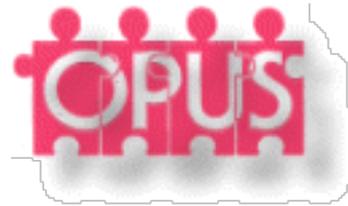**AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)**

**United Kingdom and the World
at the Dawn of 2014
Report of a Listening Post
held in London on April 15th 2015**

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 four interrelated themes:

Theme 1: Institutional violence

"I work with someone who is talking about things all the time and is not listening. It is hard to have to deal with this on a daily basis." A member described the daunting experience of deciding to take his four and a half year old grandson to the science museum. He was advised to get a ticket beforehand, which he did. Moving across London was quite difficult (i.e. the underground) but getting into the museum was even more challenging. There was a sense of moving at a snail's pace. He and his grandson had to queue for 45 minutes and the waiting and the frustration that was caused did not appear to be contained. On the contrary, difficulties encountered by the buggies in the queue were left to the visitors to deal with and no provision or effort to accommodate them was available. The experience in the train was more interesting than the experience in the museum. There was an idea that there were too many people in this city.

Something about this situation made one feel that in order to go through London one had to engage in intense social interaction where it felt hard to relate and one could even have the impression that they had to negotiate with animals. This powerful statement revealed the primitive feelings that emerge in the face of the experience of "too many". Staff find it difficult and patients are finding it hard, too: these are the two sides of the same coin. There is institutional violence

expressed by the absence of someone who cares. No one gives a damn! Is it sadism? Someone wondered; "You can't leave your buggy unless you queue for 45 minutes!" "Is it masochism?", someone else added. A different member talked about the rage that underlies the above situations. You are trying to scream and express frustration whether as a pilot or as holding a buggy.

Another member, a GP, stressed how difficult it was to be able to afford to care at a political, personal and professional level. She described her research project that involved interviewing senior GPs. When in the waiting room before the interviews she felt a sense of horror: an allergic sense that she had not wanted to see. Walking down the High Street felt similarly despairing, added another member and somebody suggested that there was a sense of elements of society beginning to disintegrate. The question "Can we afford to care?" was asked in the group. This was connected to the political agenda and to the debt government in particular, which felt disturbing: the government is in debt to the extent of default. One can get away with their debt. There seems to be a direct link between the government situation and the debt- very disturbing. GPs are reaching their limit of care. The numbers are overwhelming and care turns into hatred. We hate people who are too much for us to care for. Another member added that the structures that we built for 100, 000 people to be cared for are failing. 400 people drowned. The NHS, the plane and the Chinese banks are systems that we created to contain us, but they don't. We can care for 2 people. What is care? Who is Google caring for? Does the Italian government care for the boat refugees? Another member commented on the massive complaint mode of the group, the ungratefulness: there are people who are doing all right. After a tribunal a member's client told him: You really care for me. So why are you putting me in section 2? The member was trying to make sure his client got the help that he needed.

Theme 2: Lack of institutional control and vision

There are a lot of concerns at work as well as elsewhere. The aircraft, deliberately crashed by its pilot, killing all passengers on board; it was a random, impulsive act of madness. British teenagers go to Syria and join ISIS. At work people are not safe either: the inpatients had taken over the ward, while the staff were trying to escape from windows. There is a remarkable lack of containment that leads to something crazy. There was a suggestion that perhaps the co-pilot was not mad. He was definitely extremely narcissistic and in the position to act his pathology out. People with extreme personality disorders are more dangerous than terrorists or psychopaths. These people may hold powerful positions in society. The issue of role was raised: an American police officer had shot someone eight times in his back. The member linked the abuse of the police officer's authority with what may be happening elsewhere; in the mental health sector a clinician who does

not like a patient may diagnose them with emerging personality disorder.

The questions asked to politicians on the radio were not answered. They are rehearsed questions with no feeling. It is so dehumanizing to hear politicians. People are seeking for a moment of passion; he recalled a woman speaking from her feet, from her heart that made him feel connected immediately. Another member linked this to the situation in Greece where people felt that they were heard and represented by their leaders even if their aspirations were unrealistic. People were thirsty to be heard, to feel that democracy still existed and this government, advocating for the majority of the people had given them hope. Another member stressed the disappointment that the hopes that Green or other parties are offering are unrealistic.

Helplessness! The whole world is changing. Governments are not policemen. China is taking over and no one can stop this. All one can do is keep on playing the game. There are no institutions in place to control this situation and it filters down. There may be austerity in Greece, but in the UK people also lost a lot of money, the cost of living gets higher and higher. It is invisible, but still it produces a particular attitude. What will happen when China takes over the world? Another member talked about the helplessness in Nigeria. He referred to the kidnapped girls. Everybody shouts for a moment and then it goes away.

A member wondered whether we were going to vote in a suicidal, malignant alliance as it appeared to him that it was all about "who one hated". This criterion about voting was making the elections feel depressing. Voting for the Green Party could be seen as a completely wasted vote now but maybe in the future you could have a few candidates. Another member picked up on the idea of hatred: absolute hatred was no longer viable. The member who mentioned choices on the basis of hatred gave the example of Nicola Sturgeon who decided to come to politics because of her hatred of Thatcher. He concluded that maybe a coalition could bring some hope and that the pairing might produce something. Another member wondered whether the Royals was our pairing. The hope is not in the Royal family.

Theme 3: Hatred, violence, withdrawal, disconnection

A member shared her annoyance and irritability at noticing aggression in others. There is a sense of terror, of a lack of safety and a need to hide inside and disconnect from what's going on. A different member talked about her difficulty in finding meaning in a city like London: the aggression, the rush and the activity on twitter or emails appear to be overwhelming. There is a need to define one's own values, a wish to move to the countryside. "What happens to young people who become heartless and promote killing?" "Are you saying that we

should be interested in this?" "These acts were very relevant to our lives. I was expecting a child to come back from Spain. What if he would not return?"

"I grew up in NYC and was not bothered by crowds there." It appeared to him that in London talking to someone could feel as if he was in somebody else's way and was pushed. There seemed to be a lack of compassion from people around him or from messages he was bombarded with: an experience of being a recipient of messages that he did not want to receive. The sense that violence is happening around us was making another member want to withdraw, to not know what is going on, to stay safe inside rather than go out.

A member of the group talked about how his flat in Hackney had increased in price without him doing anything. This felt exciting but also mad. The member continued the thread about some people doing all right, while some others not. Some people are dying and are not helped. "When you think that you have made money you have actually not because the next thing you buy will be very expensive." "The flat earns more than the person who occupies it." "It depends on where you live." A member contrasted the rush to go to the supermarket to the shops owned by people from different cultures, peacefully coexisting next to one another: the Romanian barber using hot towels, the Pakistani takeaway shop, African and Asian shops and people walking around dressed in different ways. This was a nice experience and was appreciated, offering a moment of hope. However, right opposite these shops there was a big building developed by Russians. Russian mafia was taking over although for a moment there was a nice feeling of hope.

"I don't live in London. I appreciate going out and seeing the pond, the river, the sun." "We have that in London!" "Where do you live?" "Is there a fear that something will be taken away from us?" Alongside the sense of satisfaction that multiculturalism brings, people are hunkering down and there is an over-riding sense of lack of safety and mistrust. Another member suggested that the elections make this more visible. There appears to be a fourth choice, which won't be our choice and this does not make any difference. There was a reference to UKIP. Immigrants are seen as the list of suspects, the cause of all problems. The member acknowledged her need to defend some aspects of the situation that appears to be so very threatening. The closer we live, the more the things we can do. Helping people, being considerate, kindness is something that one can see everywhere if they are prepared to see it as a possibility. The same member stated that it is a big thing to say that London is not friendly; she believed it was. Another member connected with this saying that some of his best friends were Londoners. At an individual level many people can be nice. But this changes in groups where one can see distinctions such as the rich and the poor.

The Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy was offered as a metaphor for the division between individuation and drunkenness-madness that threatens. Apollo is the god of reason and the rational and appeals to our capacity to think, while Dionysus is the god of the irrational and chaos appealing to emotions and instincts. The tension between the interplay of the two is perhaps what we are struggling with.

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. The resulting analysis has been distilled into the following two interrelated hypotheses:

Analysis and Hypothesis 1. Managing neediness

Analysis 1: GPs are reaching their limit of care. The numbers are overwhelming and care turns into hatred. We hate people who are too much for us to care for. The structures that we built for thousands of people to be cared for are failing. The NHS, the plane and the Chinese banks are systems that we created to contain us, but they don't. Who is Google caring for? Does the Italian government care for the boat refugees? There is excessive neediness in the context of changes and limited resources: elections stir up the fear that others will get more: my needs are not going to be heard and looked at. The extremely vulnerable are demanding more, the extremely powerful are demanding more too. It is hard to be in either position from fear of being the hated, the suspect. There is a sense of screaming for attention to the helplessness that is acted out by the one least able to contain it: the vulnerable patients, the British teens joining ISIS. The acts of violence, whether small or big, create further terror, disconnection and despair. The impossibility to contain the excess of neediness creates a narcissistic wound to the GP, to staff, to politicians and turns our capacity to care into hatred in the work place, in the society. Neediness is cruelly pushed back to the demanding infantile parts of ourselves that are projected to the clients, to citizens. Responsibility for the hatred is denied both by authority figures and those in need of care. It is masked in the system of numbers, efficiency, and technology that people so mistrust.

Hypothesis 1: Because of the coming elections and the terror that some citizens' interests will be satisfied at the expense of others', members of our society project their neediness and their hatred of their needy part of themselves onto service users. This results in an unbearable amount of vulnerability that not only fails to be contained by the systems delivering services, but is also cruelly attacked by impersonal, narcissistic, sophisticated systems that present themselves as efficient, while they are pushing back their failure onto individuals to manage. This generates further rage and mistrust that is violently acted out.

Analysis 2 and Hypothesis 2. Unmet dependency

Analysis 2: People with extremely narcissistic personalities find themselves in the position to act their pathology out through the important roles they take up in our society. They are seen as more dangerous than terrorists or psychopaths. There is, however, narcissism in us all: a sense of self-entitlement and no responsibility. We project this onto authority figures or feel that narcissistic people are our only option to assign authority to. We then accuse those for the hazards of the changing world, where nobody is able to predict what is going to be required, while pushing them to promise the impossible to voters: that they will be the all knowing parents, who will solve all problems and save members of society from anxiety and discomfort. We therefore create leadership that promises solutions that are impossible to keep and at the same time accuse them of their failure, while we are not taking responsibility to contain our anxieties and frustration and vote with reason and long-term thinking in order to try and influence the trajectory, which the world is following. This is the Dionysian versus the Apollonian way of engaging with reality dilemma.

Hypothesis 2: Because the world is uncertain and complex at a global level, members of society become overwhelmed by despair and split their power and capacity to think and act with reason and project it onto politicians and other societal leaders, through unrealistic expectations. A result is that on the one hand there is disillusionment and despair because of members' of society unmet dependency and on the other awareness that they need to own their power, take personal responsibility as citizens and act accordingly.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3 The fundamentalist response to globalisation

Analysis 3: Global changes appear to be constant and their impact on people's everyday lives is immense. There is loss of an experience of a stable world, making the disadvantages of globalization more obvious. Anxiety is increased and there is a need to deny the complexity members of society face. Gratification is therefore obtained by fundamentalist tendencies expressed in a variety of forms; the iconoclasm of neoliberalism, the absolute faith in sophisticated

systems of managing care, the theories that function as narratives accounting for everything, the rise of UKIP, ISIS, mistrust towards any difference observed. The hope emerging from difference (the possibility of creative pairing in a coalition outcome, multiculturalism, etc) is quickly taken over by something threatening. In this state of mind there is no room for doubt but "absolute belief", where one can invest their energy and identity. This comes at a terrible cost both to the individual but also to society as a whole: a world of absolutes cannot be but one where difference needs to be wiped out. The individual becomes alienated and even an enemy of his own self, in the public space "another" is standing in one's way, as if deliberately, and gets rushed and pushed, in global encounters another religion, country or culture is one's enemy and needs to be exterminated. Young teenagers, vulnerable to their developmental need for belonging and joining a culture, may be finding containment for their violent feelings towards difference in ISIS. Members of society can feel full of hatred, destructive, disconnected, isolated, not valued and desperate, which amounts to a fragmented society.

Hypothesis 3: Because the loss of a stable world the disadvantages of globalisation have become more visible, members of society experience frustration and rage that they struggle to process. It is therefore projected onto the people that globalisation brought closer to them, especially those of different cultures, who are then experienced, without doubt, as threatening and wanting to take them over. In this state of mind where members of society struggle for survival no other point of view can be afforded. This results in fundamentalist desires and even attempts to wipe out difference, violence and societal fragmentation.

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