

**"Britain and the World  
at Autumn 2011"**  
Report of a Listening Post  
held in London on 6th October



**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 three interrelated themes:

*1. Leadership both global & local: Conflicts both global & local*

This theme cycled around feelings of lost and failed leadership, the hope for something better and the fear of something worse. In Communism the state make the decisions but perhaps these decisions will make us rich!

We have lost faith in Obama and America but they still do some good in the world, Could China be better or would they be a harsher or crueller world leader?

Will China be a good leader or not? The group was ambivalent in its views. On one hand "Will China soften & change? We need to be optimistic!" or on the other "China! They will run the world – the weak western world – we could really be in trouble – they don't care about human rights!"

Thoughts moved to pop culture but with similar themes of what is healthy and good and what is wasteful and corrupt. The X-factor provides instant fame and "some young girl thinks she is entitled to glamour & successes" but this is also seen as a genuine chance for excellence to emerge. Amy Winehouse's tragic death was seen to be wasteful and distasteful yet she was an inspiration, a leader & a role model

Again the lack of leadership in America and the UK came up producing feelings of anger and hostility. "Bank bail outs! I am still so full of anger!" "What else could they do?" was the reply.

A member described 'Hateful thoughts' – Fuelled by the media and how "The military have messed up Iraq and Afghanistan."

The discussion now moved on to possible links between rioters and wish for leadership and how the young can become scape goats or saviours in our society.

The group talked about ambivalence around our attitude to leaders in organisations. “People say they want a mixture of Attila the Hun & Jesus Christ, these are the perfect leaders.”

Leaders were seen to be under suspicion. They were described as strong people to be aware of as we depend on them but that they might not be able to get us out of trouble. This was linked to the economic situations in Greece & Spain.

## 2. Destructive & creative forces collapse/ apocalypse

The group seemed to wrestle with feelings of doom & destruction by attempting to balance out the negative with examples of ‘goodness’ & ‘Trust in the universe’. One member stated that she gave most to charity when out she was running out of money the implication being that somehow good Karma would re pay her sacrifice.

An ambivalence about kindness emerged. A sinister comment was made that “Acts of kindness can hide secrets”. Was countered by a touching story from another member “While walking with my son who was wearing his flip flops his foot got injured. A stranger stopped and gave us plasters.”

Fear became a topic. “It’s scary when things fall apart” the possibility of evil leadership emerging in difficult times were suggested. “Will we get a bad Hitler type leader?”

The Amanda Knox murder trial was talked about, once again drawing attention to the polarities of beauty and innocence and death and destruction. The chant of ‘shame, shame, shame’ outside the court room was looked to as an indication of the public’s disappointment with the perceived corruption of the case.

The language of the group fluctuated between extremes. Dooms day, decimated, horrific, scary, apocalypse, the end of civilization. In contrast – ‘Everything will sort its self out’. ‘Nature will take its course’.

The group moved on to talking about entitlement as an assumption and the idea that people believe that they ‘deserve good things, free health care, schooling etc,’ and that people, especially the young had lost sight of the value of these ‘privileges.’

Once again we spoke of how we always mobilise the young and moved on to the London riots. Once again destruction and hope were in balance as a member commented on how in Ealing the rioting gave an opportunity for reparative acts with groups of people taking to the streets with brooms and cleaning. The positivity of those who had defended their own communities during the riots was mentioned against the description of a “perverse, dark carnival atmosphere” described by another member who had witnessed the riots.

## 3. Mortality: personal vs global

Feelings of age, mortality and place in the world began to be mixed with the other predominant themes. One member said “we are about to down size and leave London to get a new frame work” after the comment she added that this felt in some way like giving up and that her time had passed. Another member spoke about the need for “getting outside the box” and wondered if “something creative could happen before we

all go over the edge”. More than once these kinds of comments were thought to be linked to member’s feelings of personal mortality being aroused by destructive happenings in society.

Members considered themselves the old guard. The question was asked “We have free health care & education, why do you (the young) hate us so much?” “Why is life is not valued” and “Why so much complaining? These benefits are hard won privilege’s.”

Guilty feelings emerged as the group talked as if there time was done and they were moving on “I think about all the changes in my life, the progress, the choice & abundance & contentment. I am so glad I don’t have to live through the next twenty years”, “We will be ok – it’s our children & grand children who will suffer.”

Another member talked about ambivalent feelings of achievement “My Son took me to the opera, champagne etc. – like being in bubble – strange.”  
“Gucci bags, cashmere sweaters etc., I know where I want to be.”

One member hopefully stated that he is fine & thinks someone might “pop up and help” but this was countered by several comments that the loss of a capacity to think and to think through would make this unlikely.

Members had ideas regarding the age of the listening post membership and a desire to project feelings of death and annihilation on to the world stage.

Comments regarding the absence of the personal and familiar suggested a disconnect with society.

### **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.

#### ***Hypothesis***

Because of the massive changes members of society look for firm and clear leadership to get them out of the experiences of death and annihilation that they are experiencing. However, political and other institutional leaders were experienced as having failed to deliver the dependency needs required. Faced with having to take back their projections members of society were left facing the world without the resources to do so. Thoughts turned polarised views such as a doomsday scenario or that everything will magically be alright. Members also sought to mobilise youth as a form of saviour.

**Convener: Ben Neal**