemblies have typically demonstrated a higher competence in debate. This necessarily places the general population at a disadvantage in any debate, obliging people to explore other strategies.

Any claim by French authorities that the terrain of debate is a level playing field could then be understood as a manipulation of context -- perhaps to be fruitfully explored as an instance of [structural violence](#), or even of [conceptual violence](#). Alternatively it might be asked how the "martial arts" could be more appropriately adapted to debate, given the many martial metaphors used in description of debate and rhetoric (*Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns: reframing the scope of the "martial arts" in response to strategic threats*, 2006).

The extraordinary **investment in mobilization and deployment of the forces of law and order in France (to contain and constrain the *Gilets Jaunes*) merits critical comparison with the seemingly minimal investment in articulation of the *Grand Débat*** and the processes which would enable it to be fruitful.

Perception of complicity? Given the trust deficit, and with the above-mentioned government assertion of the complicity of the *Gilets Jaunes* with those deliberately engaging in violence, the French authorities (and especially the security forces) place themselves in an extremely difficult position. It is in the interest of the security services to frame the *Gilets Jaunes* as negatively as possible in order to erode the sympathy in which they are held by the French public. It is noteworthy the care with which displays are made in the media of dangerous objects -- purportedly seized from demonstrators bent on violence and destruction.

However, having framed the *Gilets Jaunes* as accomplices with such rogue elements, do the security services then invite an accusation that they themselves are complicit with those engendering violence and destruction -- if that violence serves to alienate support from the *Gilets Jaunes*? Otherwise known as [black operations](#), would there be those "rogue elements" within the security services who would see such operations as justified in defence of national security?

The difficulty, for those who have the power to do so, is that they are unable to prove that they have not enabled violent action for such reasons. From the traditional perspective of "*cui bono*", realists and cynics could readily argue that it is actually in the interests of some segments of government to encourage destructive actions in order to discredit any movement for social change critical of government policies.

Registering grievances and suggestions: The organization of the *Grand Débat* process, as currently described, would seem to depend

primarily on the most conventional processes, best caricatured as a variant of the traditional process of suggestion boxes, comment registers, and community discussion groups. No effort is made to address the doubts as to the efficacy of the process as a whole or how the communications might be processed, if at all. The registers are traditionally termed *cahiers de doléances* in French, renamed for the purposes of the *Grand Débat* as *Cahiers de doléances et d'espérances* -- in order to complement grievances with hopes.

However simplistic may appear the process of registering grievances, it is important to recognize the major historical precedent from which this derives in France. This precedent is potentially problematic at this time, given the imperial arrogance with which Emmanuel Macron is now widely associated by members of the public ("*Macron's arrogance unites us*" -- *on the barricades with France's gilets jaunes*, *The Guardian*, 7 December 2018; *Macron's arrogance won him the presidency; the same arrogance will be his demise*, *Prospect*, 4 December 2018).

Questionable historical precedent: At that earlier time the *Cahiers de doléances* were the lists of grievances drawn up by each of the three Estates in France, between March and April 1789, the year in which a revolutionary situation began, leading to the emergence of the French Republic. As noted by *Wikipedia*:

Their compilation was ordered by **King Louis XVI**, to give each of the Estates -- the First Estate (the clergy), the Second Estate (the nobility) and the Third Estate, which consisted of everyone else, including the urban working class, the rural peasantry, and middle class and professional people, who were the only ones in the group likely to have their voices heard - the chance to express their hopes and grievances directly to the King. They were explicitly discussed at a special meeting of the **Estates-General** held on May 5, 1789. Many of these lists have survived and provide considerable information about the state of the country on the eve of the revolution. The documents recorded criticisms of government waste, indirect taxes, church taxes and corruption, and the hunting rights of the aristocracy. (see also *Extrait du Règlement sur les Doléances pour Paris*, 13 avril 1789).

In the cultivation of his "Jupiterian" image (as widely noted), Macron's insensitive remarks can be readily perceived as an imitation of those of the royalty of that period. The notorious "let them eat cake" of **Queen Marie Antoinette** is strangely reminiscent of Macron's response to the impoverished and the unemployed: "just cross the road to get a job", and "the need for effort" (*Pour Emmanuel Macron, "beaucoup trop" de Français oublient le "sens de l'effort"*. *Le Figaro*, 12 January 2019; Pauline Bock, *Emmanuel Macron's most offensive, self-centred and strangest comments in 2018*, *New Statesman*, 21 December 2018).

Explicit possibilities: A striking exception with regard to the current *Grand Débat* in France is the proposal made by Gregory Rozieres (*Les outils qu'il faudrait au Grand débat national pour résoudre la crise des gilets jaunes*, *The Huffington Post*, 2 January 2019). This cites proposals from civil society, made by "open government" and "open democracy" groups. It is unclear whether French authorities have any capacity or inclination to explore such concrete suggestions. [NB: Literally a day before the start of the debate, it was intimated that an internet site would be set up to facilitate it. It has the address www.granddebat.fr and is operational from 21 January]

Widely used variants of the multi-lingual *Wikipedia* platform can be understood as serving as a means of profiling issues and strategic proposals (*Wiki-model for eliciting strategic responses to urgent issues*, 2010). Potentially far more ambitious in scope has been the progressive organization of the online *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* to produce a context for the issues and solutions variously articulated by organizations of every kind -- as profiled in the *Yearbook of International Organizations*. Such projects have as yet to enable or elicit the levels of participation imagined as appropriate to the public debate of a peoples assembly. An early ambition of the *State of the World Forum* can be criticized in that light (*Global Solutions Wiki*, 2010).

In the event of emergency? The challenge is all the greater when the focus is provided by an emergency and the need to focus resources and solutions, as discussed with respect to a specific case (*Enabling Collective Intelligence in Response to Emergencies: illustrated by the case of deep oil spill containment*, 2010). Emergencies will obviously continue to emerge. Particular "preparedness" facilities are of course already in place within specific international frameworks.

It is typically striking to note the lack of coordination between such initiatives. This is even the case when they operate within a larger institutional framework, as may for example be provided by the United Nations with respect to its Specialized Agencies. More problematic is the nature of their organization which may be such as to severely inhibit public involvement -- even when it may well be that civil society bodies are most capable of responding rapidly to emergencies, eliciting resources, and enabling viable solutions.

More problematic is where public participation is solicited as a (cynical) public relations initiative -- with the full intention of ignoring any feedback, other than that which reinforces the pre-determined agenda.

Current multi-platform technical viability and costs

Feasibility? As is widely demonstrated in the case of participative platforms on social media, the costs of setting up a new platform have diminished rapidly over the past decade. The process can be enabled using existing open source software, of which *Wikipedia* offers a prime example. Appropriately, such platforms can be set up "in the cloud". The major difficulties are now those related to choice and ambitions regarding the facilities to be offered by the platform.

The current challenge of the French case offers a means of focusing choices, most obviously with regard to language and various technical options. Just as the *Gilets Jaunes* have been recognized as a new challenge to democratic processes, the manner in which views are gathered and processed will itself be seen as a model for other situations in other parts of the world.

Framed as it is as a national emergency, the French case could be seen as demonstrating with what speed some such facility could be made available -- to match processing of the volume of citizen input that it is expected to elicit. However that processing is done, costs will be incurred. It is probable that these could be reduced by technical facilitation.

Multi-platform viability: Given the concerns and suspicions regarding how any one platform is organized and operated, there is an additional possibility to be considered. Rather than assuming the creation of a single platform for a *Grand Débat*, a case can be made for developing **a mode in which any such platforms (whether specially created or pre-existent) are able to retrieve data from each other** according to protocols which each can define independently. Each platform is then understood to have the independence desired by those organizing, supporting, and using it. The relation to other platforms can be defined by each as (selective) retrieval or exchange (however it may be desired to constrain this).

It is appropriate to note that such a retrieval/exchange facility has long been common practice between many governmental and nongovernmental platforms. It does not necessitate any overall organization or coordination, although this may facilitate some exchange. The process can be organized bilaterally. Some platforms allow content to be downloaded by others as a matter of policy and require no consultation. In the prevailing context of surveillance of social media by corporations and by intelligence agencies, it is of course the case, however, that content is retrieved anyway without any negotiation.

Understood in this way with respect to the French case, **one or more platforms could pool public comments from relevant platforms permitting this**, or from which such retrieval could be negotiated. The collected information could then be tagged and processed according to the priorities and skills of a given platform. Each could engender one (or more) patterns of consensus. These products could be rendered accessible as an option from other platforms.

Benefitting from existing platforms: Arguably this process is already in operation to some degree between some social media fora -- although not recognized as such. As such it could be argued that the quest by French authorities for consensual outcomes can be achieved to a degree during the *Grand Débat*, in anticipation of its outcome. Any consensus is then to be understood as emergent -- usefully to be presented to all participants during the process in order to elicit further comments.

Note that each platform would be able to present its own consensus, whether or not this incorporated insights formulated through other platforms. Any consensus framed by French authorities, whatever criteria were used to order selectively the communications, would then be seen in a context of that emergent through other platforms.

Eliciting insights from the public

"Hearing" vs. "Listening": There is considerable irony to the fact that, since the early experiments with participant messaging, the capacity of the security services to **"listen"** to peoples communications has increased immeasurably -- whether with respect to private citizens or otherwise.

Far less evident, as notably demonstrated in the French case, has been any capacity to process that information into a form from which insight could be derived by authorities -- or by those debating the issues articulated. The point is emphasized in the French case by a widely expressed argument that the authorities have proven unable to **"hear"** what has been widely articulated in the social media, interviews, panel sessions, and opinion surveys.

[Activist organizations](#) and [advocacy groups](#) have developed considerable skill in using platform-based processes to elicit engagement of the population, whether on a narrow range of issues, as with [Attac](#) (which originated in France).

Hearing consumers vs. Hearing citizens: There is further irony to the fact that that the development of marketing skills, whether online or otherwise, now enables corporations **both to "listen" to the public and to "hear"** the views of consumers. This of course involves [data mined](#) from social media discourse (under contract) and analysis of consumer purchases (provided under contract). The procedures have of course been adapted in order to manipulate public opinion in political campaigns, as has been widely publicized.

It is fair to say that a vast range of skills is deployed to elaborate an evolving sense of consensus with regard to desired consumer products. Authorities, as in the French case, are however free to claim that they have no clear idea of what citizens want and no processes in place to determine this -- other than a process of national debate. Insights from opinion surveys are presumably considered relatively irrelevant. Ironically, for example, **there is greater insight into which cheese the public prefers compared to understanding of preferences with regard to taxation.**

It has been the position of the French authorities that unless the public was appropriately organized with duly appointed representatives, no message from the people could be meaningfully "heard". This posture would be especially ironic if France was exposed to a crisis which authorities were unable to recognize because those reporting it were not appropriately qualified. The crisis represented by the *Gilets Jaunes* could be understood to have been just such a crisis.

Effective participation? Currently, as noted above, the process in France involves variants on the suggestion box procedure, notably in the form of "books" kept in the office of town mayors, in which citizens could register complaints and suggestions. There are some 36,000 such offices in France. At the time of writing -- before the start of the *Grand Débat* -- it was indicated that an average of 30 comments had already been registered in 3,000 offices, namely a total of 90,000 comments. The debate will clearly engender many more.

Authorities have proposed that citizens be chosen by lot to participate in focus groups for the final processes of clarification of comments from the wider public (*Grand débat national. Des citoyens tirés au sort pour y participer*, *Le Telegramme*, 21 December 2018).

Technical facilitation of insight capture and processing

Beyond hand-written comments? No mention has seemingly been made as to how the information provided by the public in hand-written form is processed into a form which could be associated with similar comments and analyzed for thematic content. Little

mention has been made of the possibility that some mayors might enable an electronic mode of registering comments, or that people could register such comments from their own homes -- rather than journeying to the mayor's office, possibly in inclement weather and with the possible need to queue (as is currently the questionable requirement for democratic voting, with its associated costs to the public). Given some reluctance by the public to engage with local authorities, no mention is made of the possibility of registering comments through regional or national platforms -- especially since some of the issues are national in nature.

Messaging? Given the extent to which the media now solicit comments by SMS, notably into the Twitter facility, a case could be made for using this as a complementary mode for those who have brief comments to make, or are prepared to submit multiple comments by this means. Consideration could also be given to transformation of comments made in the form of chat-style messages, whether written or verbal.

Transforming hand-written comments: Clearly there are various means for transforming written text into electronic form, possibly ensuring access to the written original (for confirmation). Given the degree of involvement of civil society, it is clearly possible that handwritten messages could be transcribed by volunteers into electronic form. More challenging is the transformation of hand writing into typescript for which some software applications currently offer approximations.

Recording local debates: Since it is intended that the local population should be invited by each mayor to debate together in facilities provided by the mayor, a further question is the extent to which such debates would be recorded, or their contents transcribed, whether via a [minute-writing](#) process or through the stenographic process used in [court reporting](#). This is especially relevant to the extent that it is expected that such debates should elicit some form of consensus, then to be further processed regionally and nationally

Recording debate commentary: A quite remarkable characteristic of the TV coverage of the *Gilets Jaunes* crisis has been the panel sessions and interviews throughout the day over weeks on a single all-news channel [La Chaîne Info](#) (LCI). Views from all perspectives are presented and challenged. These have necessarily been recorded (*24h Pujadas, l'info en questions, LCI*). They invite use of software to transcribe the verbal comments for subsequent analysis of evolution of the crisis and the diverse understandings of it.

Fortunately or unfortunately, observation of many hours of such debate suggest it exemplifies the challenges to be expected in other contexts of the *Grand Débat*:

- competitive discourse, often simultaneous and with each interrupting the other (both being a feature of French debating style)
- frequent repetition of arguments made on previous occasions
- lack of any facility to enable repetition to be recognized or how an argument is evolving
- absence of any effort at summary, or any perceived need for such
- elusive nature of any consensus as conventionally understood -- interest in the process being of greater significance (as with ball-games)

Automatic transcription of debate: [Transcription applications](#) now enable audio recordings to be transcribed rapidly and automatically to provide text for subsequent processing. Examples include: [Dragon Dictation](#), [Happy Scribe](#), [oTranscribe](#), [Recordly](#), [Rev](#), [Sonix](#), and [Trint](#). Little mention is made of such possibilities with respect to conferences in general; none has seemingly been made with respect to the challenge of processing the many debates within the *Grand Débat National* of France.

Clearly the relative use of such tools under particular circumstances calls for evaluation, of which one comparison exercise is described by Ren LaForme (*The best automatic transcription tools for journalists*, *Poynter*, 20 November 2017). This highlighted the value of [Trint](#) which claims to transcribe 12 European languages (including French)

Text analysis and summarization: Potentially more challenging in technical terms (and labour requirements) is the subsequent processing of large quantities of typescript records into more compact form. Most simply, this can include automatic tagging by topic. Of particular relevance to the process of eliciting consensus is how duplicate arguments are to be recognized and consolidated appropriately.

Of great potential relevance is [automatic summarization](#), as briefly described (Jason Brownlee, *A Gentle Introduction to Text Summarization, Machine Learning Mastery*, 28 November 2017; *20 Applications of Automatic Summarization in the Enterprise*, *Fraser*, 17 July 2018). This is the process of shortening recorded text with software, in order to create a summary with the major points of the original document. A simple online text summarization tool is [Text Compactor](#).

Technologies that can make a coherent summary take into account variables such as length, writing style and syntax. and use of text compression applications which endeavour to summarize the contents of a verbose text communication. Such summarization is part of [machine learning](#) and [data mining](#). Note that at each stage the possibility remains of retrieving electronically the communications which contribute to such progressive synthesis.

- Anne Hendrik Buist, et al: *Automatic Summarization of Meeting Data: a feasibility study* (2004)
- Hassan Alrehamy: *SemCluster: Unsupervised Automatic Keyphrase Extraction* (2017)
- Abderrafih Lehman: *Essential Summarizer: innovative automatic text summarization software in twenty languages - ACM Digital Library*. (*Proceeding RIAO'10 Adaptivity, Personalization and Fusion of Heterogeneous Information*, CID Paris, 2010).
- Joel Larocca Neto, et al: *Automatic Text Summarization using a Machine Learning Approach*
- Aakash Sinha, et al: *Extractive Text Summarization using Neural Networks* (*arXiv:1802.10137*, 2018)

The importance of such technology to processing debate is illustrated by an anecdote of conference interpreters, at a time when there was greater dependence on consecutive interpretation (rather than simultaneous interpretation). A speaker at a UNESCO conference spoke for some 20 minutes; the interpreter then spoke for only 2 minutes. The speaker formally protested and the tape record was analyzed to resolve the dispute. Conclusion, the chief interpreter confirmed that the 2-minute summary was appropriate. Many debates are confronted with a high order of verbosity and verbiage which are a major challenge to handle in a politically correct context in which

content is a secondary preoccupation.

Future historians will no doubt make use of such applications to study the evolution of the *Grand Débat* and of the commentary on it so conveniently recorded by

Enabling consensual articulation -- towards a synthesis?

Following the early experiments by Stafford Beer, as indicated above, an articulation of the possibilities can be presented in the following form (*Meta-Conferencing: Integration of the Concept Structure of Debate*, 1992). One initiative towards consensual articulation has been that of the *Dropping Knowledge* project (Berlin, 2006) which made use of a variety of experimental approaches to elicit and record comments presented verbally from a gathering of 100 people -- subsequently rendered accessible through an online facility.

Proposals made at the time for insight capture and processing remain indicative of possibilities which have yet to be further explored and developed (*Complementary Knowledge Analysis / Mapping Process*, 2006). The latter details the following with indication of examples and software (for which more recent variants have no doubt been developed):

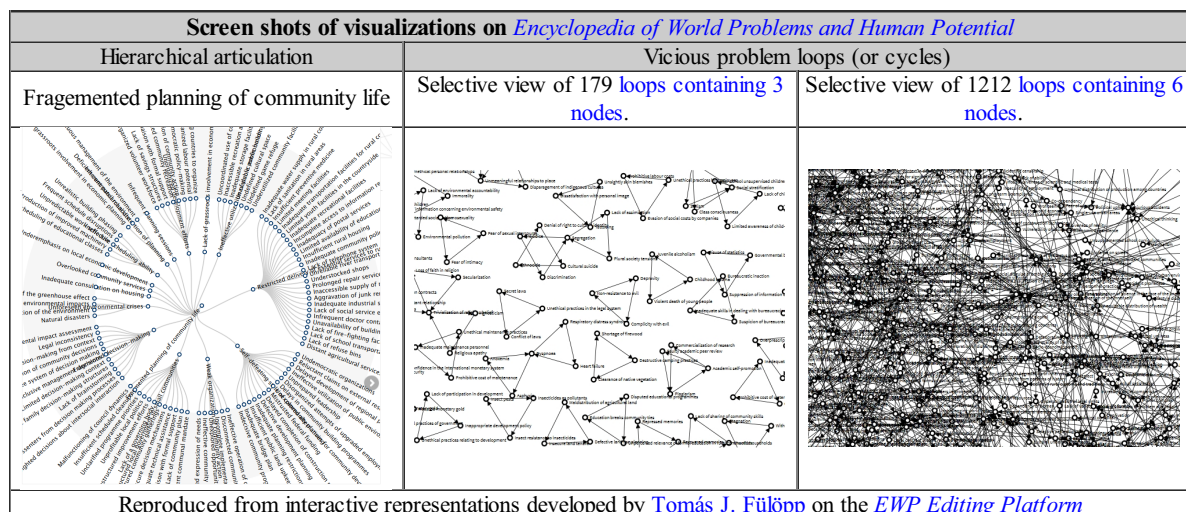
- [real-time transcription](#) techniques -- [computer aided transcription](#) ("CAT") technology to deliver **text** to computer screens within a few seconds of the words being spoken - notably as used at ICANN meetings.
- concept analysis
- [mind mapping](#) / [concept mapping](#) (now a feature of the periodic [Concept Mapping Conference](#))
- "harmonizers" through which a higher level of editing and integration could be allocated to specialists in terminology and language, possibly aided by text analysis / summarization packages
- mapping of all the "voices"

As noted above, potentially far more ambitious in scope has been the progressive organization of the online *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* to provide a context for the issues and solutions variously articulated by organizations and groups of every kind -- as profiled in the *Yearbook of International Organizations*. Somewhat ironically, from the French perspective noted above, the former could be appropriately termed *Cahiers de Doléances et Espérances Mondiales*.

Of particular relevance is the use of software in that context to cluster issues, both in hierarchical and systemic terms -- susceptible to use of visualization over the web. Many further possibilities remain to be explored, as can be variously argued:

- [Eliciting a Universe of Meaning -- within a global information society of fragmenting knowledge and relationships](#) (2013)
- [Encycling Problematic Wickedness for Potential Humanity](#) (2014)
- [Time for Provocative Mnemonic Aids to Systemic Connectivity? Possibilities of reconciling the "headless hearts" to the "heartless heads"](#) (2018)

Possibilities are evident from experimental analysis of problems profiled in the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*, as presented by [Tomás Fülöpp](#) ([Loop Mining in the Encyclopedia of World Problems](#), 2015).



Alienation of the public: However, the current situation in French society suggests that meaningful consensus needs to address the amazing alienation of the public from French officialdom, as indicated by the most recent survey (*Institutions, elites: la grande défiance des Français*, *Le Figaro*, 11 January 2019; *Enquête Cevipof: flambée de défiance contre les institutions politiques*, *Liberation*, 11 January 2019). The latter indicates that **85% of the population consider that French politicians are uninterested in the real concerns of the public.**

Confidence: Understood in terms of trust, this suggests that the elusive subtleties of meaning and confidence are closely intertwined in enabling effective governance -- especially in society highly vulnerable to crises of confidence in the financial system. How such subtleties are to be further explored is clearly an issue of fundamental importance in France and elsewhere, whether the emphasis of the "head" is placed on meaning and the emphasis of the "heart" is placed on confidence:

- [Comprehension of Unity as a Paradoxical Dynamic](#) (2019).
- [Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering: "Credit crunch" focus as symptom of a dangerous mindset](#) (2008)

- *Abuse of Faith in Governance: Mystery of the Unasked Question* (2009)

Envisioning consensus and synthesis: what form might it take?

Whether in people's assemblies in general (involving hundreds of people), or the French case (potentially involving millions), it remains quite unclear as to what form any expression of consensus might take.

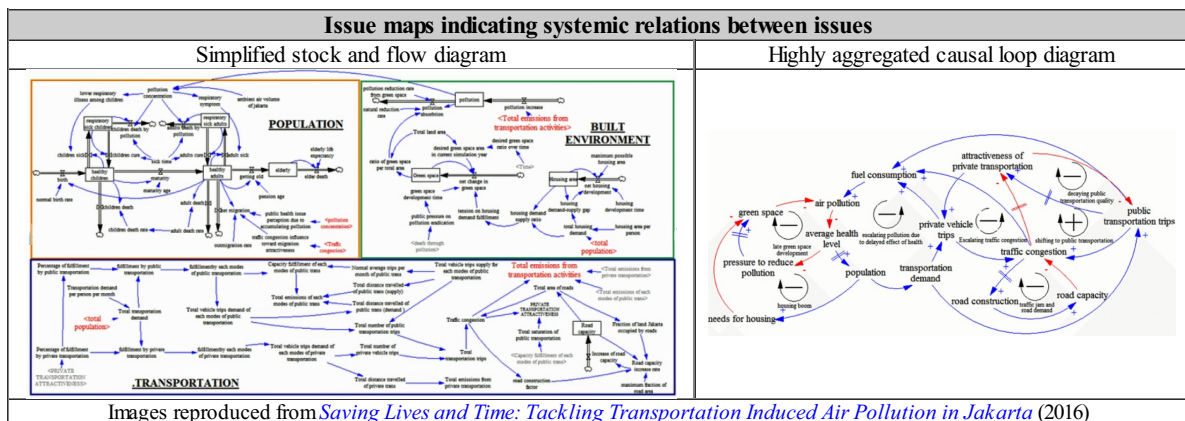
Lists: Most conventionally it could take the form of a list of issues, sifted from lists articulated in smaller groups. In the French case such lists from debates facilitated by 36,000 mayors, would first be sifted at the regional level, then at the national level by a process which has yet to be clarified. Presumably the final product would take the form of a list of 20 to 100 points. There are many examples of such actionable lists, most notably those of the United Nations, as with its [Sustainable Development Goals](#), or [Agenda 21](#) (potentially backed by extensive detail). One example is the recent report to the Club of Rome ([Ernst von Weizsaecker and Anders Wijkman, Come On! Capitalism, Short-termism, Population and the Destruction of the Planet](#), 2018).

With respect to the national socio-political crisis associated with the uprising of the *Gilets Jaunes*, President Emmanuel Macron took the highly unusual measure of addressing a "Letter to the French" (*Lettre au Français*, 13 January 2019). This presents a list of questions under 4 headings by which the *Grand Débat* has been framed (*Les 32 questions d'Emmanuel Macron dans sa lettre qui lance le grand débat national*, *La Tribune*, 13 January 2019; *Grand dÉbat: les 33 questions suggÉRÉEs par Emmanuel Macron*, *Le Figaro*, 14 January 2019; *Lettre aux Français: les 35 questions posÉEs par le prÉsident*, *Le Progres*, 14 January 2019),

As indicated by these articles, there is some difficulty in giving a precise count of the number of questions because of the structure of the letter, the manner in which they are posed, and the manner in which some are effectively "follow-on" questions, readily combined with another. Other than being clustered under 4 headings, no systemic relations are indicated between them, even though obvious solutions to one could be incompatible with that of another, just as some complement one another in other ways..

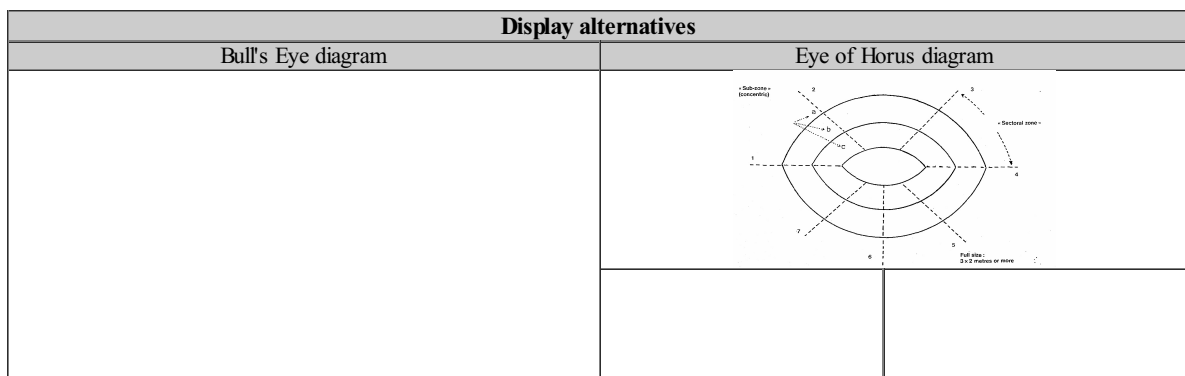
Issue maps: Typically such lists avoid indication of the systemic (and budgetary) relations between issues -- which are necessarily a preoccupation in determining budgetary priorities. The approach for the Club of Rome has been explicitly criticized for inadequacies in that respect (*Exhortation to We the Peoples from the Club of Rome*, 2018).

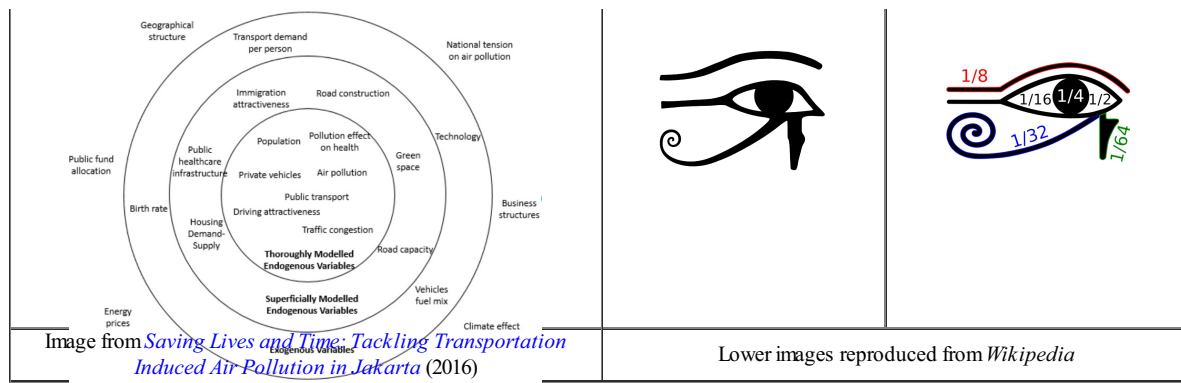
A valuable demonstration of this approach are the diagrams presented in a paper to the 34th International Conference of the System Dynamics Society (Bramka Jafno, Pedram Soltani and Erisk Pruyt, *Saving Lives and Time: Tackling Transportation Induced Air Pollution in Jakarta*, 2016).



The paper by Bramka Jafno and colleagues (2016) uses a "bull's eye" diagram (below left) to frame a particular focus in relation to more contextual issues. In an interactive context, any such "eye" could be moved from one focus held up as a priority to another, as a kind of magnifying lens -- in each case pushing other issues (then understood as secondary) to the perimeter.

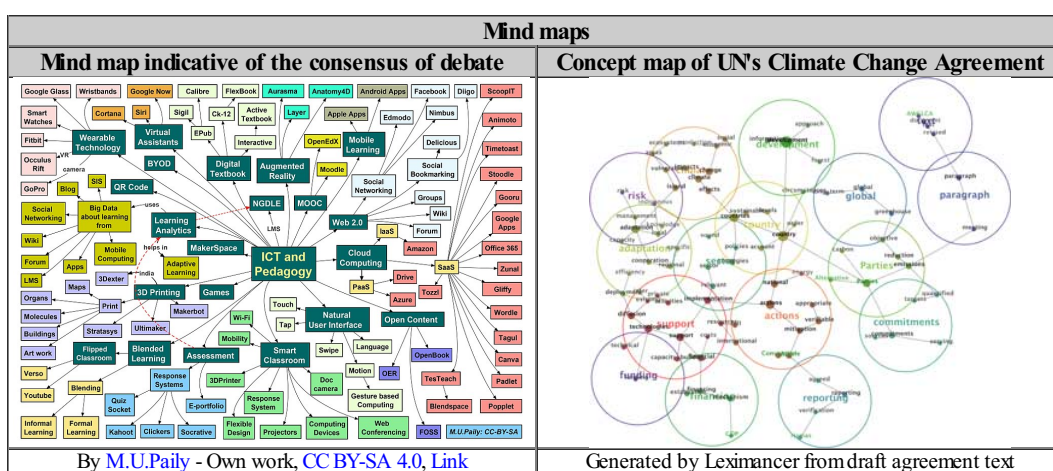
The "Bull's Eye" framing has a potentially interesting relationship to the "Eye of Horus" (below right), especially since the latter was held to offer symbolic oversight of significance to governance. Like the Bull's Eye, it can be understood as of relevance to providing a context for a complex set of viewpoints, as previously argued (*Interrelating Viewpoints in Complex Meetings the Horus wall-display technique*, 1978). Given the argument below for an aesthetic configuration of issues, the proportions associated with the Eye of Horus (indicated below) offer further mapping possibilities.





More ambitiously, software could be used to indicate relations between issues raised so that the articulation of points could take the form of what would look more like a map -- readily printed, projected onto screens, or disseminated via the web. The development of such possibilities is a preoccupation of the [Global Sensemaking](#) network. This explores tools for dialogue and deliberation on so-called [wicked problems](#).

Given the development of mind mapping techniques, as noted above, the outcome of a complex conference can be presented in a form such as the following, where the consensus is with regard to the configuration as a whole, rather than with any particular part.



A notable example of text analysis software to this end is [Leximancer](#), as applied experimentally in 2009 in anticipation of a UN [Climate Change Agreement](#) (*Concept Analysis of Climate Change Agreements*, 2009). This automatically analyses text documents to identify the high level concepts, delivering the key ideas and actionable insights that are needed with powerful interactive visualizations and data exports. This enables interactive thematic and concept maps to be rapidly produced for the range of topics evoked in a mass of communications. As was done in that experiment, an [automated report](#) can be generated by Leximancer to highlight the concepts detected.

Trends: Another approach is evident in that which [Google Trends](#) has made available. It is notable that the media giants have long made controversial use of "profiling" as a means of eliciting advertising income. They may well sell profile data to enable advertisers to use [data mining](#) techniques, as illustrated by the [Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal](#). Such techniques can be readily adapted to process citizen comments submitted anonymously.

There is every reason to believe that this already done in some manner by security services. For such reasons it is appropriate to address the concerns voiced by some *Gilets Jaunes* that the intentions of the French authorities in electing opinions from the population may well not be all that they are overtly claimed to be. The process calls for a degree of transparency which the authorities are typically called upon to employ with respect to electoral voting procedures.


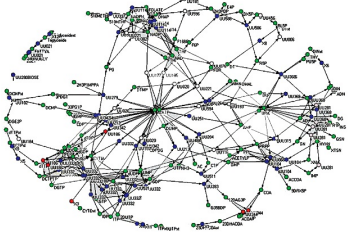
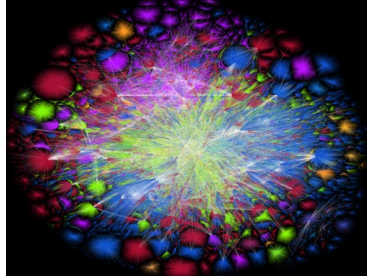
3D Configurations: At a time when much is being made (notably in France) of the possibilities of virtual reality in a knowledge-based civilization, configuration of more complex interactive maps in 3D is a possibility which could invite the engagement of those who make regular use of social media -- as an extension of that facility.

These contrasting possibilities frame the question as to consensus can be articulated and to what degree -- and how the processes of governance can engage with any such articulation. Dependence on lists as conventionally preferred, is potentially an indication of an obsolete framing of governance which is no longer "fit for purpose". Especially relevant is the possibility of holding the dynamic between contrasting or incommensurable priorities -- by which governance is typically faced, if only from a budgetary perspective.

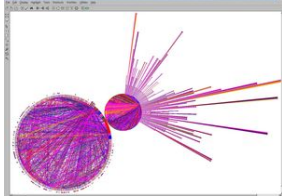
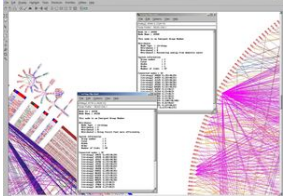
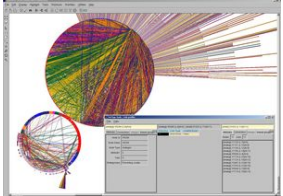
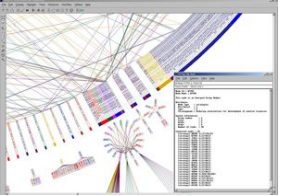
Comprehension of the connectivity of appropriate consensus is arguably enabled by emerging technology in which Frances claims particular expertise:

- *Visualization Enabling Integrative Conference Comprehension: global articulation of future-oriented 3D technology*, (2018)
- *Time for Provocative Mnemonic Aids to Systemic Connectivity? Possibilities of reconciling the "headless hearts" to the "heartless heads"* (2018)

Indications of future possibilities include visualizations of the [Global Brain](#), those of the human brain, and a metabolic network, as shown below. Analogous images of biodiversity would be indicative of the coherence of the global ecosystem.

Future display possibilities		
3D view of Simulated Thalamocortical Brain Network	Example of metabolic network	Internet connectivity -- the "Global brain"
		
Screen shot of video by Ivan Dimkovic (2012)	Lenke, et al. (2004)	Map of the internet by Karel Donik of The Opte Project (2015)

The images above raise the question as to how the strategic coherence emerging from a national or international debate on a comprehensive range of issues might be usefully visualized. As noted above, the online [Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential](#) makes available a multitude of maps visualizing hierarchical and systemic relations between problems and between strategic solutions. Exploration of the data using the [NetMap Analytics](#) application has given rise to interactive images such as the following.

Indication of use of an interactive application explore systemic relations between strategies and problems			
Study of Energy Strategies (represents 1472 strategies and 4790 links; click on image for larger version)		Strategies responding to Violence (emergent groups and details) (represents 2367 strategies and 6740 links; ; click on image for larger version)	
			
Images reproduced from Preliminary NetMap Studies of Databases on Questions, World Problems, Global Strategies, and Values (2006)			

Aesthetic articulations: The images in the media coverage of the *Gilets Jaunes* uprising in Paris have been striking. A notable example is provided by a wall fresco made by [Pascal Boyart](#), a street artist supporter of the movement.



Such imagery raises the question as to whether any consensus from the *Grand Débat* could take the form of images (other than concept maps), poems or songs. Does the French uprising call for an equivalent to Picasso's *Guernica* -- or a gallery of *Guernicas*?

Is it possible that poems and songs could articulate a complex pattern of insights in ways which a greater proportion of the population would find meaningful? The argument has been developed separately ([A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic?](#) 2006; [Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns](#), 2006; [Participative Development Process for Singable Declarations Applying the Wikipedia-Wikimedia-WikiMusic concept to constitutions](#), 2006).

Will a "Gilets Jaunes song" emerge to elicit a degree of consensus in France? Perhaps more thn ironically, at the time of the launch of the

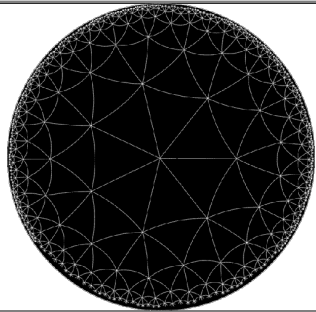
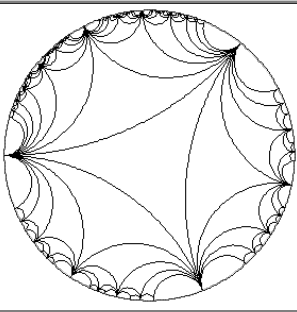
Grand Débat, a competition is being organized in France to determine who is to represent France at the forthcoming [Eurovision Song Contest](#) (14 May 2019) -- immediately prior to the elections for the European Parliament.

Could the challenges of climate change and any "ecological transition" be fruitfully articulated in that mode? Of particular value would be the capacity to convert lengthy debate into more attractive aesthetic forms as a catalyst for engagement and consensus, as separately discussed (*Convertor from Text to Poetry, Song or Music: computer-assisted aesthetic enhancement of treaties, declarations and agreements*, 2007). The development of automatic text-to-poetry conversion offers the provocative possibility that Macron's 30-plus questions to the French (as noted below) could be converted experimentally into poetic form in order to increase, through aesthetics, the memorability of the integrative pattern of systemic relationships they purportedly constitute. Indicative examples include *Automated Prose to Poetry Conversion* and the haiku *Poem Generator*. Possibilities in French are explored under the theme *versification automatique* (Laurent Jenny, *Versification: méthodes et problèmes*, 2003).

Is there necessarily a role for drama in eliciting democratic transformation (*Gorbachev: Dramaturge ?! Participative Democracy vs. Participative Drama: Lessons on social transformation for international organizations from Gorbachev*, 1991). Whether Macron is to be archetypally framed as "Beauty" and the *Gilets Jaunes* as the "Beast" -- or vice versa -- might poetry indeed offer a means of reframing their relationship, as argued separately (*Poetry-making and Policy-making: arranging a Marriage between Beauty and the Beast*, 1993)? Will history see Emmanuel Macron to have been a dramaturge?

A related argument has been made with respect to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the possibility of a mapping onto a [Rubik Cube](#) configuration (*Interplay of Sustainable Development Goals through Rubik Cube Variations: engaging otherwise with what people find meaningful*, 2017). Is there a case for exploring the mapping of Macron's questions onto such a device as a means of eliciting imaginative engagement with respect to strategic coherence in France?

Hyperbolic presentations: It is too readily assumed that the range of issues can be effectively portrayed using the conventions of two or three-dimensional geometry. There is a case for recognizing that the complexities of governance now call for challenges to the imagination exemplified by hyperbolic mappings, as was the inspiration of the graphic artist [M. C. Escher](#), most notably with respect to [hyperbolic tilings](#), as discussed separately (*Hyperbolic space: realm of hypothetical entities?* 2016). The argument above, with respect to use of the Bull's Eye diagram can then be explored with respect to the [Poincaré disk](#), also discussed separately (*Global communication patterns in a hyperbolic space of negative curvature*, 2016).

Poincaré disk animations	
Escher tessellation animation	Poincaré disk animation
	
Adpted from W. Goldman, <i>Ultraideal Triangles</i> , 2004	Adapted from <i>Wolfram Demonstration Project</i>

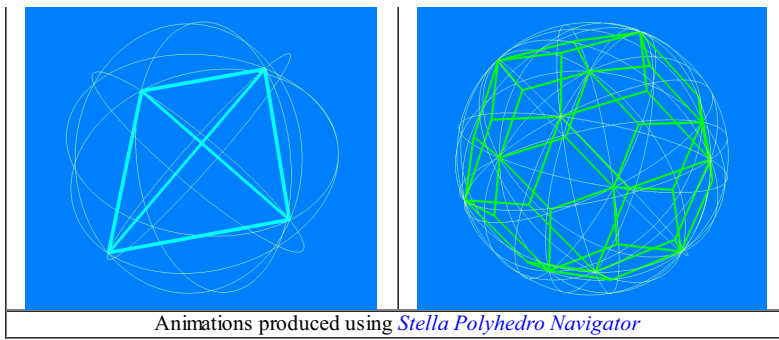
Associated with the hyperbolic approach is the visualization of data using potentially interactive [hypergraphs](#) on which there is a very extensive literature (Xavier Ouvrard, Jean-Marie Le Goff, and StÉphane Marchand-Maillet, *Networks of Collaborations: hypergraph modeling and visualisation*, CERN, 2017). Unfortunately examples which originally worked with great sophistication tend to have been disabled by recent upgrades in browser and related technologies; others are only available behind paywalls (A. Agocs, et al, *Challenges in visualizing large graphs and hypergraphs*, CERN, 2017). An early example of some relevance to dialogue and debate is described separately (*Mapping Songlines of the Noosphere: use of hypergraphs in presentation of the I Ching and the Tao te Ching*, 2006).

Oppositional coherence implied by polyhedral mapping of debate

One approach to eliciting strategic coherence is through mapping of issues onto polyhedra with appropriate characteristics. This approach was used to reframe the 40 issues by which a recent report to the Club of Rome was articulated (*Exhortation to We the Peoples from the Club of Rome*, 2018). Various images and animations are presented there to that end.

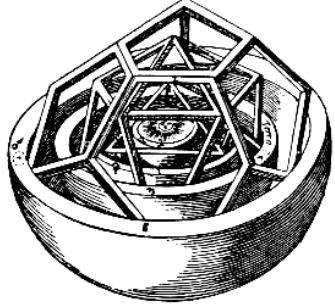
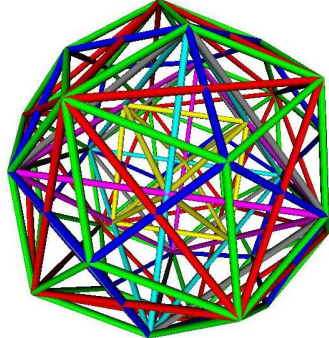
Arguably a similar approach can be taken to the set of strategic questions formally posed by Emmanuel Macron in response to the crisis engendered by support for the *Gilets Jaunes* (*Lettre au Francais*, 13 January 2019). However, as noted above, there is a degree of confusion regarding the precise number of questions in that document, so for the purpose of this exercise they have been reduced to 30 - notably as a consequence of framing them succinctly for visual representation.

One of the most appropriate polyhedra onto which to map 30 such issue-questions is the [rhombic triacontahedron](#) of 30 faces, This is a geometric dual of the [icosidodecahedron](#) of 30 vertices, offering an alternative mapping. The two variants are presented as animations below (left and right). In this indicative exercise, no effort has been made to organize the relationships between the issue-questions as mapped. The central animation shows the morphing between the two forms, potentially indicative of the shift in debate between a debating forum for an issue (as a face), and the central principle (as a vertex).

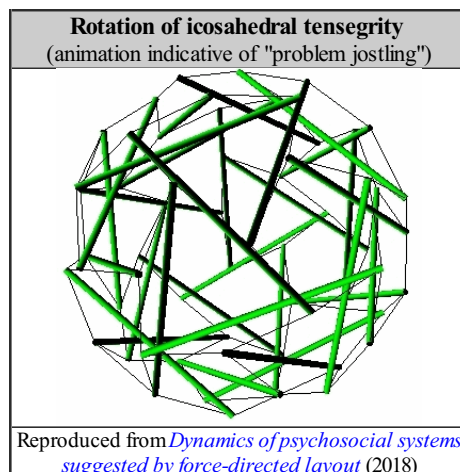


Animations produced using *Stella Polyhedro Navigator*

Given the fourfold framing of the 30-odd strategic questions by Emmanuel Macron, it is appropriate to note the role of the rhombic triacontahedron with respect to the fundamental fourfold organization exemplified by the tetrahedron (light blue above and below). This can be nested dynamically within the rhombic triacontahedron (green above and below), together with the four other Platonic forms -- as indicated in the animation below right. This is placed provocatively in juxtaposition with another image of historical significance. Of relevance to the challenge eliciting coherence from debate, these are reproduced from a separate discussion (*Dynamic relationship between polyhedra engendered by circles -- variously implying forms of unity*, 2017). The great circles in the animations above are indicative of lines of systemic communication presumably vital to the coherence of global strategy.

Nested polyhedral model of historical solar system of Johannes Kepler	Rhombic triacontahedron (green) as a nesting framework for the 21st century?
	
<p>In <i>Mysterium Cosmographicum</i> (1596)</p>	<p>(virtual reality variants <i>static</i>: vrml or x3d; <i>mutual rotation</i>: vrml or x3d; "pumping": vrml or x3d; videos: "pumping" mp4; "rotation" mp4)</p>

Given the credibility that Emmanuel Macron has given to a 30-fold articulation, it is appropriate to recall the justification for such a 30-fold articulation developed by management cybernetician Stafford Beer (*Beyond Dispute: the invention of team synteegrity*, 1994). In contrast with the structural rigidity implied by the use of polyhedra in exploring oppositional logic, Beer emphasized the complementarity between "non-negotiable" rigidity and flexibility in configurations basic to the architecture of "tensional integrity" (*tensegrity*) -- effectively extending it to the architecture of psychosocial systems, as variously discussed separately (*From Networking to Tensegrity Organization*, 1984). This frames the emergent coherence achieved by balancing the dynamics between non-compressible ("non-negotiable") and flexible elements in group discourse, as suggested with respect to a UN Earth Summit (*Configuring Globally and Contending Locally: shaping the global network of local bargains by decoding and mapping Earth Summit inter-sectoral issues*, 1992).



Reproduced from *Dynamics of psychosocial systems suggested by force-directed layout* (2018)

Exploration of the relationship among the 30 questions of the *Grand Débat* could then usefully focus on the possibility of an emergent

systemic coherence between "rigidly opposed" and "flexibly connected" issues. Of further interest is how a configuration of well-defined strategic agreements ("non-negotiables") may be vulnerable in practice to alternative (mis)interpretations -- potentially framed as opportunistic, as may be associated with corrupt practices. A realistic system needs to allow for such "flexibility" in order to be viable and sustainably coherent.

Any polyhedral framework for a set of strategic options invites further analysis in the light of the various axes of symmetry, whether between opposing faces ("sides") or opposing vertices (principles). Associated with highlighting such features is the pattern of great circles which are indicative of forms of connectivity basic to systemic coherence. As virtual features, they may prove to be related to the suggestion that atnational and international relations merit exploration in the light of quantum theory, as articulated by [Alexander Wendt](#) (*Quantum Mind and Social Science: unifying physical and social ontology*, 2015).

Ironically these considerations could even be relevant to the number of questions variously distinguished in Macron's articulation. The mapping of 30 onto the faces of the rhombic triacontahedron could then be seen as confusedly related to any mapping of 32 onto the faces of the icosidodecahedron -- one being the dual of the other. How many "sides" are there to coherent comprehension of a complex psychosocial system?

Problematic dynamics of debate

"Debate-as-usual"? As noted above, the practice of debate organization in people's assemblies, conferences, and discussion groups involves a very heavy investment in **"talking"** -- accompanied by a very heavy investment in **"listening"**. However, with respect to eliciting any consensus, it is quite unclear whether the processes employed to enable **"hearing"** are currently "fit for purpose". At best these involve recordings which may (or may not be transcribed) and summarized in some way. Recordings may of course be made widely available to reinforce further "listening" elsewhere -- irrespective of any need for "hearing".

In many contexts rhetorical and debating skills are much appreciated -- even ranked as a high art. This appreciation needs however to be carefully distinguished from the contribution of any such skill to a consensual outcome. In the French political system, the speaker acknowledged as having the greatest rhetorical skills is the leader of one of the marginalized extremes. Especially noteworthy is that society does not seek to engender groups whose quality of dialogue can be seen as especially noteworthy -- beyond any exhibition of individual performance in such a group.

Exemplary dialogue? It is difficult to claim that parliamentary assemblies exhibit a high order of dialogue worthy of emulation, especially given the necessary competitive relationship between opposing parties -- and the relatively frequent use of insult and the occasional resort to physical violence (in some cases). The situation is little better in gatherings with far greater declared commitment to high quality dialogue (interdisciplinary, interfaith, intercultural, intentional community, etc).

Typically however there is no recording of debate or any effort at minute writing. No such process has been mentioned with respect to the discussion groups supposedly to be facilitated by 36,000 French mayors. Summaries (if made) are then the work of a **"rapporteur general"**.

Recurring problems in debate: It is interesting to note that with respect to dialogue, it is the manner in which it is presented in writing which has been most usefully criticized (Beth Hill, *Examples of Bad Dialogue*, *The Editor's Blog*, 3 November 2011; *The Six Forms of Bad Dialogue*, *ScriptsShadow*, 12 April 2018).

With respect to debate, there is long-standing interest in the "art of debate" (Alex Clark, *Why debating still matters*, *The Guardian*, 6 Aug 2016). However, it remains unclear as to the extent to which it is practiced rather than abused (Michael Sndel, *The Lost Art of Democratic Debate*, *TED2010*; Gene Edward Veith, *The Lost Art of The Debate: how today's debates teach cynicism and relativism*, *World*, 2000).

A valuable summary (below) is accompanied by many examples, offered with an indication of both the problems and fruitful guidance by Shane Snow (*How to debate and make progress by curbing intellectual dishonesty*).

Recurring problems in discourse (political and otherwise)	Formal debates could have the following rules
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dodging: People do not address the problems at hand 2. Logical fallacies: People say things that do not make sense 3. Deception: People sneak around the actual truth 4. Dirty debate: You can "win" debate without a good argument 5. Little accountability: Intellectual dishonesty goes unchecked 6. False endings: Debate are over when time is up or people get upset, not when positions are clear and issues get resolved 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Debaters must address the topic at hand. If a debater veers off topic, they will be stopped by the referee. 2. Debaters may not use logical fallacies and will be called out for them in real time by a panel of judges. 3. Debaters must operate from a common set of facts, and may not be deceptive. A panel of judges will check all assertions of fact; and false, exaggerated, and deceptive statements will be called out and corrected. 4. Debaters must play nice. The referee will turn off the microphone and/or place a stop sign in front of a debater's face if they interrupt, talk over their time, or engage in any other bad sportsmanship. 5. The debate on an issue/question ends when the the positions of the debaters are clear. If needed, the debate will continue another time.

Criticism of "debate-as-usual"? Critics of the forthcoming debate in France have been articulate in their condemnation, using terms such as the following:

- encouraging [verbiage](#), "giving birth to a mouse"

- expression of grievance and verbal exchange (chat sessions), but with little commitment to consensus or outcomes
- a means for the authorities to ensure that issues and concerns are effectively "buried", offering the curious association of grievances (*doléances* in French) with *condoléances*.
- a debacle (*Du grand débat... À la grande débâcle*, *Le Figaro*, 9 January 2019)
- a smoke screen (Attac France: *Annonces de Macron: un enfumage pour préserver l'injustice fiscale et les cadeaux faits aux riches*, 17 December 2018; *Grand débat national: les maires de France y voient "une manœuvre d'enfumage"*, *Sputnik*, 10 January 2019)
- a quagmire (*L'organisation du grand débat, un borbier qui guette l'Élysée*, *The Huffington Post*, 10 January 2019)
- an escape valve (*L'exécutif veut éviter que le grand débat tourne au défouloir*, *Le Figaro*, 9 January 2019)
- a cynical delaying tactic by Emmanuel Macron, anticipating that the population would weary of the process and of the *Gilets Jaunes*

Debating priorities? Of concern to any assembly, is the question as to what then is a "debating process" and how could it merit criticism in a time of national or international emergency:

- a fundamental need to express personal identity, especially in a potentially competitive social setting?
- a need to associate with others who share similar preoccupations, namely to experience a sense of community?
- a need to register solidarity, especially when this is to be noted by a constituency elsewhere?
- a need to avoid being subsumed by frameworks articulated by others, namely a need to express a distinctive perspective, possibly by disagreeing with others?
- a means of demonstrating active engagement, but without necessarily making any commitment to subsequent action?

Beyond their relevance to parliamentary debate, how could these be seen as characteristic of the enabling debate for "environmental transition", as the preoccupation of COP24 -- the [United Nations Climate Change Conference](#) (Katowice, 2018)?

It is for example extraordinary to note the contortions of speakers to ensure intellectual copyright over any statement which it is sought to disseminate or reproduce elsewhere. This preoccupation could be appropriately named as the systematic "incarceration of insight", if not its "burial".

Manipulation and appropriation of the process: There is of course the threat of appropriation, whether political, ideological or commercial. Many have commented on the probability of efforts by the authorities to manipulate the process in support of their pre-existing agenda.

Other criticism has focused on the tendency of the existing political parties, especially those in opposition, to seek to appropriate the *Gilets Jaunes* and their preoccupations as a means of advancing their own agendas.

Hackers: There is widespread concern with [electoral fraud](#), whether in relation to paper-based or [electronic voting](#). Many electoral results are now challenged for that reason. There is similar concern with respect to the security of electronic systems in general, more especially those involving financial data and transactions. The remarkable process of *Wikipedia* is vulnerable to a continuing process of so-called [edit wars](#).

It is to be expected that the process of eliciting and consolidating the grievances and proposals of a public debate would be vulnerable to such "hacking" processes, or invite suspicion that they have been used. To what extent will any intervention by authorities be understood in such terms?

Potentially more curious is the sense in which such hackers are then systemically analogous to the *casseurs* whose violence has been the focus of the problematic framing of the *Gilets Jaunes* -- and to the "black operations" on the part of authorities with which they may have been associated.

Problematic track record of people's assemblies

Formal democratic assemblies: It is appropriate to recall that the [General Assembly of the United Nations](#) is framed by a Charter with an opening [preamble](#) declaring: *We the Peoples of the United Nations*. The debating process can of course be much appreciated in the light of the multitude of resolutions it produces. Less evident are the problematic dimensions of its debate which have been a feature of a process of many decades framed as [Reform of the United Nations](#). As noted by *Wikipedia*:

Since the late 1990s there have been many calls for **reform of the United Nations** (UN). However, there is little clarity or consensus about what reform might mean in practice. Both those who want the UN to play a greater role in world affairs and those who want its role confined to humanitarian work or otherwise reduced use the term "UN reform" to refer to their ideas. The range of opinion extends from those who want to eliminate the UN entirely, to those who want to make it into a full-fledged [world government](#). There have been reform efforts since the creation of the UN and closely associated with each of the Secretary-Generals.

Calls for reform have included proposals for the [Creation of United Nations Parliamentary Assembly](#). Another frequent demand is that the UN become "more democratic", and a key institution of a [world democracy](#). This raises fundamental questions about the nature and role of the UN. The UN is not a [world government](#), rather a forum for the world's sovereign states to debate issues and determine collective courses of action. This raises fundamental questions about the nature and role of the UN. Very little is said about the quality of debate within the UN's many assemblies. There is seemingly little understanding of the form or characteristics of debate of a higher order.

These challenges at a global level are echoed by the challenges in many other assemblies, including those at the regional and national

levels. The quality of debate within the [European Parliament](#) of the EU and in the [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) could be a focus of similar questions.

It is striking to note that formal assemblies do not elicit any formal review of their debate and communication processes, as is evident with respect to the series of [Earth Summits](#) (Rio de Janeiro, 1992; Johannesburg, 2002; Rio de Janeiro, 2012) and to the succession of UN [COP](#) gatherings on climate change.

Informal democratic assemblies: As characteristic of the spirit and preoccupations of the *Gilets Jaunes*, how is debate within the [World Social Forum](#) to be assessed? As with formal assemblies, there seems to be the greatest reluctance to review critically the communication and debate processes potentially leading to the emergence of consensus. Are they too to be recognized as collective "non-learning environments" with a primary commitment to the illusion of self-satisfaction?

Notable exceptions include:

- Jai Sen and Peter Waterman: *World Social Forum: critical explorations*, (OpenWord, 2012)
- Jackie Smith: *The World Social Forum and the challenges of global democracy* (*Global Networks*. 4, 2004, 4)
- T. Teivainen: *The World Social Forum and global democratisation: learning from Porto Alegre* (*Third World Quarterly*. 23, 2002, 4)
- Tadzio Mueller: *Other Worlds, Other Values: alternative practices in the European anticapitalist movement* (University of Sussex, 2006)

It is within this context that hopes regarding the *Grand Debat National* of France need to be seen, whether for the government or the *Gilets Jaunes*. For a movement which emerged spontaneously in November 2018, it has already inspired analogues in other countries. These echo the process of the earlier [Occupy Movement](#), itself inspired by a retired French diplomat, [Stéphane Hessel](#) (*Time for Outrage!*, 2011).

The extensive entry on the [Yellow Vests movement](#) in *Wikipedia* provides details on recent protests under that name in other countries (listed below). Some are related to the central concerns of the French movement (taxation, high-living costs, representation, and income disparity). Others are related primarily by the use of the readily-available symbol.

Belgium	Germany	Netherlands	Serbia
Bulgaria	Iraq	Pakistan	Taiwan
Croatia	Ireland	Poland	Tunisia
Egypt	Israel	Portugal	United Kingdom
Finland	Italy	Russia	

But what is possible after expression of outrage?

Transcending vulnerability to inadequacy: self-reflexivity?

The question then is **why have such assemblies and movements proven to be less than fit for the purpose they inspire?** Why do they so effectively "celebrate the flame" but prove so limited in their ability to address issues which inhibit its wider impact?

Blame game? A standard response is to blame external forces and vested interests, including the media which they may control (*Collective Mea Culpa? You Must be Joking ! Them is to blame, Not us !* 2015). There is little effort to question the quality of debate of those assembled, readily perceived to be incapable of effective self-criticism or of acting on the dynamics which merit attention. In that sense it could be said that debating processes as currently conceived and organized are condemned to failure -- despite the hopes and enthusiasm they arouse.

Systemic readjustment of an ecosystem? Rather than any focus on the psychosocial dynamics of blame, it is also useful to recognize that there are systemic dynamics in play, articulated as *Le Chatelier's Principle* by [Stafford Beer](#), with his own track record in social change (*Platform for Change*, 1978)

Reformers, critics of institutions, consultants in innovation, people in sort who "want to get something done", often fail to see this point. They cannot understand why their strictures, advice or demands do not result effective change. They expect either to achieve a measure of success in their own terms or to be flung off the premises. But an ultrastable system (like a social institution)... has no need to react in either of these ways. It specialises in equilibrium readjustment which is to the observer a secret form of change requiring no actual alteration in the macro-systemic characteristics that he is trying to do something about. (*The Cybernetic Cytoblast -- management itself*. Chairman's Address to the International Cybernetics Congress, September 1969)

A similar question could be raised with respect to the many online platforms and fora. It would seem that the "dead hand" undermining social change calls for understanding otherwise -- a cognitive shift to complement any institutional shift.

Challenging "debate-as-usual"? So framed, the questions for the future could include:

- what kinds of debate/dialogue are possible and how to determine which are fruitful under particular conditions?
- why have the many approaches to dialogue facilitation proved to be less than successful on a larger scale?
- as with participants themselves, are dialogue facilitators as much a part of the problem as of the solution?
- where are extraordinary examples of good debate to be found, and why are their qualities not more widely celebrated?
- why is appropriate expertise not applied to the analysis of debates, in order to clarify their qualities and defects, whether during

the process or thereafter?

- is there a dangerous complicity among participants in tolerating less fruitful forms of debate -- under the banner of political correctness?

Paradoxically, **are those who fail to recognize how they are part of the problem then necessarily incapable of understanding the nature of the solution required?**

A controversially provocative question of this kind merits clarification with the aid of the philosophy which is so widely valued in France and in its educational system. It is however striking to note that the contribution of "intellectuals" and "philosophers" in France to its current socio-political crisis have been minimal, as noted by various commentators. Those associated with such competence who have contributed to the process have tended to exacerbate the polarization rather than to reframe it fruitfully (*BHL : "Dans un peuple, il y aussi des intellectuels. Pardonnez-moi"*, LCI, 12 January 2019).

Consensus on ecological transition as reductionism and misplaced concreteness?

The justification claimed by the French authorities for the policies, which engendered the uprising by the *Gilets Jaunes*, have been repeatedly framed as essential to an "ecological transition" (*Macron wants France to become carbon neutral by 2050*, EURACTIV, 28 November 2018). This is held to be consistent with the acclaimed [Paris Agreement](#) (2015) within the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), whose implementation was the primary focus of COP24 (2018), despite its dubious outcome. Macron was unable to attend that event due to the violence associated with the demonstrations of the *Gilets Jaunes* preoccupied with their immediate living needs.

The dilemmas have been variously reported -- a reminder that they are of significance to the response elsewhere to the urgency claimed for climate change:

- Adam Nossiter: *Macron Has a Long-Term Vision. But the French Have Urgent Needs* (*The New York Times*, 27 November 2018)
- Pauline Bock: *The yellow jackets are a reminder Emmanuel Macron rules only one version of France* (*New Statesman*, 28 November 2018)
- Erwann Le Page: *Should Macron give up on the ecological transition?* (*H+K France*, 21 November 2018)
- Andr s Ortega: *"Yellow Vests": The First Rebellion Against the Ecological Transition* (*The Globalist*, 5 December 2018)
- Tracy McNicoll: *'End of the world' vs. 'End of the month': Macron walks tightrope amid fuel tax protests* (*France24*, 27 November 2018)

The longer term strategic vision which resulted in Macron's election effectively requires a consensus within the French population. Strangely the uprising by the *Gilets Jaunes* has called into question that consensus and the possibility of achieving it, as envisaged by Macron. More relevant is the implication this has for any understanding of ecological transition in other countries seeking to implement measures in response to climate change. In particular, **what is then assumed to be the nature of the consensus on which an ecological transition depends?**

It is more readily appreciated that the coherence of an ecosystem constitutes a form of consensus amongst a diversity of perspectives -- then to be recognized as "cognitive species". The challenge of this recognition is that that coherence depends on the dynamics between the species, whether that takes the form of symbiosis or predation -- as two of possibly eight such relationships (*Cardioid Attractor Fundamental to Sustainability: 8 transactional games forming the heart of sustainable relationship*, 2005).

The current problematic situation of French society then calls for its recognition as a form of ecosystem in its own right -- a psychosocial ecosystem. This raises the question as to **how are the French authorities to be understood as related in systemic terms to the protesting *Gilets Jaunes***, -- as well as to those exploiting their demonstrations to perpetrate violence and destruction. Given the existence of political parties in opposition to that of Macron, they too call for consideration as features of that system -- the ecosystem of France (*Systemic Function of Highly Unrepresentative Minorities: recognizing the role of the "Dark Riders" of social change*, 2018).

The consensus for which leaders typically call is then to be recognized as inappropriately simplistic -- involving a process of systemic [reductionism](#), usefully understood as "conceptual violence". As such it is an instance of [misplaced concreteness](#), namely mistaking the abstract for the concrete. The *Gilets Jaunes* epitomize a concrete reality which Macron's constituency has endeavoured to frame through an abstraction, and subjected to "redaction".

Any ecological transition promoted as a strategy would then seem to require a much more complex and subtle understanding of consensus and systemic coherence, as argued separately (*Comprehension of Unity as a Paradoxical Dynamic: metaphors reframing problematic engagement with otherness*, 2019). Or is consensus better recognized as a kind of illusion, a mirage towards which nations should aspire (*The Consensus Delusion: mysterious attractor undermining global civilization as currently imagined*, 2011)?

What is the process in France which deprecates so systematically those whose voices the *Gilets Jaunes* represent? What is the strange process whereby a party, which has elicited a very considerable proportion of votes in a recent election, is subject to a variety of forms of marginalization and shunning by other parties in the political system and in the media? This is especially striking in the case of the [Front National](#). The question is relevant to the other political extreme, articulated by [La France Insoumise](#). An equivalent shunning practice is also strikingly evident in Germany with respect to [Alternative f r Deutschland](#) -- which has also attracted an historically significant proportion of the popular vote. Is shunning extremes now characteristic of democracy? Is governance to be understood as no longer possible if account is taken of extreme perspectives (

These are all necessarily to be understood as features of an ecosystem -- a psychosocial system. Like or not. Political "parties" are indeed part of the whole in the eyes of their supporters -- whose perspectives are also part of that system. Arguably extreme political

"wings" need to be understood as essential to strategic "lift-off" of society in this period (*Counteracting Extremes Enabling Normal Flying: insights for global governance from birds on the wing and the dodo*, 2015; *Coordination of Wing Deployment and Folding in Politics: bird flight and landing as complementary metaphors of global strategic coherence*, 2015). Is an "ecological transition" feasible by reducing of diversity -- whether biodiversity or psychosocial diversity?

Efforts at eradication of parts of the system are then best recognized as mistaken and as systemic -- especially when it is claimed that the system is democratic. Ironically they would then have to be considered as extra-systemic as extra-terrestrials.

Such questions are of relevance to other countries and any implications for a global strategy to enable environmentally viable sustainability.

Le Grand Débat -- the launch and after
<p>The national debate was launched on 15 January 2018 by Emmanuel Macron through the first of a series of 13 regional engagements with the 36,000 mayors of France. Some 600 mayors had been invited to what became a six hour session of questions -- to which Macron provided detailed responses. It was widely considered a virtuoso performance repeated on 15 January with mayors from another region. Whether it could be argued that it was an exercise in framing some issues such as to avoid more fundamental matters -- building a smoke screen -- was highlighted by some with their particular agendas.</p> <p>Although framed as a debate, it is difficult to avoid recalling contextual factors. It was widely recognized that mayors had been previously neglected by the Macron regime -- a major source of any funding they receive. Opinion surveys continued to note throughout the <i>Gilets Jaunes</i> crisis that 58% of the population had confidence in their mayor, but only 23% in Macron himself. Some argued that the mayors had been framed by Macron as his "life vest" -- a play on the role of "yellow vests". Others argued that the mayors were being summoned in an emergency as a kind of "fire brigade".</p> <p>As launched, a difficulty with Macron's regional "debates" with the mayors is that the financial dependence of the mayors on Macron is such that any mayor would be foolish to fail to accept the "invitation" -- recalling a condition characteristic of dictatorships. Whilst microphones were necessarily required, it is quite unclear whether the marathon sessions were recorded and how the contributions of the mayors would subsequently be processed, if at all.</p> <p>The <i>Gilets Jaunes</i> interviewed after the launch tended to be highly sceptical of the debating process in which they were invited to participate and of how any comments would be processed. A further nation wide demonstration -- "Acte X" -- was held on 19 January, with more scheduled for the following weekends.</p> <p>On 18 January it was indicated that the start-up, Cap Collectif, scheduled to collect comments from the population via the internet, was facing many problems but expected to be operational on 21 January (William Plummer, <i>Grand débat national: le laborieux lancement de la plateforme de vœux</i>, <i>Le Figaro</i>, 18 January 2018).</p>
Contradictions?
<p><i>Wikipedia</i>: Opération Chammal is the name of the French military operation which is currently ongoing in Iraq and Syria in an attempt to contain the expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and to support the Iraqi Army. <i>French military to continue fight against Daesh in Levant: Macron</i> (<i>Arab News</i>, 17 January 2019).</p> <p><i>Macron: Violent protests are unacceptable</i> (<i>Fox News</i>, 10 December 2018). Emmanuelle Wargon, Secrétaire d'Etat auprès du ministre de la Transition écologique et solidaire: <i>The violence associated with the Gilets Jaunes renders their message unacceptable</i> (<i>Le message qui s'exprime avec un masque, une cagoule, en cassant, Ça rend le message irrecevable</i>, <i>LCI</i>, 20 January 2019). Rcgis de Castelnau: Système Macron: violence et Etat de droit à géométrie variable, <i>Vu du Droit</i>, 8 January 2019)</p>

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