

Public Engagement and a new Civic Responsibility:

I would like us to focus our minds – for the next fifteen minutes – on the perfect storm which surrounds us: on how we, gathered in Portmeirion, can come together as a genuine force for good and a force for change. I would like us to re-consider how we measure our own outputs and achievements – how we can help shift our world from a society of wants to a society of needs. I would like us to think beyond pure economics, to properly consider the environment, and to help others embrace the power that digital democracy brings. Above all, I would like us to start thinking of ourselves not as an ‘opinion forming elite’ but as **Catalyst Citizens** – and the role we can play in bridging the divide between Government, Business and the People.

For too long, the marketing industry – myself included - has sold consumers stuff they do not really need purely in search of growth and profit. I believe that marketing, specifically - but all of us, generally - must now move from **being part of the problem, to being part of the solution**. We need to understand the better language by which we should measure success: quality of life, social capital, sustainable development; community strength; wellbeing and progress. *Forgive the jargon – help me with the sentiment.*

Ten days ago, we watched many of the world’s great and good flounder at the World Economic Forum in Davos. **This floundering is not meant to happen** – just as Wall Street Traders are not meant to be led away in chains, nor retire in disgrace with huge wealth. Nor are our banks – and our countries – meant to be bailed out with hard-earned citizen taxes. Nor is Bob Dylan, folk hero of the ‘60s, meant to ‘sell out’ by letting his anthem be used for the sales pitch for a chain of mid-market supermarkets.

I winced when I first heard that ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ will be the soundtrack for The Co-Op’s new TV ad. Bob is the man who has always led, never followed. He has shunned commercialism. He is the man who inspired Sam Cooke, of course, whose own ‘Change Is Gonna Come’ captured the spirit of the Civil Rights movement and, in turn, inspired Barack Obama.

The truth is that Bob is telling us that the nineteenth century values of the Co-Operative movement, are in **fact some of the values we most need now**. The philosophy of Robert Owen and the Rochdale Pioneers – which championed a more open democracy, a better distribution of surplus and a

utilitarian pursuit of the common good – has real resonance with the emergent values of today: **active participation; economic participation; giving back; altruism and a sense of purpose; a sense of community.** My point is that we cannot simply steal these words and apply them for marketing or political gain. Our new language must become our new actions.

We must, first of all, nail the green consumption myth: that it's ok to consume, as long as we do so in a kinder, greener sort of way. **The bigger issue at play here is consumption itself:** what do we really need to consume? How do we move from a society of wants, to a society of needs? How can we shift our thinking to 'what is necessary', rather than 'what is possible'? How can we bring about better regulations and controls that properly recognise and safeguard human and planetary wellbeing - and help them flourish? *There are some in this room, businesses and brands, who are – thankfully – already walking this path of progress.*

The Kingdom of Bhutan famously measures growth in terms of Gross National Happiness, not Gross National Product. At his coronation, King Khesar spoke of 'an enlightened society.... in which happiness and wellbeing is the ultimate purpose'. I hope there is a little bit of Bhutan within us all.

Many of us have always relied on such outliers to refresh our own thinking. In recent months, these have included our religious leaders. While Gordon was busy saving the world, the Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, spoke beautifully on Radio 4 about the '**renewable energy of high ideals**'. He referenced a twelve year old girl who had asked not for gifts for herself but for contributions to society. He called into question our over-consumptive lifestyle excesses.

Three years ago, Rowan Williams argued that 'the economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment' and warned us all on the environmental perils of super-consumption. Yet too many are using the current state of global economic turmoil to turn away from our environmental responsibilities – as though they are just not that important right now – as though the problems of global warming and the possibility of a bankrupt planet can be put on hold while we sort out our apology of bankers. Sadly, **the science does not lie.** As John Hirst, Chief Executive of the Met Office, puts it: '*Climate Change is not a philosophy, a religious conviction or a problem of metaphysics*'. **It is scientifically observed. It is real and it will happen in our lifetimes.**

Those who make excuses on the environment include many from within the creative community. Last summer, I spoke alongside the COO of one of the larger advertising groups. Worry not, he said, about all this green anti-consumption blather in Europe and the West. We, the marketers, can simply move on to Asia and Africa – where no doubt there will be new levels of adoration. No doubt we can sell them tobacco, too. **There has to be a fundamental shift in behaviours by some in the marketing industry.**

There are clear parallels – and a powerful metaphor – between the collapsing state of our world economy and the slide into destruction of our planet. George Monbiot called it brilliantly: *‘the two crises have the same cause. In both cases, those who exploit the resource have demanded impossible rates of return and invoked debts that can never be repaid. In both cases, we denied the likely consequences.’*

According to WWF, on current UK rates of consumption, we already need three planets to satisfy our resource needs, sustainably. If we adopt US rates of consumption, we would need five planets, not even three. And we are heading in the wrong direction. Far from decoupling resource use from GDP and *reducing* our impact, we are in fact becoming *more* wasteful and *more* destructive. The science does not lie. **We therefore have to change the way we live and consume**, just in order to survive.

The inter-dependency between the economy and the environment is one of the central themes of a Wiki Book Jules Peck and I published in September.

In **Citizen Renaissance**, we write about the end of Corporate-Consumer-Capitalism and, above all, a Green New Deal that finally nails the green consumption myth and puts an end to a ‘growth at all costs’ philosophy. GDP, we argue, is an arcane and imprecise measure that takes no account of our personal, planetary or societal wellbeing (I know some of you are uncomfortable with this ‘trendy’ term). We called for better regulations; and a more open, participative, active democracy.

It has been a strange few months. While some initially greeted with scepticism our views on consumption, there was Paxman - within 24 hours of Lehman’s going to the wall – claiming that capitalism itself had collapsed.

Likewise, the '**new age of austerity**', which we had written about out of environmental need, was suddenly being driven by economic imperative.

The Citizen Renaissance call for a **Green New Deal**, echoing the Green Party and the NGO community, has become common currency. The UN's Achim Steiner called it in October; Chris Smith flagged it in November and, by January, it was embedded within the PM's New Year message. Obama claims it, too. My fear is that we become easy with – lazy with, perhaps – such terms. **We are too good at grabbing the soundbite; writing the headline and the story; nowhere near good enough at thinking through and acting on the implications.**

President Sarkozy has opened the debate on **GDP**. Working with Joseph Stiglitz, he has sponsored a commission to better understand 'economic performance alongside social progress' and develop indicators for the environment to sit alongside those of economic development. There are those who now want to remove from GDP measurements the negative elements of economic expansion – starting with the polluters and the pollutants.

Regulation has become fashionable again. Edelman's own **Trust Barometer** shows that 71% of UK 'informed publics' want the Government to impose stricter regulations and control. 70% believe business must partner with Government to solve the big issues of our time – climate change up there alongside the financial system meltdown. We would be ill-advised to ignore these signals.

In early December, Edelman hosted an illustrious panel of thinkers, asking them what prospects 2009 would really hold. Vince Cable spoke of a 'mothballed Britain', while David Frost, Director-General of the British Chambers of Commerce (the real voice of commercial middle Britain) called for **green manufacturing**. Why, he asked, are our wind turbines being built in Korea? When we ask ourselves '*what should we be making/ what should we be selling?*', we would do well to hear Frost's voice. Jim O'Neill, Chief Economist at Goldman Sachs, also recognised that there is a green tech solution to the current crisis – we have the people, the language and the technology to re-build Britain. **Now is the time to re-order our purpose.**

We therefore need to make our citizen voice heard on the most urgent issue of our time. Stephen Hawking has said 'we should declare a war on climate change, rather than a war on terror'. The

Ministry of Defence has called Climate Change *'the greatest challenge to global stability ... and national security'*. As Catalyst Citizens, we need to focus on how we can provide meaningful counsel to those who can help shape the destiny of our people and our planet.

Last year, the CBI published its report on Climate Change. Signed by the great and the good of British industry, the seventeen company signatories together represented over 1% of Britain's total carbon emissions. **Change can start here. Our changing advice can start here. We can hold those whom we advise, those who read our articles, those who work with us every day, and those whose products we buy to account.**

Digital Democracy – the power of advocacy and accountability at our fingertips – is now the critical accelerator for change. Digital Britain is about so much more than Stephen Carter's interim report. Carter focussed on content and entertainment. He failed to address the wider, political revolution and a new sense of engagement that a properly Digital Britain will bring.

In my marketing world, we have seen how Digital Democracy has spawned consumer politics – forming on-line networks and coalitions; spreading positive and negative word-of-mouth; leading boycotts. This is only the beginning. **A true, Digital democracy changes everything** - as the Total workers have demonstrated to great effect only this past week. Their movement started on-line; they by-passed traditional authority figures; they brought pressure to bear; and they initiated change.

We ignore this most seismic of shifts at our peril. Digital Britain can save us from being trapped in a **'spiral of political alienation'** - of failed systems, pointless divisions and hopeless short-termism ... of bankrupt ideas.

At Edelman, we talk about **'Public Engagement'**, a new communications model that draws together many of the strands articulated this evening (and today). Public Engagement speaks to the new communications paradigm, and to a better regulated world that respects the growing equality between business, government and citizens. It rests on four pillars, many of which echo the founding principles of the Co-Operative Movement:

First, **Private Sector Diplomacy** – where we argue that businesses must forge transparent partnerships with Government and NGOs to drive decision-making on major, societal issues.

Second, **Mutual Social Responsibility**. We are in this together. As employers and employees. We are not just serving the elite. We need to collectively benefit society and the common good –not only the bottom line.

Third, **Shared Sacrifice**. We can no longer accept the wide excesses of some within the business community. This speaks to the spirit of mutuality and a fairer deal for all. David Aaronovitch, I am sure, has a point to make about bankers' bonus'.

Fourth – a **Continuous Conversation**. We need to *inform* the conversation, not dictate it – whether we are journalists or PR people. Crucially, we need to DO as well as SAY. We need to be Catalyst Citizens.

Our responsibility as Catalyst Citizens is therefore several-fold.

We must recognise the coupling of economics and the environment. We must accept the failings of the past and redress them for the present; we must understand that we are active participants who can provide leadership and build a better future. We must not let ourselves be fooled by greenwashing or green consumption myths. We must become as impassioned about our planet as we have been about our personal wealth. We must recognise that we have the right to hold Businesses and Governments to account – just as others, especially our employees, have the right to hold us to account, too. **We call this Active Democracy – a Democracy that works.**

The breakdown in the financial system has jolted us into a new reality. We can ill-afford to sleepwalk into environmental disaster. As people who pride ourselves as Thinkers, surely we can do better? HSBC's Joe Garner describes '*a crisis of character and ethics*'. As Catalyst Citizens, we need to **re-discover our character** and **re-purpose our ethics**. We need to re-discover our Citizen Voice and **stem the recession of leadership – the 'collective failure of leadership'**, as Jaguar's David Smith described.

Barack Obama spoke beautifully of a '*new era of responsibility*'. He referenced '*the price and promise of citizenship*'. Let us hope that he does not betray that promise. But let us understand that he cannot deliver that promise alone. **We are parties to the contract of citizenship.** *Our* era of responsibility can start here and now. We need to stand up and be counted as Names – in our numbers. Simon Scharma spoke of this being 'a revolutionary moment'. We must seize this moment while we can.

Robert Phillips – February 9 2009