

**"Canada and the World
at the Dawn of 2012"
Report of a Listening Post
held in Toronto on 19th 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 the various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organizations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called; 'the stuff of people's lives', the relating of the 'socio' or external world of participants'.

Our themes moved across: literature, poetry and the uses of the novel; hysterical realism and the effort of identity; the influence of technology, particularly social media in everyday life, in terms of what constitutes information and its desire. We discussed face book, twitter and the compulsion to participate in, resist and nonetheless be affected by these forms of social media. We were curious about the inventions and possibilities for mental space and a sense of not being alone; subjectivity and the search for, loss of, and finding of feeling, designating the other in the self; the erosion of the 4th amendment and the 'right to privacy' in the US (and its reach to Canada); depoliticizing the 'public'; zombie society, zombie categories and emptying out of meaning; the notion of 'youth', what 'they' can receive from 'us', question of what 'youth' is within the 'adult' and the adulthood 'franchise' as normative.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

1. Technology and the everyday

This discussion began in reference to a NYT article on new authors, hysterical realism, the question of 'why write.' More specifically, is literature still relevant for helping us to make sense of social experience and its psychological manifestations? This beginning discussion led us to think about the influence and scaffolding of technology in everyday life, the needs and uses of information, the magnificent 'start-up' romance of new technologies, how experience is 'invested' and 'digested', and questions of desire to 'like', to 'see', to be 'seen', and 'not seen'. This preoccupation may also reflect the wish for a universal language – in language is the desire for unity, for death. We asked, "what does technology tell us about societal symptoms of attachment, alienation and impulses to verbalize"? What does the idea and practice of technology provoke for feeling alone, wanting or not wanting to feel and in what sorts of ways? How do uses of social media and new technologies enable the production of liberties and mental spaces for fashioning a self and new socials?

Some of us are very active on face book, twitter, blogs etc (not necessarily an inter-generational difference); we wondered about (both for those who are more active and for those who are not) the compulsion and the resistance to participate: possibly out of feelings of numbness, or a reaction to numbness in the search for feeling, or a fear of being numbed by these forms of social discourse. We wondered about, “What happens to time” in the virtuality of timelessness? “Where is the other”? While we may think we are being ignored (or wish we were), the pervasiveness of technology suggests otherwise. One participant talked about the replication of banality in relation to the shared details for example, of a couple’s breakup with 1200 of their face-book ‘friends’. And at the same time, these technologies have been used in the MENA and other regions for mobilization, connectivity, and re-making new possibilities for governance and freedom.

2. *The loss of privacy*

One participant introduced a preoccupation with the erosion of the 4th amendment – the right to ‘privacy’ – in the USA (and its effects on Canada). We explored what ‘privacy’ is, and what it makes possible. If there is no privacy, what becomes of the distinction between the public and the private? Does this technological-social become ‘the social’ thereby replacing ‘the private’? In a socially-public-privacy where ‘one’ no longer attends to the need for the private, can self-authorization occur and link to Winnicott and Ogden’s observations regarding privacy: when there is no demarcation in the ‘family’ (or society?) there is no capacity to differentiate or distinguish. Yet how does one contend with the solitariness of the self? The collecting of so-called private information on citizens (on us?), the expanse of collecting such information is itself held as ‘private information’. This information might be used ‘against one’ without ‘probable cause’ at any time, such as the no-flight list. If the panopticon goes portable, if we imagine the prevalence of surveillance without interpellation how does to whom does hysteric address? One participant spoke of required police checks that are completed on every student entering undergraduate education placements: the impossible logic of ‘clearing’ students to begin work, a back ward looking effort that imagines itself as a predictor for what may occur in the future.

As a ‘soft totalitarianism’, these forms of technological surveillance structure thoughts difficult to think, pervading the self and one’s relation to the other, which not only depoliticizes the inventions for and aspirations toward creating ones’ private self but also delimits how the other can be imagined and felt-for. The injunction to ‘love thy neighbor’ reiterates its impossibility. Returning to the some aspects of the beginning theme, nothing ‘novel’ can be fashioned for the self if a ‘zombie-society’ results and ‘zombie’ categories (a new television series attesting to a re-newed interest in zombies) deaden language. And interestingly, only a bullet to the brain can kill a zombie. We aren’t alone.

3. *Adolescence in perpetuity*

One participant introduced an anxiety related to the huge number of youth for whom we cannot plan a future. Youth unemployment figures are high across the world. What are the material and thinking possibilities for ‘them’? Does this perpetuate adolescence and sentence parents in perpetuity, as though adolescents (and we through them) are not subject to death? Perhaps this worry resonates with the idea that ‘they’ (like the zombies?) will come after us to tear down as we did. But we have already torn it down. If the adolescent is a believer and not a questioner, in what ways does adolescence act as a reaction formation to libidinal attachment where absoluteness becomes ‘concrete’?

What do these phantasies mean then for our relation to the notion of adolescence in relation to time and to thoughts of 'them'? We speculated that our notions of adolescence are replete with ideas of adulthood. Can it be postponed? Evaded? Through the transference, does this perpetual adolescence as the thing that cannot go away express a wish of our own? If the adult can hate the adolescent, what are the projective identifications we employ for what ends? What are our desires in the transference? These themes returned us once again to the dream and function of face book, particularly (but not only) for youth and what this mental space makes possible for those who participate in it and in our imaginings about it.

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.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Technology and mental space: Thoughts awaiting thinkers.

Analysis: Though each of us has a different relation to new forms of social media it is clear that whether or not we make use of these directly or frequently, they affect our everyday life. Some of us are averse to or disinterested in their use, but others of us interact in the virtual space all the time. Their 24/7 existence, proliferation and expansiveness produces, invites and incites forms of knowledge production and 'information' that attracts, repels and alters the nature of subject formation, mentalizing of the other, expanding or diminishing mental space for imagining, for feeling and for thinking. Social media and technology convey a presence that is not sensuously present – itself a thought.

Hypothesis: Because technology 'works' on and arises from our desire, the construction of subjectivities and identities as a defense against the 'real' and because face book, twitter, email, and wikipedia as interlocked sets of technology are a consequence of human creation, members of society 'meet' this architecture as mental space with the repetitions, devastations and hopes from our collective psychical world which cannot be the solution for the human condition. When treated as such, the meeting becomes a thought awaiting thinkers.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

The loss of privacy: Making of one's mind

Analysis: In a post 9/11 world/time, globalized and digitalized surveillance architecture 'out there' and 'right here', creates the erosion of citizen's rights. It is – as it has always been – a question of understanding, amidst the lessening of private space, how we are to live as 'human beings' so that the mind may be made and shared. The human 'condition' is conditioned by every condition it meets. With the loss of privacy, the self becomes digitalized and fragmented as it is subject to unpredictable apparatuses. Where are the enunciatory spaces in which to make one's self and hold the

self in that impossible making and in relation to others? If everyone is suspect, loving thy neighbor still remains an impossible injunction. By now, having to contend with and defend against a surveillance that watches and disciplines – not unlike a super ego – how are we to make a mind of our own and make sense of our defenses to contain these terrors that return to us. How can poetry flourish?

Hypothesis: Because of the erosion of privacy, members of society suspect, watch, supervise and incorporate one another resulting in an incapacity to think, link, create, research or form hypothesis. This results in mind-less activities such as the reporting of everyday events on face book and endless imagined efforts at emancipation. Alternatively, because of the incapacity to think, link, imagine, research or write poetry, members of society keep an eye on one another resulting in suspicious relatedness and an urge to hide.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Adolescence prolonged: And then nothing happens

Analysis: The human problem of unhappiness is not simply located in 'youth'. At the same time, adolescence can become a category or question for what constitutes 'development' and 'good care' in the world for each other. It is possible to re/call a time in which there was a beginning, middle and an end of life, some regularity and scene of purpose. Without that, then what becomes of time? In the apparent prolongation of adolescence, what can be said to 'happen' and what needs to happen for development to occur? How are we to 'receive' this youthfulness and how can it, they and we be cared for? In the moment of noting the moment of living, in what respect can a 'something' be said to not happen?

Hypothesis: Because of the apparent prolonging of adolescence, the difficulties of 'achieving independence' in time, as well as the longing for adolescence, members of society experience anxiety arising from identifications with and transferences to youth and youthfulness. As a result we project onto youth unhappiness, and feel responsibility to care and to make sense of the moment we are in to contain uncertainties of the appearance of timelessness.

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