

**"Britain and the World  
at the Dawn 2011"**  
Report of a New Year's Listening Post  
held in London on 12th January



**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 experiences 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 to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part One. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following three interrelated themes:

- Generational Issues – A Split
- Technology – Miracle or Evil
- Social Change

***1. Generational Issues – A Split***

Generational issues create a situation of not knowing of being disconnected and of envy regarding Teenagers who are able to go back and forth and their indecision. Positive choices are available to the young they can have both if they want. There are few communal experiences and human interaction is reducing. What do we mean by authenticity? The rate of change is so difficult to live with. We have lived in a world where all boundaries linked but now children and adults seem divided. Is anything new or is it a repeat of the old? Are we doomed or will we be OK? A new generation is inventing new stuff. They are throwing away things I relied upon. Taking a technical theme, we are becoming more exposed to things which now come to our attention whether we like it or not, a lot of terrible things going on. Now we are aware of it. Is that a more dramatic shift than the Industrial Revolution? I worry about keeping up with it. I see my kids are somewhere I'm not. I'm never going to be there. Can I keep up with how it links everything together? Will there be a time when you are not connected? There is indecision of children to be here or there. So home to play on line it will never be the same? Connectivity and intolerance how did it happen? I am wary about generations there is something frightening, some control is needed. I am anxious; can we keep up with it? Is it a myth only young people can understand technology? Scary thing, I can choose to get a mixed picture. I am confused; our old model has been abandoned. I was struck by your image of children being where you are not. They've always been there and don't have so many limitations. We battery raise our children rather than free range. Kids are fantastic and we don't trust them enough. Meddle between 0 - 7 years after that we need to trust. New technology is not new to them.

Parallel universes, we forget we are standing right next to people we don't know. Where is the desire to open one self to differences?

Someone spent three months in a silent retreat – extraordinary solitude. Loss of creativity, relationship will he ever speak again. Emptiness is very important. Emptiness is what we need to know. I am feeling value in coming to this, I value it, I am mostly alone now, I can't keep up it gets lonely and I'm torn between doing things with younger people and trying to keep doing what is valuable to me. Loneliness, missing other people is one thing but aloneness is wonderful. I sometimes feel lonely. Loneliness of young people is also compounded by technology. Nothing is a substitute for being with my friends or work mates the telephone is good, internet is no substitute for real experience. We went to a concert and were gauging our age against the audience – where on the spectrum were we?

## 2. Technology – Miracle or Evil

Technology is a big influence in our lives. New technology and our established means of communication are creating opportunities and threats. Technology and morality the interplay shows how they are shaping each other. How to navigate new technology? The recent murder in Bristol, when shown on Facebook it had a big response. Bullying which occurs not just at school but can get straight into your home via Facebook. What are we going to do with this situation?

Technology where does responsibility lie? The national / global changes are difficult to comprehend. At one level I feel some reassurance that health care is more advanced but on the other hand a story about choosing the gender of babies scared me, I felt what might be the result? Could it be the end of the human race? They do these things with animals why not do it with us? How do we make these choices? What means of survival will change? There is instability if you can't rely on the facts of life. Child died of starvation while mother played games. Viewing Facebook I thought how casual and horrible people were to each other. I now feel more reassured by it. I am wistful it will be alright. We have all this technology and feel entitled to know and I don't know. It changes so fast my awareness of what I don't know is bigger. How dangerous the world is and human connection can be. In Iran Facebook was used by the authorities to identify those who had been organising the demonstrations against the Government and then they were arrested. China is thought to be behind several attempts to use cyber terrorism. Israel is thought to have done the same in regard to Iran's nuclear facility. We are seeing a new type of warfare. The more powerful the technology the more they can do. I don't know the impact of Wikileaks. I thought I would access a porn site to understand what was happening. I then thought what if the authorities traced my access and thought I was involved. I shut it off. Anti-freedom of speech people would have been pleased. Assange challenges us to ask what we mean when we say free speech; those that say it often don't mean it.

Skype with visual and audio contact is not a substitute but is a valuable means a good second best. My son is in Cambodia and I asked him if he was missing technology. He was not but felt that he had not had room to develop he was in contact with people all the time. At home he could control things by using technology. It is an illusion of being connected by technology – by pushing a button, something is getting lost.

### 3. Social Change

There seems to have developed a concept of entitlement: we are entitled to everything. We are facing the ability to have everything against what you don't know. We have to make our minds up. Unfairness, the youth who threw the fire extinguisher got jailed while MP's and bankers went scot free. There is a great deal of disproportionality. There is also a great deal of loneliness – being left out and not knowing. Wikileaks; secrecy; the Royal family links with government. A sense of polarisation, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer was it always like that or is it just now? What are new boundaries going to look like? I was disappointed this week the banks were doing what they have always done. The train is back on track nothing is done. Something could happen again. It all gets forgotten so quickly yet the ramifications are still present. I was concerned about the stiff sentence for the boy throwing a fire extinguisher, as a symbolic resistance. Family Xmas day pudding I said I'd get and one suggested I buy a particular pudding I found out they were on sale at £500 each! Sorry you are not getting. I have missed coming for a while. Seven year mark is terribly important in Shakespeare's learning more and more as it goes on. Rings bells with the North American Indians seven generation change. At New Year I was at a party of three families that consisted of children of different ages. All had Wii's and Xboxes which were in a 'connect' room. All the boys knew each other but had previously only been in touch from their own houses. In another room were the adults and the smaller children where we all played parlour games. It was a terrible pull for the boys in the connect room, they kept coming in and joining in the games. Then there was a pull to go back to the connect room and they would all leave. I was reflecting on the indecision around the pull of technology and of being with the family. I can't remember such indecision for me as a child. It seems a generational thing a pre-occupation with new technology the use or abuse of it. I went to a meeting of the local authority with counsellors and local business people. The Finance chief was presenting to the Trade Associations re the cuts. Rather than present a defence and explanation he said we should have seen it coming; it's happened before; it's something to be expected. We all moved from the position we came with but later we went back to it as we all have to live with the consequences. There is a lot of uncertainty. Is there a danger of collapse or disaster or is it a natural cycle? Where power lays in the hands of few these things will happen. I was on a recent trip to a developing country. For two weeks I didn't hear a thing about the financial crisis. How are they coping? When I came back I refused to watch the news. Pre-occupied that MPs went to prison for £14k I don't condone but £14k is not trillions. Why worry about small things when big things are occurring, the state of Haiti for example. I shudder every time I see it on television. As I saw it the MP went to prison for lying and stealing while in a position of trust. There is a sense of entitlement a woman with a disabled daughter in school, no holiday, everyone a job. In reality there isn't something for everyone. We are told that the world is about to collapse – if bankers go everything will collapse! There is terror in the notion of entitlement. Tweeting organising signing petition on line. They dismiss it. A few years ago it was a big event. They are now killing on-line petitions. What do I care about? How do I show it? I have a visual image of the politician getting killed in Pakistan I can't understand why he was killed by his guard. He wanted to stand up for equality.

### **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 two interrelated hypotheses followed from a lively and stimulating discussion.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 1: A Lack of Generational Connectedness**

#### ***Analysis***

Generations are living in different realities. Because of the revolution that we are going through there is emerging a new psyche, consciousness, intellect and emotion based on multiplicity not duality and a sense of us feeling left out or left behind. Youngsters are living in virtual reality. I don't think it's only generational, it's across people, and we are all living different realities. We don't have a common shared view of reality. What is the reality? I don't live in a village where we have a shared view of the world. I do live in a village and we still don't have a shared view of the world. Perhaps there never was but technology brought it to a head. It's a rapidly changing world where it's hard to find the moral navigator, a breakdown of boundaries. What's right? What's wrong? Without mediation where do we go? Because institutional authority has been revealed as minimal we are thrown back on our judgement. We notice we have a responsibility, we recognise we have a responsibility. It's a concept without a central authority. Boundaries, limitations what do people expect of us? We never know if we are doing enough, no limits, no boundaries to expectations. Identity, collective identity, where is it? Challenges – who I am? – who do I want to be? Religious icons we believed in, we are not now deluded, it is not rational or scientific. Praying – no one can say what is right or wrong. There is no regulation regarding Twitter. It challenges my sense of individuality. There is no agreed reality, people can't come together, deny other people's reality. There are multiplicities of reality – the plural of realities. Arizona shooting – who defines moral navigation? There is a lot of fantasy and there is a need for dialogue. Things not real can be treated as real. Children think differently. Does technology help? Moral navigators; the brain has to deal with. Bankers like avatars a fantasy world. So was the novel Tin Tin. Psychosis is the difference between a movie and reality. Actual theory is not good or bad. Foucault spoke of space not being regulated. How do we manage the consequences, where is the space for a solution? What is our entitlement?

#### ***Hypothesis***

There was a considerable preoccupation arising from the profound changes that have and are occurring as a result of new technology. There is a realisation that deep change at both an individual and collective level has affected values, beliefs and morals that have been the constant influence for several generations. Scientific advances and a much better informed society have resulted in a rejection of these influences. Older generations struggle to know what controls to impose or how to impose controls on the younger generation. Seen in a different light, this in turn has resulted in a lack of super-ego functioning by parents. A result is that younger generations are developing in a more ego inspired manner largely without internal control. At the same time new technology provides the means to do so. For example social networking sites: 'see me and all my friends'; 'see me happy slapping'; etc. An outcome is a lack of connectedness between older and younger generations.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 2: Technology – Towards a New Way of Life**

#### ***Analysis***

Avatars are real, dualism was always around. Series of distinctions but these are shown to be faulty. If in 1962 I spoke of an avatar I'd have been locked up. It is not a move

from the old to new but in between. Fear of uncontrollable technology. Babies die while mother is engrossed with gaming. Need a more sophisticated means of reality testing. The problem is how to keep up and understand the technology which is always ahead of us. Not enough understanding. Belonging: 'man is a group animal'. How do we test our reality? Who do we test our reality with when others have different realities? A virtual reality for a cause, you go on line and get an avatar of self and you go and demonstrate. Is that reality or not? Today these events are not proper campaigns. Dangerous convergence extreme views can be mobilised quickly without human control. Is this new, Ghandi was assassinated for the same reason? There is a difference in the missing part – the environment. In a context of vanishing resources and environmental collapse both persecutory and helpful aspects are projected into new technology. There is a paradigm shift. Oldies have something important to say. Technology globally is another added structure; we've been used to small structures like organisation structure. Technology is a metaphor for living/reality. Reality is a word itself there are thirteen people here that's real but all have different realities. Hypothesis limited resources; the unknown is how we use it positively or negatively. There is this unknown element at the frontier. Technology creates a new environment. Reflection of dominance we try hard to make sense of things. It's emotional regulation and moral regulation as well. Values are being re-drawn. Technology is it good or bad? We now have books as a tablet. We are running out of trees but we now have a tablet. The relationship between technology and development is driven by need.

### ***Hypothesis***

The experience of members of society is that technology creates a new environment. This has brought about the death of a way of life experienced and developed over the past two hundred years. Members of society are left in a sort of limbo where they are faced with multiplicities of reality. It provokes those most basic of questions such as what is real and what is phantasy? Technology provides a convenient object for societal projections be they good or bad. These are experienced as polarities whereby as a good object technology is idealised as a means of providing universal wealth and health; while at the same time as a bad object it is denigrated as being the possible catalyst that will lead to the end of the human race. It is against this background that members of society struggle to make sense of a new way of life; but at this time are unable to develop anything like a shared reality. A result is that members of society are left both confused and fragmented and the signs are that technological development will continue at a pace that will remain out of reach of a shared understanding.

**Convener: Lionel Stapley, Director of OPUS**