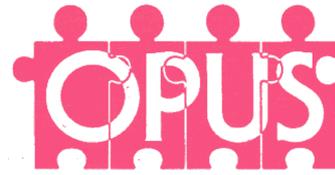


AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Australia and the World at the Dawn of 2013
Report of a Listening Post held on 9th January in Melbourne



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Introduction

18 participants attended this year's Listening Post in addition to the two convenors. Of the 20 people in the room, women predominated, 15 to 5 men. This female: male ratio is a continuing phenomenon of the New Year Listening Posts (last year it was 20:5).

In the report that follows we focus on themes and hypotheses from Parts 2 and 3 of the event.

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.

Participants were invited to share their preoccupations and experiences as citizens of Australia, and to explore these from their various social roles, be these in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. It was noticeable in the group's preoccupations that citizenship is experienced as being part of a global community.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. Several themes were identified by participants that we have grouped under four distinct themes. These were:

1. Trust and Disillusionment;
2. Aggression and Violence;
3. Fast-Slow, Saturated but Starved;
4. Seamless Local Global World.

As will be seen in the discussion below, there was a strong pre-occupation with loss of trust in traditional institutional authority, in particular the media – the so-called Fourth Estate. This loss of faith in institutional authority is a continuing trend on past years' Listening Posts. We notice too that Australia's environmental situation was largely absent from people's preoccupations, alluded to only as 'concerns about the planet'.Greed

1. Trust and Disillusionment

This expressed itself as the first pre-occupation and was returned to often and again right to the end of the session – cynicism particularly towards the media, but also, politicians, the Catholic church, corporations and the state were voiced.

Trust

- *How do I get information that I can trust?*

- *How do you trust what just gets repeated from social media?*
- *In the old days we trusted the ABC and 'The Age' [equivalent to BBC and The Times in Australia].*

What is real

- *How much [of the media] is real?*
- *I heard about the US fiscal cliff – I don't believe a word of this...I'm cynical – the message is put out for a system purpose, not a citizen purpose.*
- *News – flashy headlines but no substance.*

Disillusioned

- *It's like our politics: I feel disillusioned.*
- *I feel suspicious about the politics of democracy.*
- *The debates between our two main parties is disillusioning.*

Range of institutions seen as failing society

- *We've almost named every system we depend on – lack of trust in some of the most basic systems in society*
- *Another social institution that can't be trusted [the Catholic Church's response to sexual abuse by priests]*

Reactions to this sub-theme

- *I feel enormous anger and shame about the lack of humanity in the responses [of the Catholic Church].*
- *One of my roles is on the Mental Health Review Board. Should I belong to this system if I believe it is behaving inappropriately?*
- *We've trusted various authorities but we can't trust them. You have to cook for yourself, think for yourself.*
- *I'm glad trust and courage have re-emerged in this discussion – will anything hopeful come out of this?*
- *Hope – like Pandora's Box, it's only there after you experience everything else.*

Money/ the economy

- *I work in the health sector – it's all about numbers, costs – values are skew whiff – tick the boxes – it disillusion people.*
- *There's no soul in a palpable sense.*
- *The mantra 'we must have a [budget] surplus' is so unrealistic...only time you need no debt is when you retire – perhaps Australia is about to retire!*

Gratification

- *The analogy about living within our means applies to everything.*
- *I'm concerned about our planet – the analogy still applies.*
- *... thinking about experiences of ecstatic states – now projected into sex in the main.*
- *A sense of entitlement: if you don't get instant gratification then you're a victim.*

This sub-theme related to instant gratification was essentially then enacted through a discussion about individual experiences of being failed by doctors – increasingly victim-like and angry.

- *I don't trust the system to really look after my health issues.*
- *"I came to you [a doctor] looking for answers and help and I didn't get it and I felt lost."*

This theme of lack of trust and disillusionment with the institutions of society led to other themes that seemed to be linked to it as below.

2. Agression and Violence

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Conveners: Jinette de Gooijer & Heidi Vestergaard