



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 those 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 'socio' 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. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following 4 interrelated themes:

1. The split between the financial and the human – accelerating neediness and distress.
2. Being fed 'bread and circus', sleepwalking between fantasy and reality. Seduced by glossy spectacles, but turning a blind eye to the reality of human distress.
3. The NHS as a metaphor for wider society – the financial model is wrong.
4. Challenging the privatisation of public space, broken institutional containers. Mobilising our own/community resources.

1). *The split between the financial and the human – accelerating neediness and distress.*

A member of society commented on how their usual optimism is turning to pessimism. He was looking for 'reasons to be cheerful', and found these in the Murdoch affair, the French elections, the re-balancing of the UK economy. Also, despite high increases in University fees, more students than ever are applying for courses, but many are unable to find places. He stated that his view of society was 'in a state of indecision'. Another member commented that she felt largely pessimistic about society. She worked in a mental health service, which was described as 'a space for people to bring their distress to'. The service is currently inundated by need from people from all walks of life. Poor and affluent people alike, are in emotional distress. The email help contact service has grown 80-90% over the last year. There is a level of distress/disturbance that cannot be contained. A member of society commented 'It feels that there is more emotional fighting as the economy collapses'.

Her colleague who works in the same service, commented on a 'sense of isolation', but at the same time people 'wanting to reach out'. There is a confusing lack of connectedness: more internet connectedness but less human contact. Another member talked of being 'connected to pessimism', she works with borderline personality disordered clients. Had to rush home to cook for her son and then rush to the LP, a sense of constant running around. She caught a bit of the news which was also very pessimistic. Members commented on watching the news less, managing more and high levels of distress, and bigger referral numbers to services, but with less resources.

Another member also commented on stopping listening to radio 4 news, as it was all negative financial information. He works in a service for traumatised children. The service had been financially sound over the last year, this has heightened the dilemma of the implied organisational and societal disconnection between 'income and economics' from the 'human experiences of abuse, trauma and despair'. Recent reports have focussed on the sexualisation of childhood, and

the massacre of children in Syria. It is ironic that 'a dog is for life not just for Christmas' and yet we report on the 'dumping of children' and observe the financial exploitation of children.

A member of a mental health team talked of having contact with 12 and 13 year olds who have experienced terrible stresses and traumas. They often communicate in a very articulate adult way, which is in itself disturbing.

There was a growing awareness in the group of the disconnection between financial management and human needs and connection. A member commented that the imbalance between money and humans implies that they are not right for each other, and adds to a sense of impending doom.

2). *Being fed 'bread and circus', sleepwalking between fantasy and reality. Seduced by glossy spectacles, but turning a blind eye to the reality of human distress.*

One member talked of not watching the news but watching 'the only way is Essex', she felt that the participants have no emotional connection to each other.

Alongside the emotional distress, the nation has been celebrating the Queen's 60th Jubilee – described as a 'false jolliment' and 'almost oppositionally opposed' to the pessimistic news. It was described as 'like propaganda' and 'skewed and crazy'. The denial of reality implied in the Jubilee was described like the Roman Emperor Calligula's comment on the populace; 'let them eat bread and watch circus'. We are 'fiddling while Rome burns', or 'sleepwalking into it'.

A member commented on the forthcoming Olympic opening ceremony "I want to be able to say, I'm not embarrassed, this is good". One member explained that for the Jubilee to happen there was an invasion of 'outsiders', a member talked of returning home to litter and mess, and local homeless people complaining that there was nowhere to sleep.

Another commented on driving through London to work "With no money, how can there be cars with petrol – how can it all carry on". She described her current employment in a bomb factory which had maintained its task and employed people for over 60 years. As a Quaker she commented on feeling "very warped about it".

Reflections were offered on the Olympic games, and the Euro 2012 football tournament. A member talked of going out with her Italian friends to watch the football, being together and finding out news. "When watching football, we are all in the same boat, there are winners and losers". A member commented "with football at last you can identify the enemy, whereas societally and globally what is the solution, who is the problem, where does it begin and end?"

There is a basic level of acting out in the UK – people are tearing each other apart. This is happening at an emotional level. The gangs do it on our behalf, as did the rioters in August 2011. We are still hearing about the impact of last summer's riots, but seem unable to hear or understand the message of despair that was communicated. A Jubilee street party in Tottenham turned into a mini riot. Members did not think there would be riots at the Olympics because it is too corporate.

The group questioned 'Where's the enemy, who is the saviour? Who is taking responsibility? – not the government'.

A member commented that the Queen is the last defender of civil society against the predations of the corporations like Coca-Cola.

3). *The NHS as a metaphor for wider society – the financial model is wrong.*

A member talked of working for the NHS and seeing the structure crumble. It is "like losing the safety net". Concern was that the NHS is too expensive and cannot be maintained.

Another member commented “And yet more money has been put into the NHS, yet there are no results – what is going on, where is the money going?” Does the continuation of drives for goals and targets lead to no-one caring at all? Another member commented that she too worked for the NHS. She now felt more peripheral from patients, and commented that just trying to maintain it as a business, impacted on her time alongside patients, now feeling “more at a distance” from them.

Members of society identified a lot of anger towards the NHS especially when people feel ‘turned away’. People aren’t getting the treatment they need. The NHS is seen as a ‘marker’ of the quality and values of our society, but the new business model treats people like commodities, we are not ‘outputs’. There is no longer a capacity to ‘sit and be with’ people.

4). *Challenging the privatisation of public space, broken institutional containers. Mobilising our own/community resources.*

In Newham a new cap has been placed on council flat rents, which is making them unaffordable and potentially creating ghettos for people on lower incomes. Yet we are celebrating the underspend of £500 million on the Olympics from a budget of £1 billion. The money is there. We are being manipulated.

Unemployed workers were brought into London to act as marshals at the Jubilee, paid under the national minimum wage, and made to sleep under Waterloo bridge. There is not enough affordable housing, and people on disability benefits are finding their housing benefit capped.

A member talked of his work to reclaim power for local communities from the Olympic Committee. They had met with local community groups and the committee to discuss the legacy of the games. Universities were already putting in bids to build accommodation on the site, and they are asking will there be access for the local community for trust housing. They hope to get this at one third of the normal market value. This has drawn the community together, and they have accessed Schools, Churches, Mosques to organise and involve local people into the debate and lobbying. Community led trust housing is the big prize from the Olympic committee.

A member commented that the ‘Occupy’ movement now belonged to ‘last year’. There is more privately owned public land, the ‘enclosure law’ principles are returning. The Commons movement believed in the abolition of private property – there should be no private, only common land.

How do we continue to communicate this to communities – via Schools, Churches, Mosques, it is a way to ‘represent thousands, and to connect to the ‘underclass’’. The salvation army are working with the poor in Newham, how do we connect with the ‘Newham’s’ across the land. The Mayor of Newham issued an edict to Government not to cut the budget for the Bangladeshi community, who would vote him back in. There is also corruption at the local level.

Members discussed how bad a breakdown of civil society/institutions might become? In some countries law and order is no longer with institutions like the police, people have taken responsibility for it. In the South African townships perpetrators of crime are killed by being beaten to death by groups of local people.

We maintain that the system maintains our security, Greece and Portugal and now Spain are now realising that is only a veneer, – large scale demonstrations are commonplace. We have lived with the illusion that there is money, but it was only borrowed money.

In post war Sardinia a local priest rallied the community to rebuild their town. There was no money, they worked collectively. Is this sort of collective responsibility and self-determination now required as we face living with failed dependency?

However, we now don’t listen to elders, or take our moral code from the Bible. Why bother with the ‘old stuff’ when we can get new insights on how to develop society from computer games like ‘Civilisation 3’. Maybe our cynicism and disillusion with the NHS is healthy, it reduces dependency and we fall back on our own resources. A Head teacher from Newham took a group of bright

primary school pupils to lecture on the politics of living in Newham to University of East London politics students. It didn't cost a lot, his drive was simply 'let's do it'. A horse and plough will be involved in the opening ceremony of the Olympic games. What will the world think of the UK? Or do we need to return to pre-industrial shared communal and collective life, and contact with the earth? Are we avoiding the potential changes to work that are made implicit by the new technologies?

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 the 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. The resulting analysis has been shaped into 3 interrelated hypotheses.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: As we saw from the material in theme one, human services now cannot meet the level of distress. Similarly, the NHS is no longer seen as a container of need, and the financial and business model is dictating the quality of treatment and the relationships between staff and patients. Money has become disconnected from human purpose. The consequence of this is that Human purpose now has to fit into the financial business model. The relationship has become inverted and perverse, resulting in people becoming commodified. Have we been noticing that humans have limitations? As humans we can hold about 120 contacts, and we are not built to cope with further expansion, let alone a rising tide of emotional distress and relational disconnectedness. Twitter and Facebook allow us 1000 friends even though we can only process 120. The business culture asks us to predict outcomes, so we over estimate ourselves, and fantasise about the 'good outcomes' in order to protect our own livelihoods.

Hypothesis: Because the economic recession has been a trauma, this trauma has affected members of society's ability to think creatively and in symbols, and we have regressed to thinking simplistically and in polarities. The trauma has overwhelmed our personal and collective capacity to act and think. This results in us identifying with those who are ill, and recognising that we have become 'our own patients', and we begin to search to find ways to heal ourselves.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: We have 'drugged ourselves with money', and now live with the delusion that we can buy our way out of problems. Trauma is the realisation of this. We have a decreasing capacity to cope as 'recovering consumer addicts' with limited resources. Our dependency needs cannot be met by the existing and decaying institutional structures. Whereas religion once filled our needs, money has replaced it. We cannot legislate for spiritual or collective union as Church and State have become too intertwined and corrupted. Throughout the LP there was a growing awareness in the group of the disconnection between financial management and human needs and connection. A member commented that the imbalance between money and humans implies that they are not right for each other, and adds to a sense of impending doom.

Hypothesis: Because we bought into the myth that was sold to us: 'if we can consume enough we will be satisfied', at a time of dwindling economic resources members of society start to get in touch with underlying anxieties about having to share with a greedy and faceless enemy 'sibling'. This results in us facing our own overwhelming primary dependency needs, and a longing for human connection and primary simplicity to meet these.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis: We are more concerned about our new car than a child in Africa dying. The system is unjust, and yet we continue to 'tune in' all the time, and can see the news at any time. Fear of our unmet dependency is compounded by a loss of moral and ethical compass. The post war Beveridge report in 1948 created the NHS and gave us a collective purpose and ambition. We are at the end of a post war 60 year cycle, and now feel helpless. Governments across the world are in the same situation, — there is no leadership and no answers.

The answer might be to default from or cancel all debt. Bankruptcy might be a re-birth, allowing us to wipe the slate clean and start again. But bankruptcy is also dumping you creditors, and not honouring debt. Does this moral dilemma and guilt underpin our helplessness? We are trapped in a vision of a better past, but driven by our resistance to change. We can only counter this and mobilise ourselves if we accept personal loss and change. We are still invested in the 'boys own' story of WW2, which remains deep in our psyche. We need to be able to envision a new order. Do we still need hospitals or offices when we have new drugs and IT technology? It is lack of political courage that stops us exploring these technological advances. This change is as big as the last industrial revolution and we are in denial of it; 'today is decided by yesterday, tomorrow by today.'

Hypothesis: Because we are immobilised by our own guilt about loss of personal, collective, and state power, we look back to old legislation, institutions, and WW2 for inspiration and a 'golden age', but these confirm our age and mortality. Members of society start to recognise that their need for 'parental' courage and leadership is unmet by current government/s, and they feel traumatised by an uncaring economic environment. This lack of a facilitating environment results in our dependent infantile selves being mobilised by flight, fright, and fight, leaving our adult selves acknowledging the futility of our repetition compulsion, and searching to find our own courage and leadership.

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