



AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY

France and the World at the Dawn of 2017  
Report of an OPUS Listening Post®  
held in January 2017

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## **PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS & 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, 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 collectively was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.*

### **Theme 1. A feeling of generalized deregulation**

A general sense of deregulation, a loss of points of reference in society are dominating. The pieces of information that circulate are contradictory or paradoxical in regard to everyone’s live and feeling:

- France is one of the world's leading economic powers, and we are only talking about unemployment and economic crisis.
- We talk about global ecological agreements at COP 21, but concretely, in our daily lives, birds are getting rare and insects are invading the gardens.
- The end of the economic and migratory borders is announced, but increasingly high barriers are raised between spaces.
- There are significant advances in research and development of technologies and at the same time a significant proportion of the population is being overtaken by these progresses. Few people have skills in these areas, and few get a benefit.

Moreover, the bureaucracy sometimes looks like a “kafkaesque universe”. In this environment of anomy, in which there is a loss of sense of situations, behaviours for which everything would be allowed emerge, especially from the politicians. The image of Donald Trump is frequently mentioned in relation to this.

This generates a variety of attitudes, ranging from feelings of anger and violence to feelings of helplessness, resulting in defensive indifference, or even sideration.

Struggles, conflicts arise, related to the possession of a territory, related to the fact of having a job or not.

## **Theme 2. Appearances and concrete**

Screens are mentioned several times, of television, cinema and smartphone. Are they links to reality or means to avoid it?

People express the need to find something concrete in the context of an immediate experience. Personal spaces are sought after, such as being at home near one's family or gardening in one's property, in a direct relation to the land and the vegetation. One wants to be in a "bubble" to meet oneself and think by oneself. Then the illusory appearances of society are unmasked and the evidences can be seen.

It is also the search for a space of gratuity, where human behaviors are not directly utilitarian, where one can carry out activities as an amateur.

## **Theme 3. Giving meaning to the future**

Attention is directed to children. Many children suffer from violence. What sense of the world do we want to communicate to them? Which world are we going to leave them?

## **Theme 4. The vitality**

One can not erase that a "great vitality" is observed in this indecipherable world, especially that of young people. How can we understand this?  
There are many initiatives that we never hear of, our society holds many assets.

## **PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

*In Part 3, the participants 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, participants 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.*

We are in a period of change in our societies, which are still indecipherable. "One perceives only what one has the concept of" (René Thom).

Factors involved in the loss of point of reference are identified:

- wars and the deregulation of the global political balance,
- terrorist attacks in France, which have deeply shocked,
- new technologies ; they are a source of social division between people who have training and qualification to be part of this transformation movement on one hand, and a considerable part of the population in deficit of training and skills on the other,

- a society dominated by communication and image.

We need to understand the new world which is taking hold, to regain the capacity to situate ourselves and to act, to be able to think by ourselves. There are very few places in social life where it is possible to express and share what one internally feels in relation to the events that one goes through in society, and thus to initiate these personal and collective transformations to adapt to a new world.

Rationality is weakened. Imagination then takes over without being mediated by a reflexive activity and the exercise of rationality. The instinct at work, without superego (in the psychoanalytic sense), finds itself unbridled and favours the extremes.

Two hypothesis about the vitality circulating in society, especially among young people, are put forward. On one side, vitality is expressed with strength when the vital is at stake. This is the expression of the desire to live. According to the second hypothesis, this would be here an effect of generations. Unlike their elders, young people did not experience any other world than this world. The current uncertainty is part of their environment, and they accept it as such. It is not as destabilizing as it can be for previous generations who have lived in more predictable environments.

Finally, the personal component will have a determining effect on the apprehension of situations. To illustrate, two very different cases of experienced immigration were reported during the meeting. In both cases, the migrant person had to go through a very painful experience. However, in one case, migration had been associated with a loss of home country, the way of life and the culture left behind, a passive pain that has become a daily burden. In the other case, immigration had been lived as a chance that has transformed and enlightened one's life.

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