

**"Britain and the World
the Spring of 2005"**
Report of a Listening Post
held in Brighton
on 20th April



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be these in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called the 'stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'social' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

(a) Problems of belonging, trust and identity

Breakdown in mis-representation by government and lies over the weapons of mass destruction along with a culture of secrecy and media spin create mistrust in dealing with differences in society.

The promotion of fear politically leading people to pull back and retreat to searching for a small group to belong to. Consumer economy produces a sense of compulsive journeying, searching for hope searching among a myriad of choices for reassurance when only death provides sure ground and certainty.

(b) Polarities and extremes producing loss of a middle-ground

Lack of clear family or domestic roles can produce powerlessness in the face of feeling responsible. This was also echoed in the problem of the mass of information available, creating fewer certainties. Should we engage deeply and risk being swamped or retreat and feel isolated? Is this a retreat to the womb of a clean world with no toxins, contamination or difference? Daily invasions into private domains of media and commercialism.

(c) Dealing with differences: celebration or retreat

Successful, pleasurable experience of Brighton festival as flagship of range of diverse cultural events (central & fringe). Gay pride and economy based on pink pound. Presence at the LP meeting of a psychotherapist-patient pair who decided to stay and come out, experiences of overlapping roles in personal/professional life, confusion about whether Brighton is part of the country with the freedom of isolation socially/culturally or "London by the Sea".

Fears of contamination through Aids, MRSA, roles overloaded by frayed boundaries

begging negotiation and leading to uncertain identities, at worst risk of symbolic incestuousness (the parents are peers after all).

(d) Vicious circle of projected failure by authority

Images and experiences were produced illustrating the need to project danger externally and protect privacy locally and internally. Disappointment at the fundamentalism of the new Pope - "at least at his age he will be dead soon" (a recycled & re-cycling projection). Questions are put under the carpet in organisations. The person of faith/follower is expected to believe without question. We must ignore the sexual abuse of clerics who are collusively protected from accusation. The Catholic Church is a "paradise for the paedophile". Jehovah's Witnesses have protected information on members who are paedophiles. Immigration becomes a source of exploiting fears of chaos (also evidence for hypothesis 1). Neighbours live in different galaxies. Difficulty of engaging in organisational life as no possibility of expressing the voice of a true representative acting on behalf of others. "In politicians where does truth lie?" (in both senses of "lie"). Life is partitioned rigidly (to survive chaos of no clear boundaries). Dependency of old Pope for his very life upon invisible others as if leaders' vulnerability must not show. Mistrust percolates down in society from its leaders. Is intimate work with clients in distress a privilege to be kept silent that privatises the work experience in care? Freelance experience - "where is my group?" (if anywhere?). Nobody knows what it is like being the others eg. Muslim immigrant. How big is your team? Answers vary from 8 to 50!?! Hard in NHS work to notice let alone say what you know, leading to loss of espoused values that could integrate meaning & action. Lies over Weapons of Mass Destruction.

(e) Safety, security and trust in daily life

We had been slow to even mention family/domestic life, which was at risk of being privatised/marginalised to be protected. When mentioned, it was with a sense of how little society supports parents who set values and boundaries for children.

Multiple experiences of fears of alienation from groups/organisations. Is the only means of protection dissociation? Just how much information can we take? The world is so "speedy". Hoped for peace and slower pace out of London, results in problems of engagement and slower income too. Professional judgements in hospice based on how much truth can the dying patient take?

Lost encapsulation of truth so that people forget what they know. The risk that Global concerns become distractions/entertainment through the media from personal primitive anxieties expressed vicariously.

The difficulty in NHS that professionals are patients too (elsewhere).

The need to pull back to a safe space whether private garden or home group.

Compulsive journeying to find balance in life.

Lack of safety in NHS compulsive modernisation agenda to prove something is getting better without anyone noticing or beginning from what is being done/achieved. Mapping exercises often exclude the starting point!

How to BE-long - in your own skin - feeling alive with the air on the skin. Polarities and extremes excite manic work-aholism alternating with an isolating retreat. Dissociation from tasks/being disengaged.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and, developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

In formulating these hypotheses, it became clear from the themes above, that each could be seen as having a political, intra-psychic and spiritual element or aspect.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1.

Diversity: celebration or excitement/fear response

Analysis:

a) *Celebration* - Diversity being celebrated in Brighton is a key to the felt experience of its "London by the Sea" image and reputation. "Brighton Rock(s)!" This represents the celebration of the joys and pleasures of diversity in creative ways. Also the tolerance and open expression in culture, clothes, food, neo-sexualities and artistic licence, all release libido. This carries with it the promotion of international and multi-cultural excellence and creativity and an open-minded toleration of diverse sexual orientations and neo-sexualities.

b) *Excitement - entitlement to narcissistic regression* - A different response embodies phantasies of polymorphous/promiscuous/incestuous ways of relating within the pleasure dome (jouissance/pleasuring) with all its sense of narcissistic entitlement.

c) *Fear - retreat from engagement* - This response risks an "anything goes" culture with corresponding fears of perversity, cross-breeding and contamination. It can also produce deep prejudice and intolerance of diversity, avoidance of necessary and inevitable confusion of roles with a defensive need to split into sub-groups over small differences within common-cause organisations. It can also reveal prejudice and powerful sub-grouping, imured within projections and intolerance.

Hypothesis:

Because the diversity of culture in society was expressed in the listening post as a mixture of celebration, excitement and fear, this suggests extremes of split off and conflicting responses that compete for containment. Thus the geo-social-cultural environment of Brighton could be seen as providing a defined enough container to perform a social-cultural-emotional task on behalf of London, that is a capital too dispersed to contain it (Brighton seen as "London-by-the-sea"). This task is to contain the conflicts embodied in issues of social, sexual and cultural (but not racial) diversity.

This hypothesis has a **political** element in the wish for single issue politics and the frustration in how to register feelings/views/values eg. anti Iraq invasion (Brighton against the capital/government). It has an **intra-psychic** element in the excitement and fear of symbolic incest and the community re-cycling the traumas associated with it. It has a **spiritual** element in the wish for a god/leader of the world/pope who will understand and tolerate all and still love us.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2.

Mutual re-inforcing loop of failed dependency

Analysis:

The inner world of chaos and fragmentation seems to be echoed in the outer world of mis-representation, global confusion and political and economic uncertainties on a massive scale. This makes for a circular process in which dangers are projected and privacies protected with consequent mutual recycling of mistrust and failed dependency. This was also expressed in the idea that there is a longing for a father's robust authority and wisdom, something reliable that will endure.

Hypothesis:

Because of massive global changes and chances in this fleeting world, our inner uncertainties and a sense of un-boundaried chaos and confusion are projected on to leaders (of the world, religion, organisations and management). These projections produce authority that has no containment, that cannot be trusted and that reinforces our sense of alienation, fragmentation and annihilation in a way that is a cyclical and mutually reinforcing experience of failed dependency.

This hypothesis has a **political** element in the sense of being fated to get the leaders we deserve, an **intra-psychic** element in the sense of premature receiving back of uncontained projections to worsen the internal stagnated state and a **spiritual** aspect in the failure of Faith (religious establishments) to inspire and work with faith (self-other belief, trust & integrity).

Analysis and Hypothesis 3.

Lack of safety between engagement and privacy

Analysis:

There is a fundamental experience of loss of the sense of a woman's pleasure and a mother's pleasure, represented in the soft folds of the South Downs and the peacefulness of a garden on a Spring evening. There is no transitional process nor transitional space that protects the moves between the private and public arenas. These experiences echo the lack of profound safety, security and trust felt in daily life.

Hypothesis:

Because there is a fundamental lack of a rhythm of safety and daily life-style rituals to support it in finding a safe pace to move between a state of privacy and a state of engagement with people and the world, this leaves a profound sense of ontological security to be desired. This results in a sense of a loss of any maternal representation or transitional space. There is no dynamic to move between the security of safe attachment and functioning mature independence. There is a lack of independence facilitated by a mother whose desire does not dominate, pervert and seduce.

This hypothesis has a **political** aspect in a sense of dis-enfranchisement by party politics that distort deeply felt issues by not providing adequate representation nor policies of maternal care, an **intra-psychic** aspect in the fear of engulfment leading to schizoid or autistic withdrawal in the face of the loss of and search for maternal representation and a **spiritual** aspect in the polarisation between spiritualities that privilege inner-life and those that privilege community reconciliation and justice.