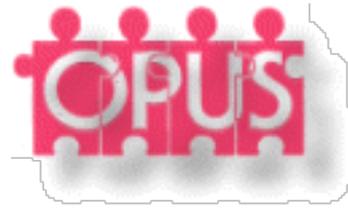


AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

United Kingdom and the World
at the Dawn of 2016
Report of a Listening Post
held in London on January 13th 2016



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

PART 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES.

In this part the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles; be they 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': 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:

- Gender expectations – male or female dominance?
- Conflict of technology and humanity

The statements (as recorded here) are deliberately not attributed to any individual, or gender, and no attempt is made under this section to link any of the statements together.

Theme 1: Gender expectations – male or female dominance?

Distributed leadership at the OPUS November conference was fresh and innovative – we even had an improvised session over lunch!

I brought 3 new people to Listening Post and from their reaction I am not sure that the model is clear. There is a tendency for the same preoccupations to keep cropping up. Can we talk about something different? I liked Ruby Wax's book "Mindfulness for the Frazzled" - trying to cope with overload of news and information.

I didn't think Ruby Wax was saying anything new. I was listening to File on 4 about the personal payments system. I was shocked that they are not keeping records of data about how many succeed or fail in

applying. Why wouldn't you want a record of success?

We don't know how many refugees die in their search for safety.

What can we do for refugees – helping those who can be enabled to live and allow others to sink?

Ruby Wax is saying we are not equipped for this century – force fed with bad news and too much information. So we shut off.

But when a man is burying people in his back garden, we need to take notice.

I've been reading Peter Ackroyd's Biography of London – he shows that in the past people frowned on anyone who was beating people up.

There doesn't seem to be much of a community now – perhaps because everyone is out at work.

Can you remember there ever being a community? When I was a boy, we only knew a limited number of people – closed communities.

Yes I lived in a road in Notting Hill where we knew each other. Then came an influx of West Indians and there was unrest. Then wealthy folk moved in, buying up the desirable houses and sending their children away to fee paying schools. But now I don't know my neighbours.

I've just moved to a small village. Recently I came to London leaving my door open with the key in the lock. I don't know my neighbours but I started to ask if anyone had noticed. All the women locally had noticed – but they didn't tell me! They were actually looking out for me. I found you can knock on a few doors and find out what is going on through the grapevine.

Education of the elite starts with taking children away from their mothers and handing them over to nannies; then sending them off to boarding school from age 7. So our boss boys learn you do not need your mother and also learn to hate their nanny and they cannot abide the 'Nanny State'.

In fee paying schools domestic science was anathema. Cooking and looking after children never got onto any curriculum.

Listening to recordings of people some years back I was struck by the fact that educated women had poorer language skills compared with men. In Greece we are much more social than individualist – so important.

Girls were funnelled into very narrow career choices. Do women not want corporate power? There is feminist frustration about continuing

inequality. I heard the male head of a women's organisation say: "I want to throttle women for their lack of confidence"!

What happened to the mother goddess? Why the switch to the father?

Matriarchal power still exists in some families. Will there not always be leaps forward and then a fall back? Not steady progression.

Banking boys asking nanny to let them back into the bank. I noticed that the woman in charge of the banking association apologised for their bad behaviour!

Pattern seems to be: Protest leads to Mainstreaming and then Difference.

As a species we are not likely to change fast.

Working with people from other countries which had different ways of doing things meant I learned so much.

Susan Isaacs work in observing children said: "You are a stranger observing another culture". It is important to be involved in the nurturing of young children, not delegating it to a servant. I am now learning much from my grandchildren (more so than from my children) when I look after them.

Yes, men of a certain age suddenly notice children!

Men were discouraged from having anything to do with birth and babies.

Health visitors and midwives were often putting men off being involved even though wives wanted their husbands there. Husbands didn't know what to do often saying they didn't want to be there.

We didn't allow fathers in when I was a midwife.

Different cultures who live here bring their own fixed ideas – often cutting across the issues of feminism. When I worked at the Fawcett Society discrepancy in wages was a main issue but was nothing compared to what goes on in other countries.

Immense importance of whether relationships between men and women actually recognise the women's contribution.

Let sons work it out for themselves.

38% of listeners to Woman's Hour are men.

There is a joint broadcast twice a year for men and women.

Why do we have to have Americans on radio 4?

There is institutional resistance to social scientists – everything is diverted into books on mindfulness. I was impressed by the reported observations of a Swedish woman on the behaviour of Muslim men in public.

“We have to let them know what we're thinking”.

I notice that women's voices have predominated in this discussion. There are two male note takers this time (one shadowing) neither of whom has said anything. Have we missed anything as a result?

When you have a mixed group, if women speak, men keep quiet.

I'm anxious about us women dominating even though the group is 5 men and 5 women.

Theme 2: Conflict of technology with humanity

I was reading about an idea of transplanting the brains of highly educated people into robots – successful people who will gain a form of immortality.

My son was asking what should we expect from artificial intelligence.

We will lose history if we rely on IT.

I miss getting to know people's handwriting – its all email and phone messages now. But I know more about people, even though we do not meet.

When I had a fall, I was able to keep in touch by email and Facebook. But not on Twitter.

Has there been a study on children and their use of iPads and tablets?

Think about how facts get recorded. In museums you have the hard evidence of the past. Will IT be as reliable? Biography of London can draw on data to show us how we were 1,000 years ago.

I was a ward sister in America. They had good IT information on what was wrong with a patient, but I noticed a gap in communication between nurse and patient.

There is a Kate Granger on Twitter who has a hashtag '#hellomynameis' – to remind doctors that she is a human being.

I've noticed a change in seeing nurses coming and talking to patients. This is to do with training at UCLH.

This used to be common practice but got lost at one time.

It depends on who is in charge of the ward.

Nurses need to know not only what is wrong with the patient but also something about them and even their relatives.

There is a re-learning of things which were once common – feminism, emotional intelligence. What makes for knowledge?

Trams went out and are making a comeback.

Is there a correlation between how much you get paid and how much you are a hands on carer? More hands on, less pay, I guess.

Like SERCO – invest more in IT than in human beings.

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: Gender expectations – male or female dominance?

The place and role of women was discussed: as child bearers, as those who can cope with uncertainty and with not being in control and as tidal beings – responding to menstrual and menopausal cycles. Whereas men like to be in control and are uncomfortable and vulnerable if not.

David Bowie was considered as someone who had a great capacity to move across genders in his various roles. He had a wide appeal, appreciated by those from age 15 to 60. Did he even become a role model for those on their deathbed by the way he published his final production a few days before his death? But it was thought that he was more interested in image than in reality. No-one seems to have thought that Bowie would die! Shock! He made a work of art out of his death.

This seemed to move the discussion on to the subject of immortality. We find it difficult to conceive of immortality now, whereas in the past religion made the idea of eternal life a commonplace. It was

suggested that the idea of living for ever would mean that you don't need to learn or act urgently, since you would be able to do something whenever you wanted to.

The subject of immortality seemed to be an escape from thinking about mortality, perhaps an escape from persecutory guilt about what we have done to the planet – what we have done to Mother Earth. Persecutory anxiety could lie behind the severe programmes of austerity being enacted across Europe – Greece being the main object of persecution. Perhaps this is connected to the idea of post traumatic stress. We are learning that the body contains the trauma and continues to react when the original trauma is over. This may be what is happening in the body politic. Our government seems to be stuck between benefits and retentiveness. Can we move to the depressive position and accept a greater degree of reality?

Hypothesis 1: Because we have a fear about the future survival of the planet (and our cherished institutions like OPUS), members of society accept punishment in the form of economic austerity with the result that we live with uncertainty about our roles as men and women – equally unable to act to effect realistic change.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2: Conflict of technology with humanity

It was suggested that the idea of transplanting a brain into a computer is the denial of the woman's place. The fantasy future of the human species would no longer be dependent on childbirth. The idea of a virtual male and virtual female would be an escape from emotions. So perhaps IT is creating an alternative breast - to protect us and feed us – but without exposure to real relationships.

There was a question whether the early use of computers by both girls and boys would change the relationship between the sexes. But even with computers there are different agendas for boys and girls – traditional roles and expectations are still there.

It was remarked that Bowie turned himself into a robot at one point.

Hypothesis 2: Because we have a hope that technology will produce solutions to our difficult problems, we suspend our disbelief and put our trust in technological advances with the result that we allow our children access to computers at an early age to the detriment of their social adjustment.

Convenor: Paul Regan