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**BUSINESS LIFE SEMINAR**  
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**MANAGEMENT IN SLOVENIA**  
**or**  
**Communication problems between different cultures**

by  
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*The following account has been prepared by Pascal LEFEBVRE  
Translated by B&A Conseil*

**Abstract**

Between the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the West, a small country discovers independence and makes itself known. A French industrial corporation starts operating there, and is concerned at the lack of success of methods it has tried and tested elsewhere. One Slovene in Paris is familiar with these communication problems, and the claims of different national characters. When the circumstances of her work as a researcher bring her back to her country of origin, she has to put in place a whole network of new understandings for the enterprise to succeed.

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## I - PRESENTATION by Tatjana GLOBOKAR

I studied economics at Ljubljana University during the period of Marxist autonomy in Yugoslavia, and very shortly afterwards I left for West Berlin in the wave of migration from Yugoslavia in the Sixties. The Germans, being pragmatists, offered me a job at once in the Eastern European department of one of the largest economic research institutes. I dealt with all sorts of analysis there, comparing economic performance and living standards in the Eastern Bloc countries. I spent twelve years in different institutes, and then came to Paris for personal reasons. I was aiming at a post in the OECD, but the job didn't materialise at the last minute for political reasons. Instead I went to the French Documentation Europe department where I spent a further ten years compiling studies on the economy of Eastern Europe.

At the beginning of the Eighties I realised that I didn't have the means to go beyond economic analysis and explore the subject that really interested me: the influence of national culture on economic performance. Being Yugoslavian I'm particularly sensitive to this issue, because in my country we're confronted with cultural differences from the cradle, with the problems of 'racism' and of understanding others. My circle of friends advised me, "*You ought to prepare a thesis and go to the CNRS,*" and so I started writing on 'National Culture and Economy in Eastern Bloc Countries'.

Whilst all this was happening I chanced to meet Philippe d'Iribarne and told him what I was writing. For his part he'd been working for two years on the subject of *Culture and Management* in France, America and the Netherlands. He was working for Péciney, who had offered him the chance to work in Yugoslavia at the aluminium works in Mostar, and he invited me to collaborate with him on the project. A few months later we were confronted with the question of relations between Croats, Muslims and Serbs in the midst of the works. This research resulted in an article published in *Gérer et Comprendre*.<sup>1</sup>

Gestion et Société, a CNRS research center subsequently gave me projects in Poland, Hungary and then Slovenia, which gave me a certain depth of knowledge and a familiarity with the intellectual life of a researcher - and of course I continued to work on a daily basis within the administration of the French Research ministry.

### Renault in Slovenia

In 1990 Renault found that although they had technically identical equipment in their European factories, the product quality was very different. Some of their executives, who had just read *The logic of honour*<sup>2</sup>, reckoned that it was worth looking into and entrusted Gestion et Société with the job. The French factory at Flins gave Philippe d'Iribarne free access, the factory at Haren in Flemish Belgium refused; luckily there was a factory in Spain which agreed to take part, and another in Slovenia. This last dated from the Second World War and originally built lorries, and then in 1972 started producing Renault 4s for the local market under license from Renault. In 1988 it became a joint venture, with 20% owned by Renault and 80% by the Slovenes. In 1990 it became a limited company, with Renault holding the majority of shares. Its aim was to produce up to 500,000 vehicles a year for the Western market, and this presupposed a Western standard of quality and therefore a radical change, as much qualitative as quantitative. In France people talked about the factory a good deal - at the time Slovenia was still quite adventurous, as locations go.

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<sup>1</sup> Tatjana Globokar (1989) " 'Ni père ni frère'. Culture régionale et autorité des contremaîtres dans une usine yougoslave", *Gérer et Comprendre*, no. 16, September 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Ph. d'Iribarne (1989), *La logique de l'honneur*, Paris, Seuil.

Furthermore, the executive, who was in charge of the research project at Renault itself, wanted the opportunity to show his colleagues that maybe a researcher could bring more to the running of the enterprise than the traditional audit process. Since an audit had just been completed at the Slovenia factory he invited me to hear the final report, and asked me to contribute my own comments. As I seemed to know more than the others, my credibility as a researcher was enhanced and the staff at the company headquarters asked me to take on the project in Slovenia, with the proviso that the French general manager of the factory should agree to it.

Actually, he wasn't really in favour at first: he had so many worries, there were so many changes, so many French nationals visiting the factory that really he thought that having a sociologist as well was overdoing things. Nonetheless, in February 1992 the executives in charge of quality control at Renault met in Paris, together with Philippe d'Iribarne, the executive in charge of the research project, the factory director and myself. Whilst all the others were talking about other things, I turned to him and said, "*I'm sure you have difficulty understanding why all the people in your factory - shop-floor workers, foremen and managers - should meet up on a Sunday to build a house for someone else, and then go and have a drink in the village bar.*" He answered, "*You're quite right!*" and I immediately said, "*I think I could help you to understand how these people live, and what the effects are on relations in the factory.*" We settled dates whilst the others were finishing their discussions, and to everyone's surprise we agreed to start work on the project a fortnight later.

The audit, which had shown up serious problems with quality, had been carried out in June 1991. In February 1992 I spent a week in the factory, and made my report in April; I made a further visit in December 1992 and then made my final report, so that my connection with the factory lasted a year; and I regard July 1993 as the conclusion, when I learned during a flight from Paris to Ljubljana that quality in the factory's output was now one of the best among all Renault factories. That's roughly the timescale. For this project I was conditioned by four things:

Firstly, I knew the factory. I was in my own province, 20 kilometres from home; I knew the people who worked there, they came from my village.

Secondly, I had the results of the 1991 audit which stated: "*In this factory hierarchic authority doesn't play a great part, managerial positions don't set managers apart, absenteeism is high, as are accidents in the workplace, there is very little sense of individual responsibility, personal initiative is frowned upon, the workforce is inert, people don't know why they're working, there's a psychological block...*" I know my people, and to me that seemed serious.

Thirdly, I had an understanding of the French system, mostly gained from discussions with Philippe d'Iribarne. From him I learned of the French regard for hierarchic authority, the French ability to resolve open conflict but also their individualism at work, their need to define territories and the importance they give to informal relationships. This helped me to imagine how they might feel in a Slovene environment.

Fourthly, and most importantly, I knew Slovenia. The country has less than two million inhabitants, it's only a fifth of the size of Paris and you're never more than 100 kilometres from the border with Italy, Austria, Hungary or Croatia, surrounded by other languages and other cultures. Since they settled there in the seventh century the Slovenes had never been independent until three years ago: they were always under the reign of Bavaria, Austria or Italy.

### **Identity and independence**

In the course of their history the Slovenes have never had an aristocracy or a bourgeoisie. They have tried to preserve their identity in village communities where hierarchy wasn't really an issue: the most important people in the village were the mayor, the innkeeper and the

minister, and marginally below them the farmer, the labourer and the farmer's boy. It was possible to move from one level of status to another; there was no really rigid structure which might give them a sense of hierarchy. Confronted with a foreign overlord, they tried to preserve equality within the community, and insisted that everyone should keep within the terms of a general average, it wasn't acceptable for some to be above others. When everyone is part of the same flock, the only means of distinction are therefore the particular skills of the individual. The Slovenes supported the Reformation keenly, and if today the country is nominally Catholic, this is due to a civil war; at heart the typical Slovene is sober, upstanding, and would prefer to be likened to the Swiss or the Swedes. Another typically Slovenian quality is that of co-operation, of solidarity. Even today, when a house is built the whole village helps out, because everyone knows that if they help one day, they will in turn be helped the next, and so hierarchical status plays no part. A Slovenian thinker once said: *"The Slovene is an intelligent and assiduous worker, creative in his work but at the same time scrupulous, sometimes to the point of tension,"* and also: *"The Slovene is at the same time teacher and model student, the student's ambition being to give only correct answers."* As a result, a Slovene takes criticism badly, even if it is part of the process of improving quality.

### **They treat us like illiterates !**

When I first visited the factory, I started by meeting the French manager, who was distant but courteous, and said: *"Tell us about the Slovenian management pattern, and tell us how the Slovenes are different from other nationalities, so that we can be sure that the Renault working methods and quality control processes we're trying to implement aren't radically different from what people are used to."*

The factory employed 3.000 people, the shop-floor workers were sixteen to twenty years old and had eight to ten years of education in school; the managers were twenty-five to thirty years old. Many of them were small farmers as well as factory workers, meaning that they worked on the farm for half the day, which might have some bearing on the level of absenteeism.

I also met other French employees, responsible for different departments, whilst their deputies were Slovenes. They told me that they were working with the aim of ultimately leaving the factory to be managed by the Slovenes, and so were training them. There were only about fifteen French managers, but their presence was very much felt. Amongst the group, some were extremely keen and worked unflaggingly; others were expatriates for reasons of their own; others still had only just arrived, knew nothing of the place and said to me: *"We were told that the Slovenes were like the Austrians!"* I found an enormous gulf of understanding and a total lack of communication between the French and the Slovenes.

The Slovenes had quite a different story. The Slovenian deputy of the industrial director was my guide when I saw round the factory. For two hours he was very silent, and tense, wondering *"Is she on our side or theirs?"* I had come from Paris, from headquarters; I spoke French, but at the same time I was Slovenian, I had a house by his village. Then he started telling me some serious things: *"The French take all the power, and we're completely inferior; they have the power and all the information, but they spend the whole time apart from us; we don't know what they want, we don't understand them; apparently they're going to take all the foremen's jobs, soon we won't have any influence at all in the factory; they don't learn Slovenian, but we have to learn French which is really difficult; we aren't invited to go to France, we aren't shown how things should be done, how they're done in France..."* and so on until he turned scarlet and cried *"They treat us like illiterates!"*

## Latin and Alpine races

I had to deal with all this at once, and I found it very depressing: these people just didn't understand one another at all. So, during the coffee-breaks, the lunch hours, the journeys from hotel to factory, in the corridors, in more than ten hours of interviews a day I spoke to them, lectured, explained the culture of one group to the other. Being Slovenian my natural instinct was to help the Slovenes, but since I also consider myself French, and Parisian at that, I had a strong urge to explain Slovenia to the French executives.

Since I was addressing not just the foremen but the shop-floor workers as well, I had to speak in straightforward terms, make myself easy to understand. I quickly realised that the training officer seconded from France had come to the factory with sessions and models and slides which had been put together for the North African workers at Flins' factory. He had not expected to be dealing with young Slovenian workers, who had ten years' school education and would feel patronised; and because Slovenes don't express the tension they feel, and unfortunately don't have the French capacity for managing open conflict, they would store tension, say nothing, become immobilised and completely inert. If by ill luck dispute did break out, it would be a major conflict which called for a whole complex ritual to restore matters. All this meant that there was such tension in the factory by then that people in the area believed that there would soon be a really serious confrontation. Basically, there were two stumbling-blocks:

- the first was purely a matter of national culture: the Slovenes are an Alpine race, ponderous and slow-moving, whilst the French are Latins, mercurial and flexible. This resulted in meetings where the Slovenes put their points pedantically and without refinement, conditioned by forty years of the Selfmanagement and Communist regime ; where the interpreter struggled, translating word for word; where the French manager waited and waited, with incredible patience, saying *"We're open to any suggestion, we're prepared for anything, tell us what we should do and we'll do it."*

- the second was a matter of politics: in 1991-92 everything fell apart. Yugoslavia, autonomy, communism were all finished, and people were scared by the war which affected Slovenia at the moment of proclaiming independence. People felt completely insecure: all their lives they had been told that capitalism was evil, and now here they were in a capitalist factory.

## Europe's answer to Japan

In this highly-charged context I began my research in two workshops - the panel shop and the paint shop. I was told, *"The panel shop is a disaster, the workers are fine but they don't seem to be achieving anything; the paint shop has outstanding results, we'd be delighted if they did as well at Flins, they work really well, we don't understand why they should be so different."*

I carried out my interviews and discovered, quite simply, that the (Slovenian) foreman was one of the old guard (when I say 'old guard' I'm referring to his Communist past) and was trying to re-establish a hierarchical structure. Kept at a distance, the workers were unhappy and told me: *"If the person I'm working for doesn't convince me that he knows as much as me, if not more, how is he supposed to pass on information and tell me what to do? If I can't share my own knowledge I have no role here, I feel excluded, I have no professional dignity."* In other words, within the factory the worker had no part in the group's dynamism, had to work outside the group in a hierarchy where authority belonged to the person who had expertise. At the same time I was told, *"Things have really changed here, the workers aren't treated just like a pick or shovel any more, they're listened to and taken seriously"* which made the panel shop workers seem all the more downtrodden.

In the paint shop, on the other hand, the foreman told me: *“Well, you know, I’m not really a one for hierarchy. We all work together here, we talk to each other all the time, we pool our knowledge and we have meetings where everyone can say what they like, I let people talk so that they feel a part of things, and we work all the time.”* He had a dynamic teamwork approach, plenty of brainstorming, and saw his role as that of a motivator. This approach reflected the co-operation of the village community and its particular way of highlighting skills; and that’s what made people happy, made them creative and ensured that they worked well together.

When I made my first report, in April 1992, I stressed the idea of communication between French and Slovenes. In order to do this I gave a report in French and one in Slovenian, a summary in French and in Slovenian, prepared slides in both and of course gave a conference in each language, being sure not to offend one side or the other (especially the Slovenes who were more sensitive), not always starting with the French, and speaking to people using their own terms of reference, so that they could be aware of their own role and value.

At the end of the meeting there was a general sense of relief. The French were happy because they had understood that by sharing information, and by bringing the Slovenes to see the French factories, they could have a really motivated workforce, and one which would totally subscribe to the quality control process soon to be implemented, by virtue of their national culture.

The Slovenes were equally happy: I hadn’t let them down. Through my representation they had even had their value proved, were not considered inferior, were appreciated for their way of life, their skills and their capacity to work. I also made my report to the headquarters in Paris, and was not entirely joking when I said, *“Seize the moment, they’re waiting for you, these people have great potential, you might have Europe’s answer to Japan!”*

### **Introducing self-testing**

My predictions were soon confirmed. In November 1992 ‘self-testing’ was brought in in the coachbuilding department, and one month later I was asked to study the development of this procedure, and to see how the method which was imported from Japan by way of Renault’s factories would be put into practice by the Slovenes.

The aim was to integrate quality control in small teams, with at most twenty members, a team leader and one or two retouching specialists working with a quality checker. There was a list of operations in each car which passed down the conveyor belt, on which the operator was supposed to put a cross if for any reason he hadn’t been able to complete his operation, so that it could be discussed afterwards. The emphasis was therefore on the group’s identity, the quality of the result and the responsibility of the individual in his work.

This method was quite new to the Slovenes, but I saw that the groups worked very well. Collective work was something they understood and co-operation worked throughout the process: as soon as an operator had a problem the team leader came and worked with him. The retouching specialist, who was supposed to be at the end of the line and concentrate on retouching at that point, told me: *“As soon as I see that somebody else has a problem, I go and help him.”* Although the quality checker was from a different department and was only supposed to be checking, he would help the team leader, advise him, help the retouching specialist, hand parts to the operator beside him and so on. This wasn’t at all what the Flins method had envisaged!

The Japanese method, as transcribed by the French and passed on to the Slovenes, was turning up some curious anomalies! The French just wanted the worker to do his job, as at the factory of Flins, and no more; if he couldn’t complete his operation, he should put his cross on this amazing list, and when his problem was examined he should listen and accept what he was

told. The Slovenes, however, made every effort to finish as much as possible on their vehicle in order to have a clear conscience. The workers were so keen that they were constantly running from their posts to the retouching specialist to say, *“There’s a problem with such-and-such that I couldn’t fix: look out for it.”* Besides which, they didn’t mark anything on their lists, it seemed unnecessarily complicated to them: they called out, spontaneously - theirs is an oral culture, not a written one.

Still, how was the oral communication to be documented? How could it be recorded in the memories of the team leader, the retouching specialist or the quality checker who worked so well together? In the end this seemed to be the most important point in the study I was working on with Philippe d’Iribarne, in contrast with his work at Flins.

This is where the problem of transposing methods comes into it. The two countries approach self-checking differently: the French, with their individualists’ logic, consider that the most important thing is responsibility as demonstrated by the individual. The Slovenes transform the process into a collective ambition of ‘one for all and all for one’. Would the French be able to understand the influence of collective memory on the Slovenes? If the Slovenes were asked to behave as responsible individualists, would they lose their impetus?

### **The Flins model**

At this point, in another anomaly, the French sent the Slovenes on a training visit - not to Flins, which was their model factory, but to Portugal. Fortunately the Portuguese had a slightly more elaborate model than the famous list, which included fewer operations, and which the Slovenes found very appropriate: being a methodical people, they appreciated the idea of using different colours for different parts of the process, making it easier to find one’s way around the list. Back in Slovenia, once the staff of the production methods department had learned how the quality control processes worked, they spent a year preparing their proposals.

However, there was a hitch: the deputy manager of the quality control department spoke French well and often went to France, and it transpired in a meeting that the quality control department and production methods department were at cross purposes. The quality control department insisted on introducing the Flins method, whilst production methods wanted something they themselves had devised to suit Slovenian principles; which led to new tensions...

In the Slovenian factory practical skills were paramount and were the basis of authority, rather than theory. People wanted to know the basics, and to have a clear, efficient model which they could grasp easily. Besides, quality at Flins wasn’t so outstanding! That is to say, the need to justify a process intellectually wasn’t a problem which normally exercised people in Slovenia, where practical knowledge was more important than anything else.

From that point on, the Slovenian factory began competing. The foreman told me: *“You’ll see, the French are full of ideas but it’s thanks to us that they’ can make things happen.”* The Slovenes began to think that they were really worth something!

As you see, we’d already made a lot of progress. Now the French were determined to put across the message of participation, innovation, of the worker being the factory’s first client, of dynamism and adventure. As for the Slovenes, they told me that they were fed up because their salaries were so low. A shop-floor worker earned FF 1,000 a month, and a French manager FF35,000; of course that’s hard to accept. Once again I explained that purchasing power isn’t calculated according to exchange rates, there were other factors to take into consideration.

I also heard from the women in the factory: *“They don’t understand, it’s always the men who go to Portugal and abroad, we don’t get to go anywhere.”* Maybe it had nothing to do with my project, but when I made my second report I knew I was expected to transmit things like that. Should I be loyal or not? Consequently, in my report I spoke of the atmosphere amongst the workers, which I thought was entirely allowable, and reported the remarks about wages, the women’s complaints and so on.

### **Speaking out**

Suddenly the report became the springboard for a heated discussion. With this, a link was made: when I first arrived the French manager had said, *“These Slovenes never say anything, never give their opinion. I’d just like to see the Slovenian manager banging his fist on the table and saying he disagrees.”* Suddenly in this meeting the Slovenian, the industrial director’s deputy, started getting agitated, banged his fist on the table and spoke out! The executive in charge of research, who was there beside me and who had followed the whole project, was delighted: for him it was something which had been achieved. It was like releasing a pressure valve.

However, time was pressing and the meeting had to be ended before everything had been thrashed out. At the lunch which followed the French said how much they regretted this; but I was relieved, because I knew the Slovenes: they aren’t capable of managing conflict, they’re happy to have had the chance to express their opinion but they aren’t capable of taking it a stage further. The meeting could have degenerated, and I was very glad that we had come out of it without any damage.

I finished at that point, and left the factory. However, on the plane from Paris to Ljubljana in June 1993 I met someone from the factory who told me: *“Do you know, I’ve just heard that they had to calculate our quality coefficient several times over in Paris, at headquarters, because it was so high they couldn’t believe it.”*

One year later, at Orly Airport I also met the general manager, who was thrilled. He who had been so sombre and distant before, said to me as we boarded the plane: *“We’ve won the challenge, I’ve just been told that we’re the best of the Renault factories, and I’m leaving, I’ve been given carte blanche to set up a Renault operation in China.”* The Slovenian executive who was with him said to me privately, *“You know, the French may boast, but if we hadn’t subscribed to it, it would never have got off the ground!”*

## **II - DISCUSSION**

**Q. :** *Did it impress the Slovenes particularly that Renault was a national company ?*

**T.G. :** Most of the employees weren’t aware of Renault’s status. Even today, the country has the enormous dilemma: should we let the foreigners in? Isn’t there a risk that they’ll buy up our land? For them, Renault is first and foremost a foreigner. Renault comes from the West, and France is a capitalist country. At the same time, they’ve known Renault since 1972, which perhaps gave them a little confidence.

**Q. :** *You served as a mediator, everything was resolved through your being there because you were able to persuade people to communicate - but isn’t this explanation a little simplistic? Surely the political change in Yugoslavia, which brought Slovenia into existence, played a role. People must now be aware that even if they’re working with Renault, they’re ultimately working for themselves and not for some authoritarian power - and a foreign one at that.*



**T.G. :** I carried out a research project, and demonstrated in my reports how the Slovenes worked and why they weren't happy in a management model which they hadn't created; I have indicated how things should be interpreted, and stated how much I as a researcher was caught up in the aspirations of both sides, and how I was able to contribute in a small way and indirectly to this happy outcome.

I really just wanted to highlight the fact that the Slovenes had capacities for ways of working which fortunately coincided with the Franco-Japanese methods. One shouldn't forget that formerly in Yugoslavia the Slovenes, who made up only 8% of the population, produced 20% of the GNP and were responsible for 25% of exports. Nonetheless, in 1991 and 1992 no-one was sure that the country would survive. They're now the richest country in Eastern Europe, with \$6,000 per capita annual income, more than Hungary or the Czech republic. Consequently, being both Slovene and French, I was involved in an exceptional situation, one which affected me closely. My role was simply to shed light on certain areas of misunderstanding. I consider myself as someone who has been part of a transformation, not as someone who has achieved something particular.

**Q. :** *How did people react to your advice?*

**T.G. :** The French were very open to suggestion. In my first report I said: "*The most important thing is to increase the sharing of information - people feel excluded, and they're not happy.*" That was very well implemented: when I came back there were information boards, a newsheet based on Renault's, a lot of training, perhaps even too much, and visits to France.

However, there's one thing I haven't said, which is that the Slovenes asked a lot more of me. They came to see me about things which bore no relation to my research, asking my advice on training, on who to choose or on which was the best factory to visit - I thought the factory at Haren in Flemish Belgium was the most interesting, since there are a lot of traits in common between the Flemish and the Slovenian characters.

In July 1992, when I was on my way to the factory to prepare material for December's meeting, I had an accident. I ended up in my country house nearby, in plaster and suffering from shock. They were very upset, and rushed to see me in hospital; but at the same time, they were so keen for my advice that a week later they were coming to see me, not with flowers but with their files. I was all the more touched, since I found that so extraordinary in the circumstances.

### **Flexibility and strategic decisions**

**Q. :** *These days it's said that the Yugoslav factory may have a high quality, but it isn't really flexible, since it wasn't able to keep up with the demand for small cars created by the scrap subsidy.*

**T.G. :** It's maybe a little facile to say that the Slovenian factory couldn't keep up with demand. In concentrating production of Renault 5s in this one factory Renault was probably following a risky strategy in that it didn't foresee having to respond to a sharp increase in demand. With a production rate of 300 cars a day, it's not the employees' work which is at fault but the factory's capacity.

**Q. :** *I'm amazed that there should have been so little method in the matter of managing a factory abroad.*

**T.G. :** We undertook this project to make Renault aware of the problems of adapting methods. Of course, they're intelligent and they know that already. What I wanted to achieve was for

people to say, “To do things well we should think about this point, and this, and this...”; but I think I may not have entirely succeeded.

### **Psychoanalyst or spell-breaker ?**

**Comment :** *What we’ve just heard seems to me to be as important to the field of social sciences as Elton Mayo’s study at Hawthorne.*

*The analogy which comes to mind is with psychoanalysis. The relationship you had with the factory is of the order of a transfer/counter-transfer; your feelings regarding their problems demonstrate as much. You brought into play elements beyond the usual scope of seeing technical problems wrapped up in human difficulties: one thinks that the main thing is the technical aspect, but people just don’t know what they ought to be doing, and so a psychologist is brought in so that they can learn to do things properly. Nonetheless, their way of doing things isn’t brought into question.*

*What you’ve highlighted is that the interactions between people don’t fall into the gulf between the technical aspect and the rest.*

*Is there really a distinct separation between technical problems and rational solutions on the one hand, and states of mind on the other? I don’t believe so. I’ll give you an example: why are the Americans unable to manufacture small cars? We know from C. Midler’s book<sup>3</sup> : there’s no space under the bonnet of a small car. As a result, the man who does the starter is always in conflict with the man who does the alternator, and no-one knows where to put the jack and the oil-can, so they have to negotiate. Now the Americans live in a contract culture: the man who puts in the starter is happy because his area is defined by written contracts. If everything is jammed in, contracts aren’t possible any more, and negotiating becomes a fight to the death. Americans don’t know how to deal with this; so there has to be a lot of room under the bonnet for all the contracts. Human sciences still don’t know how to present this kind of problem.*

*This leads me to reflect on the definitions of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’: I describe something as ‘hard’ if it is difficult to change, and ‘soft’ if it is easy to change. Sometimes it’s easier to change machines than to change mentalities, but sometimes it’s the other way round.*

*How can we take this sort of reality into account? We need Tatjanas, that’s to say people who have an empathy with all the elements in the field under study, and a complicity with the boss from elsewhere. It’s an unlikely combination, but one whose value is incomparable.*

**Further comment:** *This presentation is a revelation to me. For a long time I imagined that the researcher, and the intercultural researcher in particular, played the role of interpreter of characteristics and customs. However, I’d like to offer another, which is the researcher in the position of spell-breaker. Unlike the psychoanalyst, in your experience you were dealing with a struggle, accusations, winning people round, directing energy.*

*The spell-breaker is someone who involves him- or herself in a forced relationship between the prosperous and the impoverished, and speaks the truth. This is a case of absolute relativism, with few common points of reference between the two parties, and it calls for someone who is capable of persuading the dominant party that they are going too far, and that the accusations levelled at them have an element of truth. This alters the actions of both parties, and by bringing each side into the other’s equations it leads to mutual understanding. However, the spell-breaker’s position is a dangerous one: his patent neutrality has to be preserved all the time so that no-one suspects taking sides. He has to have such moral status, in the absence of points of reference, as to be neither Slovenian nor French, neither capitalist*

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<sup>3</sup> C. Midler (1994), *L'auto qui n'existait pas. Ruptures et apprentissage dans l'industrie automobile*, publ. InterEditions, Paris.

*nor worker. People have to believe that he has absolute terms of reference which allow for seeing the objectives of one side or the other clearly, in order to calm the struggle. It seems to me that the psychoanalyst doesn't have to manage a conflict between two opposing sides.*

**Q.** *What did the project do for you personally?*

**T.G. :** The French headquarters thanked me for the work I'd done at the factory. In Slovenia I acquired a status which led to my being the guest of a television programme, during which I was able to speak to the Slovenes for an hour, using my knowledge and experience. At present I'm writing a book to share with my countrymen what I've learned about Slovenian-style management from my research in the country.