**"Britain and the World
at the Dawn of 2006"**
Report of a New Years's Listening Post
held on Wednesday 12th January 2006
from 7:00pm to 9:30pm
at Connaught Hall
University of London
Tavistock Square
London WC1E 7HZ

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 Two the aim was collectively to identify the major themes emerging from Part One. Several themes were identified by the members and these have been distilled into three major themes as below.

a) Communication - The impact of technology
The members referred to several aspects of the way that technology is affecting communication. It was considered that the sort of communication that members of society were engaged in was not authentic and at times was simply unreal. It was also felt to be fragmented and a totally different means of communication to that based on a real relationship between people. It was also felt that, in spite of or perhaps because of the mass means of communication, members of society were exceedingly lonely and largely unable to fulfil their needs for continuity, consistency and confirmation. From this position technological (computerised) communication was seen as a delusion and a flight away from the loneliness. One member spoke of technology supporting life style. For example, it will soon be possible to achieve automatic translation by mobiles. Another member talked of the contradiction of being alone when we are forever contactable. Reference was made to children being in touch with perhaps hundreds of other children through chat rooms; and the fact that parents might be largely unaware of this communication. Another spoke to the affect of technology in the family where her young relatives had been absorbed by game boy activity. This had a considerable affect on communication both in the family and between the children. There was also the constant contact with other people that mobile phone and texting enabled. Reference was made to mobile phones being used to photograph people who were being beaten up. One member referred to the nonsensical use of a mobile phone by a person who was freezing cold and angry at waiting for a taxi. At some stage the woman started using her mobile phone and when asked if she was calling a cab replied 'No, I'm getting comfort from a friend!' Mention was made of the need for a colleague to turn their

Blackberry off at night to preserve some private space. It was felt that communication was itself a fragmented part object - and a retreat into self.

b) Technology vs. Nature
Members' experiences of society were variously described as instability, inauthentic, loneliness, and there were references to a fear of death. It seemed that central to these experiences was the lack of an ability to establish and maintain human contact. And that it was difficult to distinguish phantasy from reality. It was felt that the illusion of technology was that 'you are not alone'. At this time there is access to a much greater variety of means of communication than at any time in human history. However, the experience of the members was that this was not fulfilling our basic human needs.

The view was expressed that there was a desperate need to meet people. Technology provided us with what was described as 'part communication' only and it was strongly felt that this sort of communication was lacking in authenticity. In spite of frequent contact with others there was an anxiety of being alone and this extended to anxiety of death. A member referred to the example of internet dating; of how loneliness drove people to participate in what was considered a quite mad activity that was really an in depth fraud. Something that went on in cyberspace; and which when confronted with reality, all goes wrong. Members also spoke of the loneliness of 30 & 40 yr olds. It was suggested that this type of communication was simply a substitute for something. And this was felt to be associated with the fact that life was more difficult. One member referred to the way that the budget had been cut at a stroke for psychotherapy services. They were told, 'don't worry we will pay out of another budget head'. But no one considered the fact that a result was that there was no sense of belonging; rather staff were left with a feeling of abandonment.

c) Globalisation and Powerlessness
Members felt that Globalisation was creating a lack of stability in society. This was experienced by members as feelings of disengagement, impotence, powerlessness and abandonment. They also referred to a loss of capacity to think; an abdication of responsibility and an inability to cope. References to frailty of the human body, pain disease and illness and of fears that nature was taking over suggested something more than an inability to cope. Various areas of society were affected by globalisation not least that concerning the nature of work. One member spoke about Blair's 'push me pull me' authoritarian policy style; and about contradictions in policy. It was as if the Government were seeking control but really there was no control. Another spoke of power being taken from parents. Another member spoke of children and of a 'Lock tight' police campaign to ensure that valuable Christmas presents such as mobiles and iPods were not stolen. Other fears for children were expressed by reference to a recent baby rape and abduction case. They were fearful for kids; and asked, 'What's going to happen to them?' There was a mood of depression and anxiety. A member spoke of having to wait for 6 months to get his parent assessed. Others spoke of simple responses to complicated situations. It was asked, 'Who is responsible for society?' One member replied that Blair's quick fix and smile was not a helpful response. There was a degree of inauthenticity in everything that was occurring. Members spoke of impotent rage at failing systems in organizations. It was felt that fragmentation of roles in organisations resulted in a situation where no one knows the full system. Another spoke of her mother being on a waiting list and having to deal with untruthful staff. It resulted in high anxiety and feelings of what can I do? The system was likened to the phone systems whereby we are faced with countless choices before we (hopefully) reach someone who

will deal with our enquiry. It is as if it this mechanical system is transported into human systems - no one person is able to deal with a whole system.

Members of organisations provide service on the basis that this 'A' is my patch, I don't know anything about 'B' & 'C'. Reference was made to customer and staff surveys which were seen as a defensive process used to communicate a false picture. And to Google the fastest growing company in the world where it was said there are no rules, simply targets. If you don't meet targets you're out. Globalisation was also seen to be a natural phenomena; bird flue reminded us of the way that nature is active at a global level. The notion of an extended retirement age was seen as having to work until you die. There was a general preoccupation with a fear of and avoidance of death.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, 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. The three hypotheses that emerged were linked by a strong sense of society being in a state of tumultuous change driven by Globalisation.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1
Globalisation - Powerlessness

Analysis:
Globalisation was regarded as the all-embracing element that was having an enormous influence on society. It was even considered that this was reflected by our own individual internal authority. This was described as more a process of, 'do it, control it, and move on'. Members were of the view that there was a sort of disconnection between people. It was asked, 'How do we ever achieve mastery?' And the discussion continued around the issue previously raised, 'How can you affect what's happening (say in bank)?' The experience of members was that everything seemed to work in the same non-emotional manner as that associated with multi-national companies and Globalisation which was experienced as a monster. Driven by economic policy globalisation was considered to have developed a value system distinct from that held by most members of society. Globalisation was experienced as tyranny and members of society felt helpless and unable to manage or remain in control. As one member stated, 'the reality is we are not in control. Globalisation reigns in an all-powerful manner'. Because of the affects of Globalisation and the subsequent feelings of a lack of control it was felt that we were living in a world that is in chaos. The same 'lock tight' processes referred to in schools were the values now being developed. Members expressed their feelings of disintegration. A search for control led to one member asking, 'who made the decision that we should adopt Globalisation?' Another asked 'What kind of leadership are we entitled to?' Another referred to the fallibility of Leadership and sited the examples of Kennedy, Sharon, and Tony Banks. The Listening Post was preoccupied with death.

Hypothesis:
Globalisation is experienced by society as an all powerful and controlling influence that produces a sort of alternative world that is experienced as a tyrannical monster which is driven by economic policy with its own value systems. A result is that those responsible for the management, leadership and administration of political, economic and social institutions adapt these values which turn our institutions and organisations into the same tyrannical monsters. Members of society are left with feelings of powerlessness and an inability to control and influence their lives.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2
Communication - defence against psychological deprivation

Analysis:
There was a concern that communication was not seen as an authentic practice and that it was being used in other ways. For example, there was a denunciation of the way that children were using mobile phones for the practice of 'Happy slapping'. There was a real issue of how you communicate with others in a world that is full of new means of communication. It was felt that much of the communication was about deference and respect an approach which equated with fear. And in this sense it was felt that we only had respect for other countries because of their power. There was a strong theme of abuse of communication and of the means of communication. One member commented that a comedian named Johnny Vegas had reportedly said that when he locked himself indoors and started to communicate by computer he felt that he could do anything he wanted to do and that he could be anyone he wanted to be. The sort of communication we were referring to was regarded as being at a low level of connection between people. Further reference was made to internet dating. How loneliness drove people to participate in what was considered a quite mad activity that was really an in depth fraud. Members wondered what this meant in terms of values and what the impact was on relationships. It was concluded that although there was now more capability of communication, there was in reality less actual achievement of relationships. The general feeling was one of de-humanisation and one member spoke of the film 'I Robot'. There seemed to be a deprived need to be and feel human. As a sort of response to this deprivation it seemed that advertising messages to the effect that 'you can have it all' were aimed at providing satisfaction. The message seemed to imply that you are deprived if you don't have many possessions. Encouraged by the principles of Globalisation, a response to this deprivation is to adopt a materialistic approach. However, this approach is never successful in the long term. Even the poor own their DVD's, washing machines and TV 's. And it seemed that what was being said was that as long as you can keep buying you can feel good. It signified a materialistic world. However, the experience was that in spite of the availability of more and more products and the ability to buy them the problem of deprivation just gets bigger. This leads to feelings of impotent rage and in this respect one member referred to fights on the public transport in the mornings. Members asked what is living? What does it mean to have a life? And the realisation of death was never far away from the conversation.

Hypothesis:
The affect of Globalisation referred to in Hypotheses (1) results in members of society experiencing a lack of control over their environment and a feeling of deprivation at a psychological level. A result is that members of society utilize multiple means of communication as a defence against isolation and lack of attachment. Such however, is

the nature of this communication that it only leads to a sort of virtual world where members of society share the illusion that anything is possible denying the reality that true relationships are not achieved. Members of society are still left feeling isolated, impotent, dehumanised and remain psychologically deprived.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3
Delusions of Control

Analysis:
Globalisation and associated technological and medical changes are seen to inspire a belief that anything is possible. Even to the extent that we can - by nip and tuck etc - prolong youth; or to be more accurate youthful appearance. This is an example of the illusion or delusion of more control that is influencing members of society. There is a seeming delusion of what was referred to as perfectness. No one had to be anything less. It was felt that members of society develop a false idea that anything is possible. But it was felt that this was a sort of virtual world that did not exist in reality. One member referred to an exhibition of wild life photography which she had attended. Seeing the exhibition it had highlighted for her the fact that in the animal world there was a strong sense of reality. For example, lions know when to start and stop; when to be gentle or when to be wild and vicious. In the animal world it was as though you know where you stand. In the human world there was no such comparison only a lack of stability. There were contradictions and a lack of containment. It was difficult to satisfy ones needs for continuity, consistency and confirmation. There were few real work attachments; and worse still there was a denial of needs. Further reference was made to Google and it was queried whether all in Google have shares in the company. And if so would this hold them together? Clearly the notion of lack of attachment was strong at this time. Doubts were expressed about our capacity to be alone. And this was allayed to fears of illness and death. One member spoke of having news of illness at Xmas and linked this to the Catholic view that disease, punishment, and death were meted out to the bad while the good were rewarded with well being and a long life.

The discussion turned to the puritanical attitudes of Health Service managers. If you take alcohol, if you are a smoker, if you are obese, or if in any way you have done something to your self you don't deserve to be treated. Such are the feelings of impotence that we vex our anger on others.

Hypothesis:
Because of medical, technological and other advances members of society have developed the notion that anything is possible, that we are highly potent and totally in control of our environment. We develop an illusion of control, a false sense of omnipotence. In a 'magical thinking' childish manner we think anything is possible. However, as must inevitably happen we frequently find that we cannot control aspects of our environment. When this occurs we no longer have the capacity for creative thinking and we respond by exploding in impotent rage which is frequently displaced onto other significant people.