

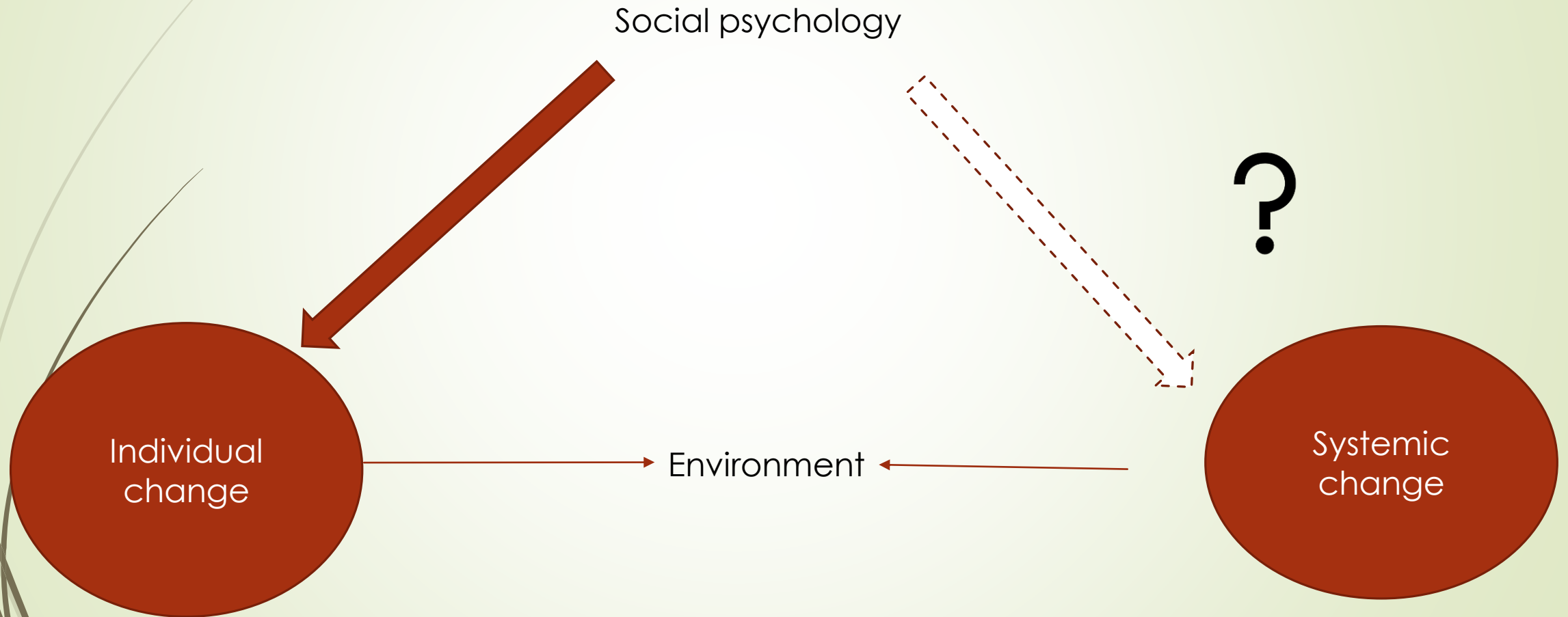
# Social representations of ecological transition between groups with different social positions : a focus group study

Leroy Alexis - alexis.LEROY@univ-amu.fr

Phd student at LPS, Aix-Marseille University

Thesis supervised by Raquel Bertoldo and Valérie Fointiat

# Social psychology and environment (Uzzel & Rathzel, 2009)



# Social representations

- Study the tension between Ego: Minority –Alter: Majority: -Object: Ecological transition (Orfali 2002).



- Process of social change are dialogically connected between change and stability (Castro & Batel, 2008) inside a dominant social order (Staerklé et al., 2011).



# Social representations and focus groups (Jovchelovitch, 2004)

- ▶ "Social representations produced, supported, and transformed by daily communicative practices" (p.246).
- ▶ Focus groups that provide access to these communicative practices: conversation, dialogue, argumentation.
- ▶ Focus group as a form of thinking society that allows for the analysis of social representations in their content and processes.

# Research questions and public

- ▶ How the vision of alter ("the people") mediates the social change project supported or contested by each group, and reflects their social positions ?
- ▶ 8 focus groups with 4 different publics (2 FG/public).

Extinction  
Rebellion

Environmental  
awareness  
organization

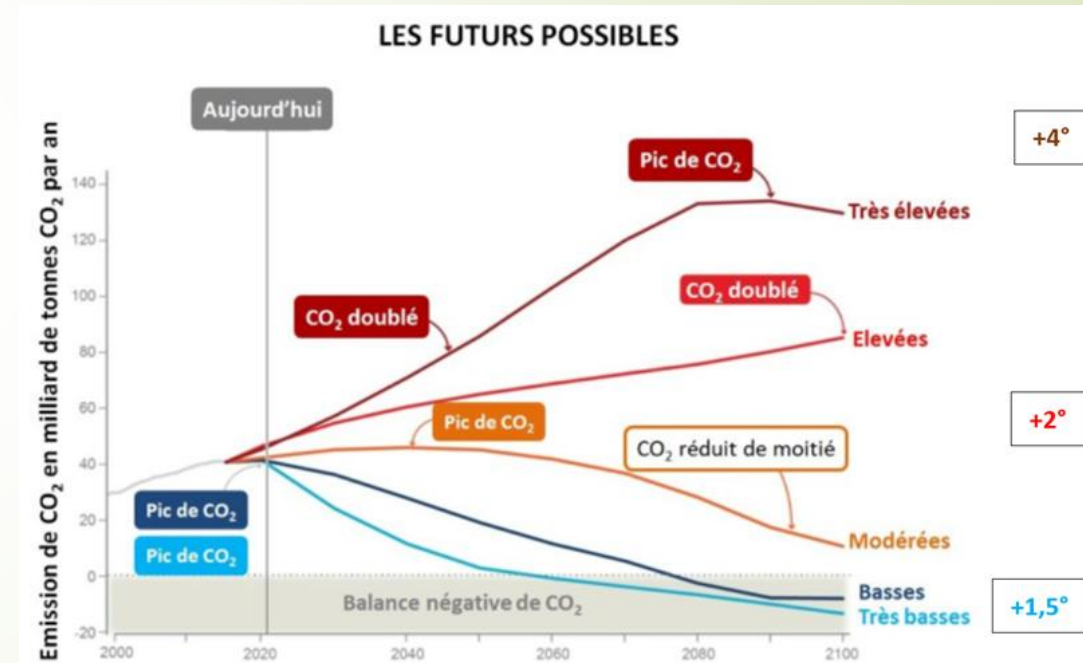
Precarious  
public

Industrial  
manager in  
energy sector



# Method: interview guide

- 1) Chart presenting different IPCC scenarios
  - A. Curve estimations
  - B. Causes attributed to climate change
  - C. Solutions
  - D. Emotions
- 2) Pro-economic growth quote
- 3) Pro-economic degrowth quote



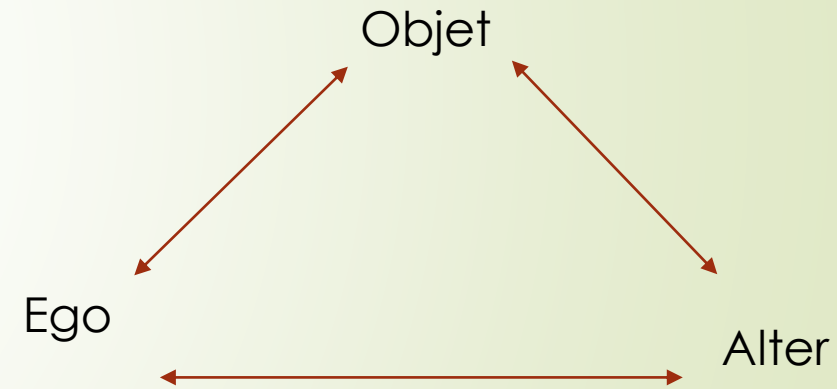
# Discursively oriented thematic analysis (Lewis & Vignoles, 2023)

## **Thematic analysis:**

- Method aimed at identifying patterns of meaning in the text (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
- *What participants say about the object ?*

## **Pragmatic analysis:**

- Method aimed at understanding the function of discourse and the discursive strategies used (Batel and Castro, 2018).
- *How participants talk about the object ?*



# Thematic analysis: Causes and solutions

## Four main discursive patterns

### **Population vs. Politics vs. Industrial**

Extinction Rebellion (FG 1 & FG 2)  
Environmental organization (FG 1 & FG 2)  
Precarious public (FG 1 & FG2)  
Industrial manager (FG1)

### **Population vs. Politics**

Extinction Rebellion (FG 1)  
Environmental organization (FG 1)  
Precarious public (FG 1 & FG2)  
Industrial manager (FG1 & FG2)

### **Population vs. System**

Extinction Rebellion (FG1 & FG2)  
Environmental organization (FG2)  
Precarious public (FG1)  
Industrial manager (FG1 & FG 2)

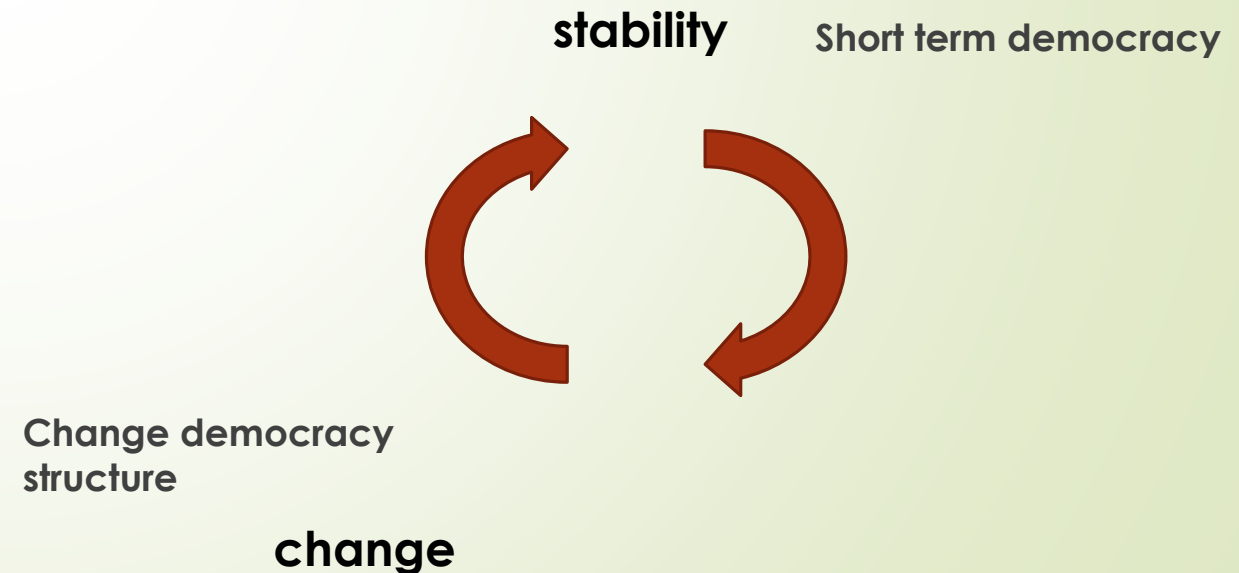
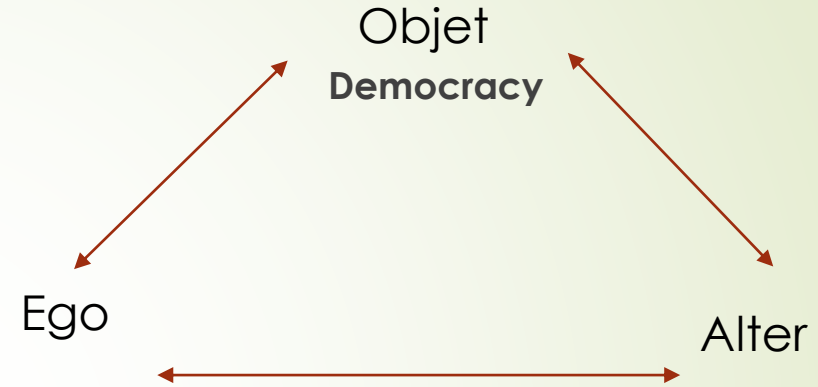
### **Consumption vs. Production**

Extinction Rebellion(FG1)  
Environmental organization (FG1)  
Precarious public (FG 1 et FG2)  
Industrial manager (FG1 et FG2)

# Pragmatic analysis: population vs. politics

## FG Extinction Rebellion 1

**P1:** The first cause I see is the very structure of our **democratic system, which is designed for the short term.** [...] Everything operates on 4-5 year cycles, and I think climate issues require us to think in tens or hundreds of years. I don't see how we can really solve them under this system. So, we would really need to **change our democratic structure.**

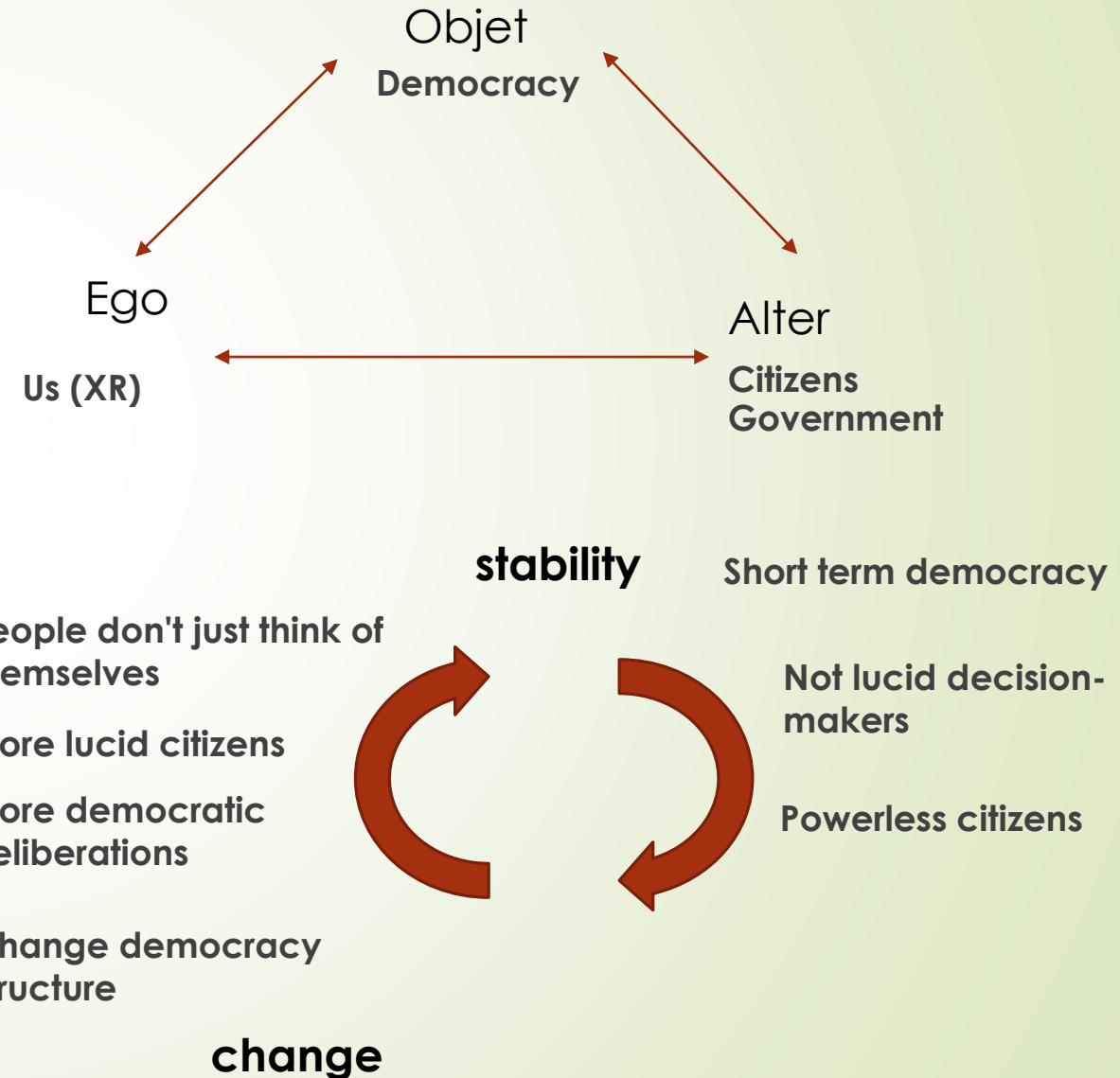


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**P3:** In the latest, uh, demands of **Extinction Rebellion**, [...] what we want is... to have an impact that makes **deliberations** in the system much **more democratic** [...]. During the Citizens' Climate Convention, informed citizens... had the capacity to propose much more stringent measures than what a **government** like the one we have today could. [...] I think it's people (*ed. the government*) who don't **inform themselves very well** [...] On the other hand, among **citizens**, uh... in my opinion, the observation is a little **more lucid** than the one finally made by the leaders. [...] but, **people are often powerless**. And this ties back to the democratic question if citizens felt powerful and capable of acting, they would act. I believe that deeply. Because **people think about themselves but also about the future, about... Everyone has some ideals and thinks about their children,**



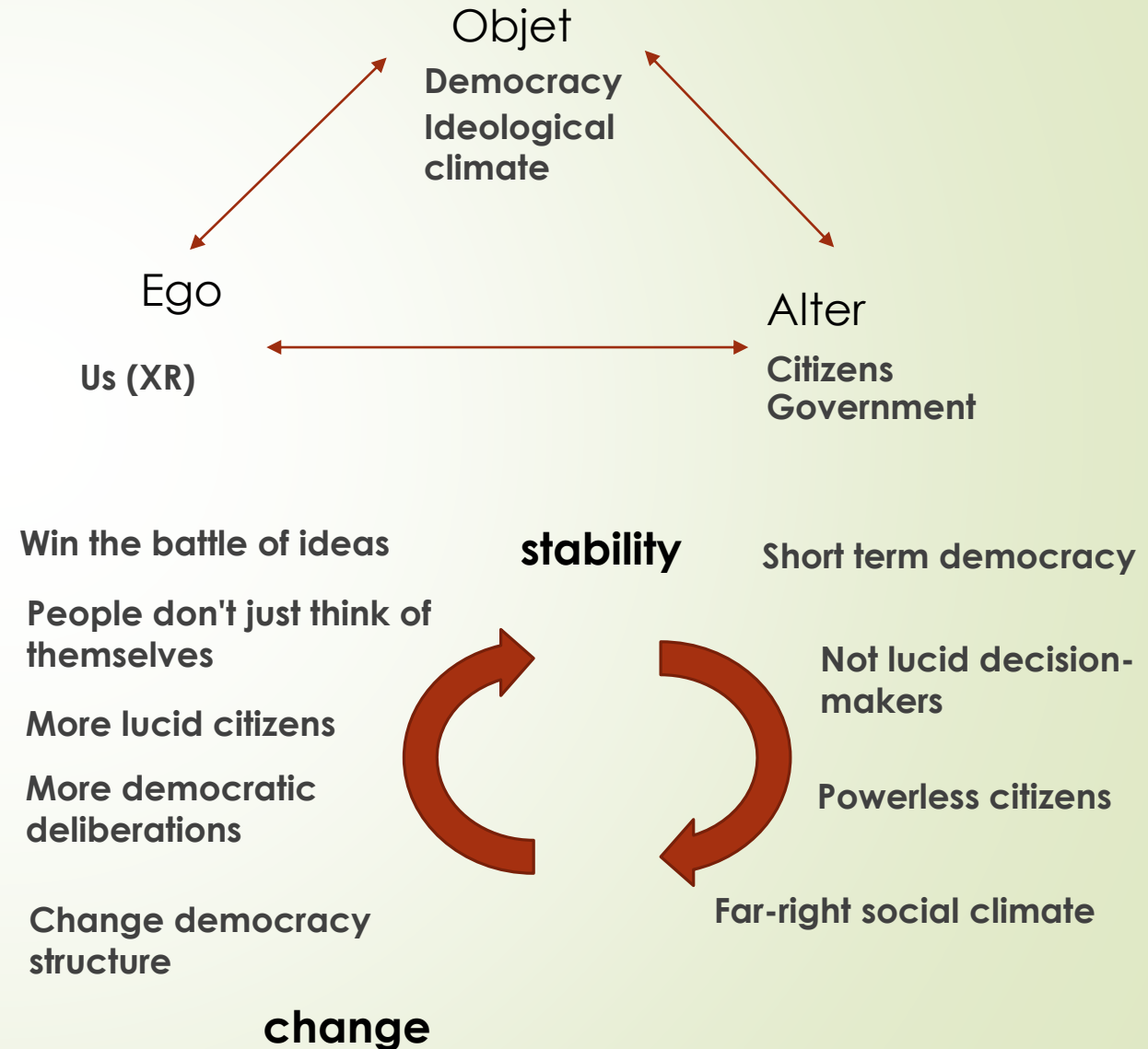
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**P4:** From a democratic point of view, if everyone had the choice to support rather radical ideas, we would still need to **win the battle of ideas**. [...] I wonder, in a deteriorating **social climate** with unrestrained, prominent **far-right rhetoric**, to what extent people could use direct democracy tools [...] to reach popular and **far-right decisions**.

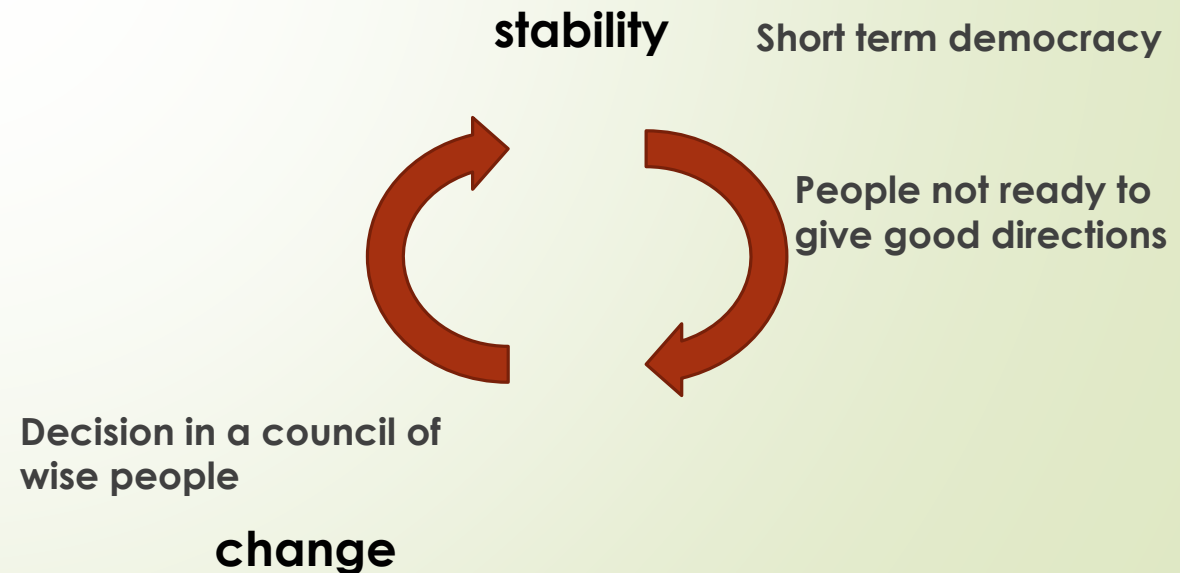
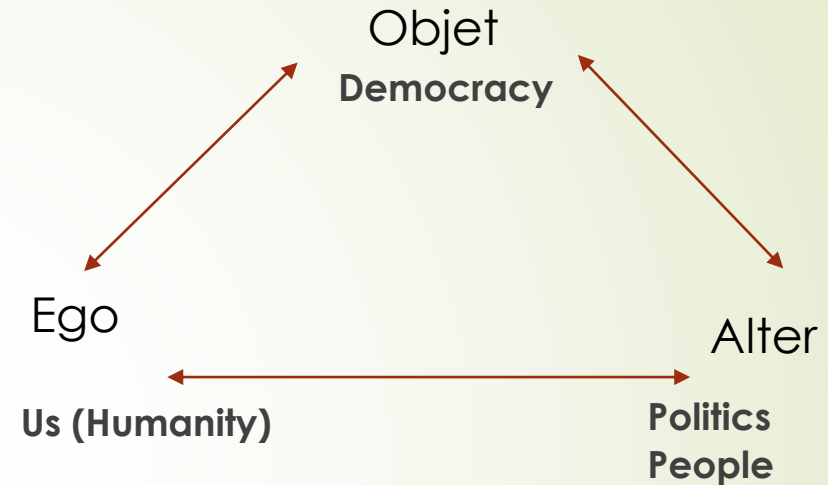


# Pragmatic analysis: population vs. politics

## FG industrial 2 :

**P3:** The environmental dimension [...] should no longer be in the hands of politicians but in a **council of wise people** who think beyond 5 years, that is, people who have a thought process that exceeds the **duration of electoral mandates** and who won't make compromises to maintain or ease certain climate plans [...] And so these political choices do not necessarily include a medium- to long-term vision that concerns **humanity and our survival**. [...] and I think... It should no longer be up to **politicians**. When **politicians represent the people** and provide a direction, which is completely normal and they are in their democratic role, but the decision should not be made by politicians, due to the uncertainties related to the... to the **rhythm of electoral mandates**.

**P1:** Well, maybe the **people are not ready** (laughs) to give good directions... [...]



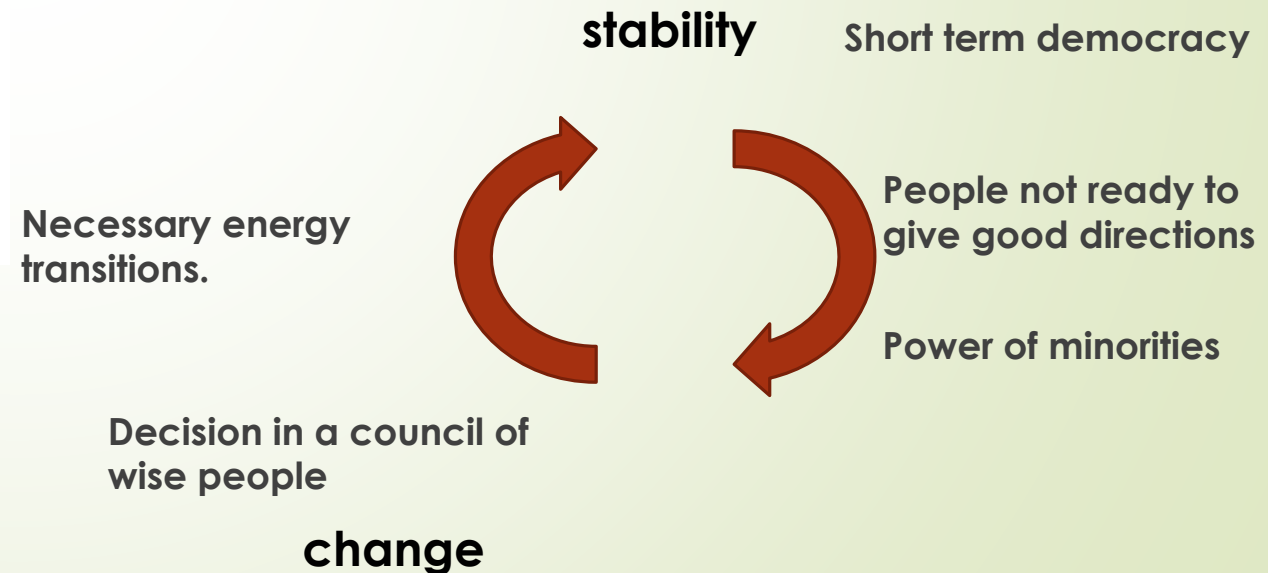
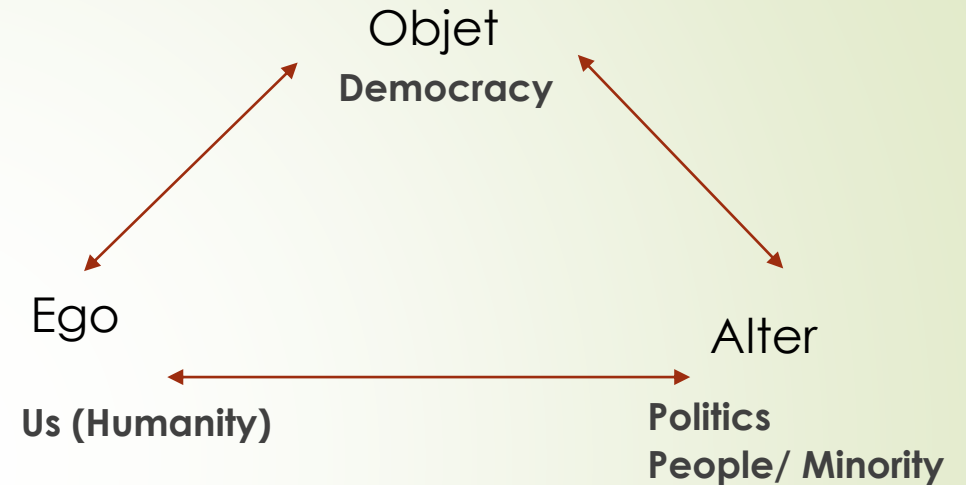
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**P3:** ...when you know the **power of minorities** in democracies like ours, nothing can really happen. This is the limit of the democratic exercise in transforming a country in favor of **necessary energy transitions**.



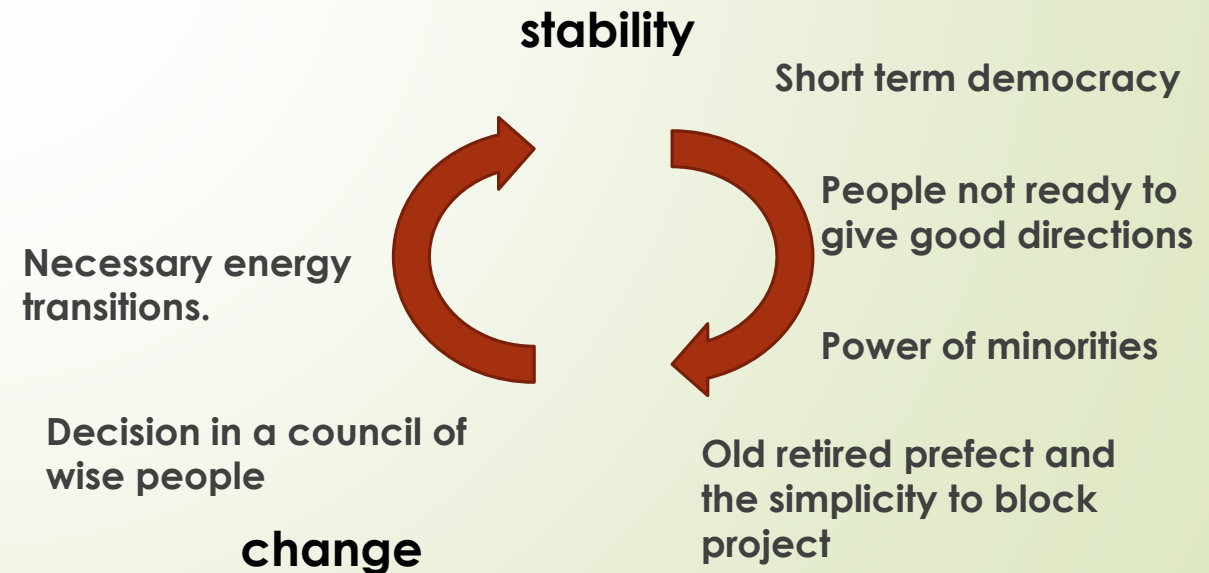
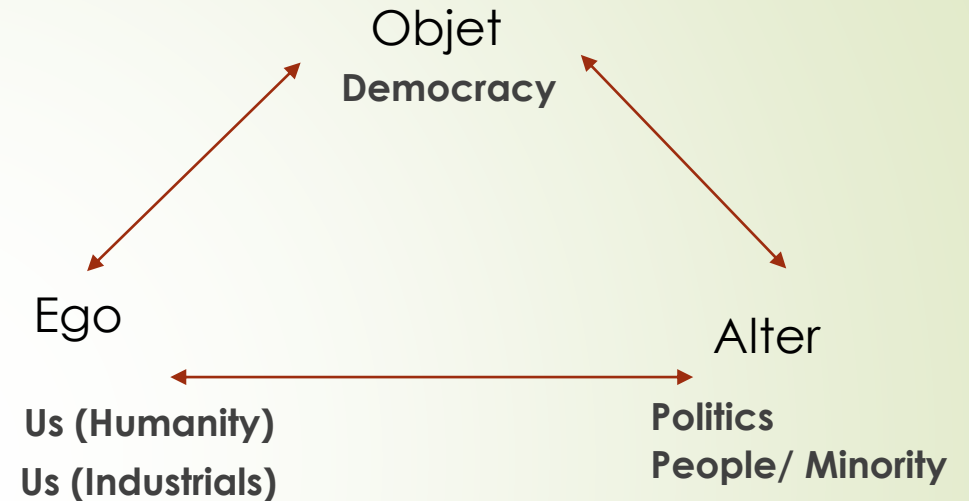
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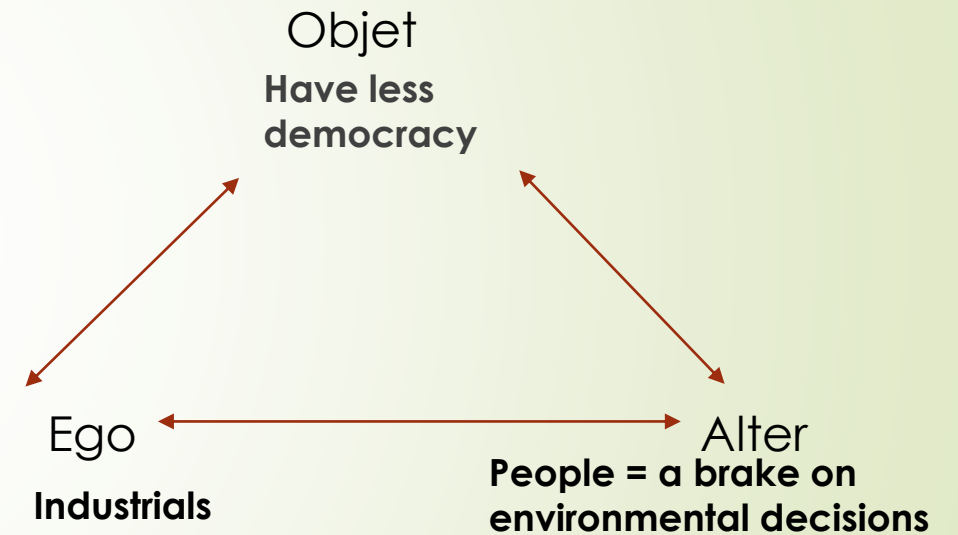
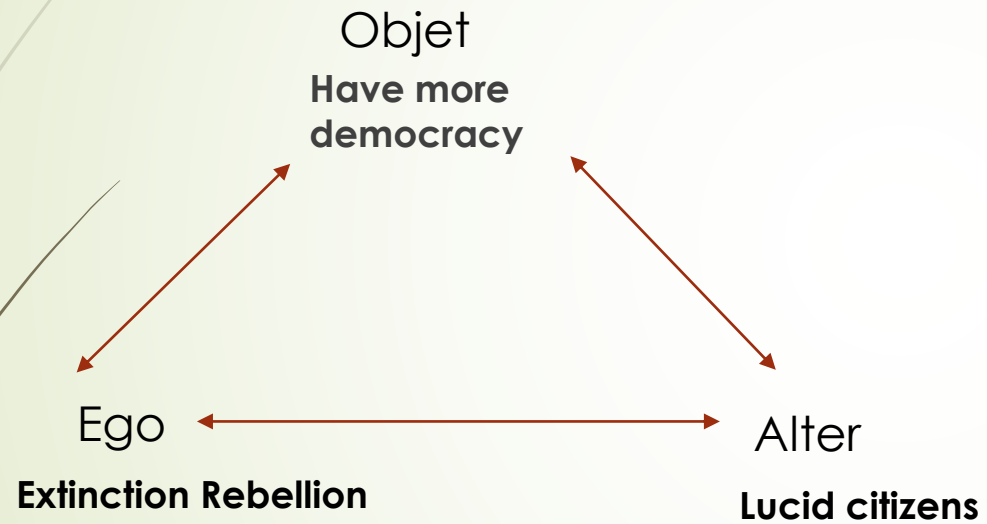
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**P3:** ...when you know the **power of minorities** in democracies like ours, nothing can really happen. This is the limit of the democratic exercise in transforming a country in favor of **necessary energy transitions**. [...] We see it at an **industrial level** [...] when you have a project, there is always **an old retired prefect** who is bored and will start an association to block the project. [...] We face **hypocritical, even self-interested behaviors**. In France, all it takes is to start an association, gather 10 people, hold up signs, provoke the press, and you block a project. **It's as simple as that**. That's why I talk about the limit of democracy in relation to the general climatic interest.



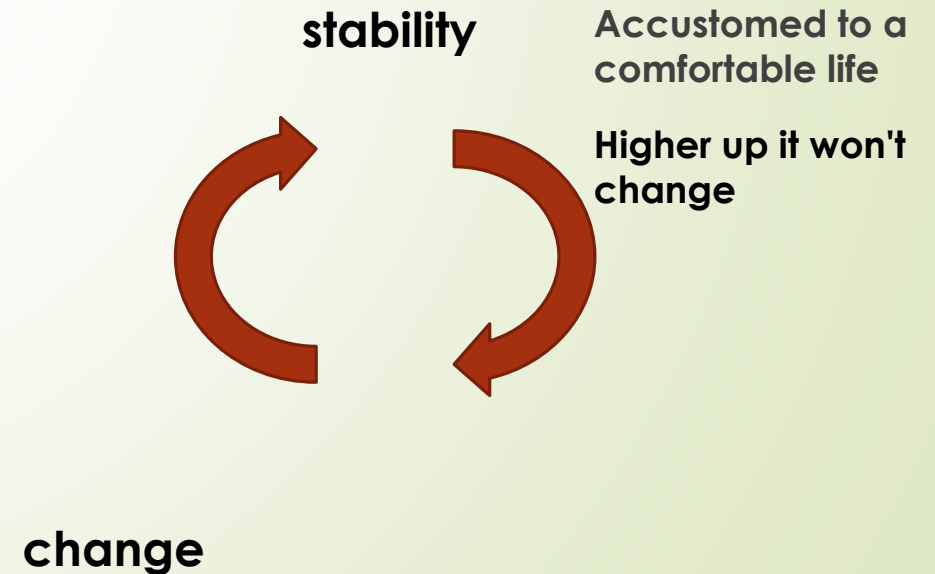
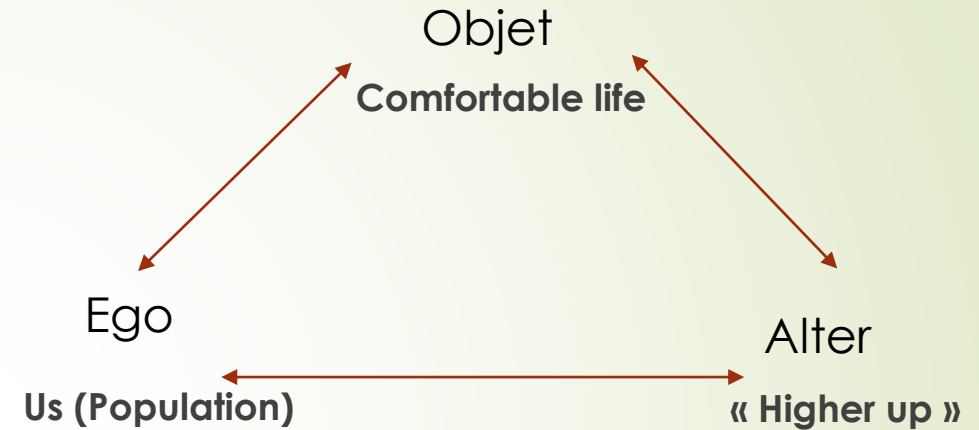
# Population vs. politics



# Pragmatic analysis: population vs. system

## FG environmental organization 2 :

**P4:** We are not doing enough, [...] we have become very accustomed to a comfortable life, [...] Higher up, they don't want to change because, they have no interest in changing. [...]

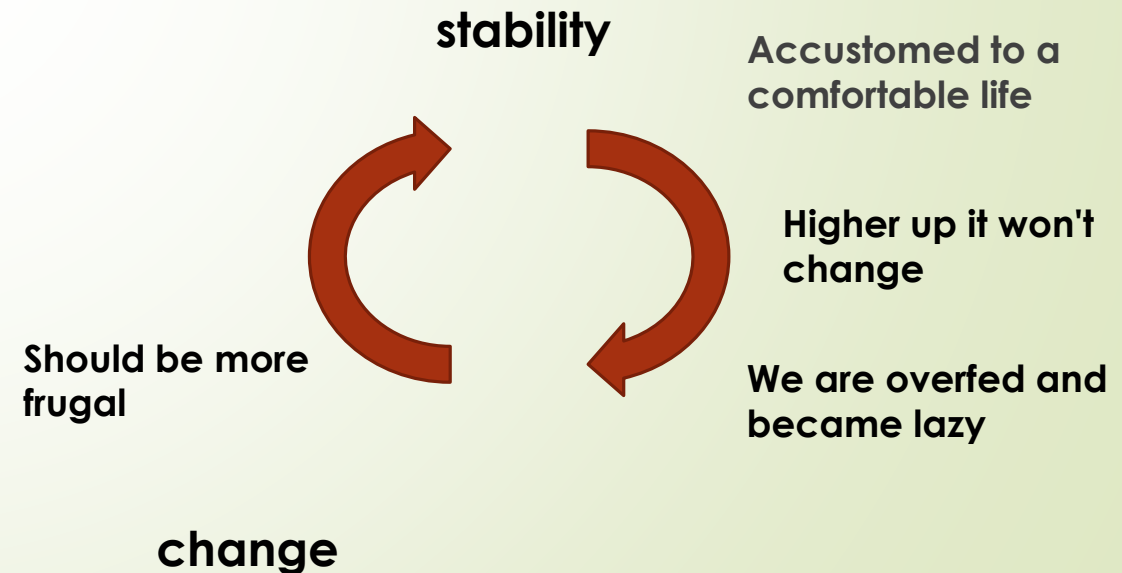
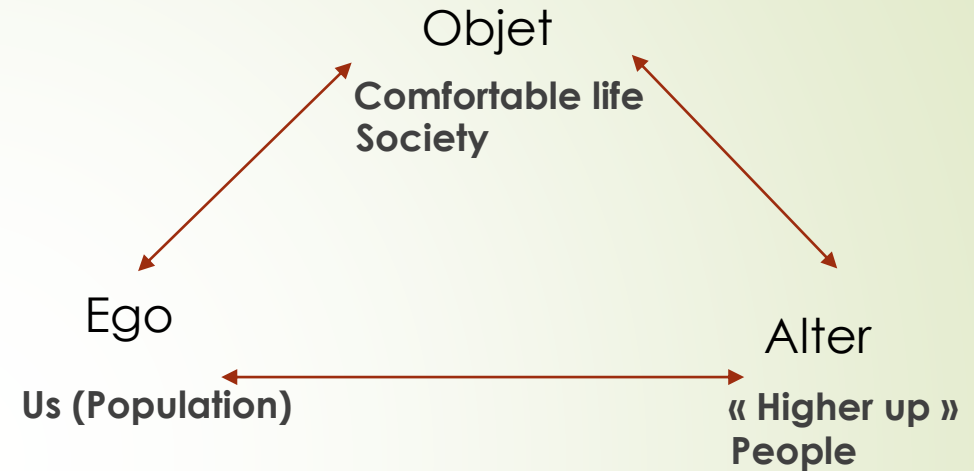


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**P4:** We are not doing enough, [...] we have become very accustomed to a comfortable life, [...] Higher up, they don't want to change because, they have no interest in changing. [...]

**P2:** Yeah, I totally agree with you, uh... in the observation of... a society that is overfed [...] with energy. [...] But, of course, we absolutely cannot propose this to people, even though that's what we should be doing. [...] Well, in fact, life is not about... It's not about overindulgence, life and ecosystems, uh... Everything is very frugal, and we are part of... of the ecosystem. And we should be frugal, simply, we are overfed with an enormous amount of waste, and we have become extremely lazy. [...]



# Pragmatic analysis: population vs. system

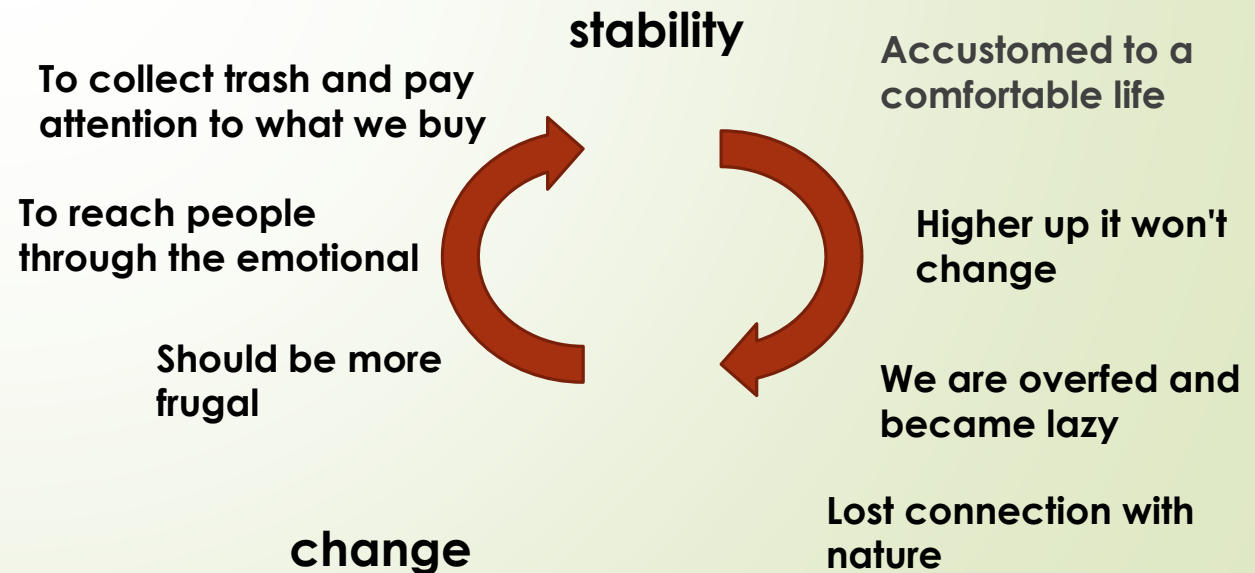
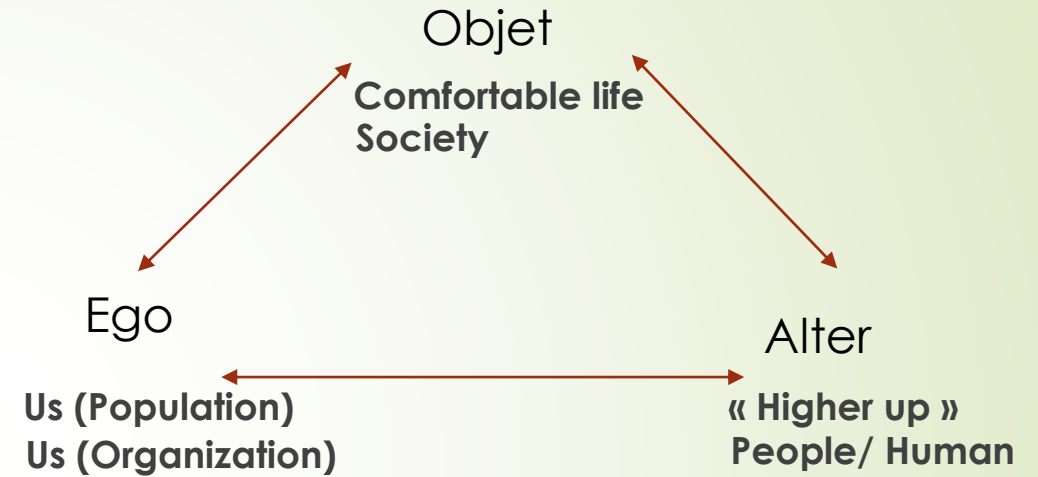
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**P1:** ...We have lost our, uh... connection to nature. Humans have somewhat developed by using nature. [...] And, uh, we really see nature, humans really see nature as a resource. [...]

**P2:** ...We are completely separated from nature. We no longer have that emotional connection. [...] And in XXX (Name of his organization). Our goal is to reach people through the emotional connection that nature can provide. The connection to nature. And when we have that emotional connection, we know why we are going to collect trash that is not ours. We know why we are going to pay attention to what we buy. We give meaning to the obligations we must follow to, uh... well, to stop the disaster.



# Pragmatic analysis: population vs. system

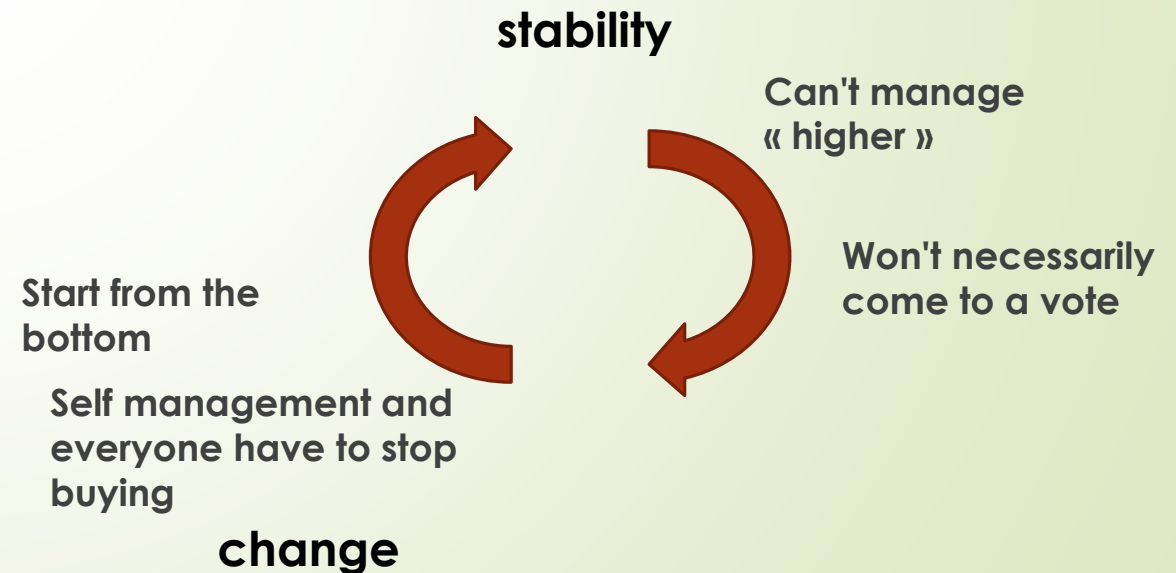
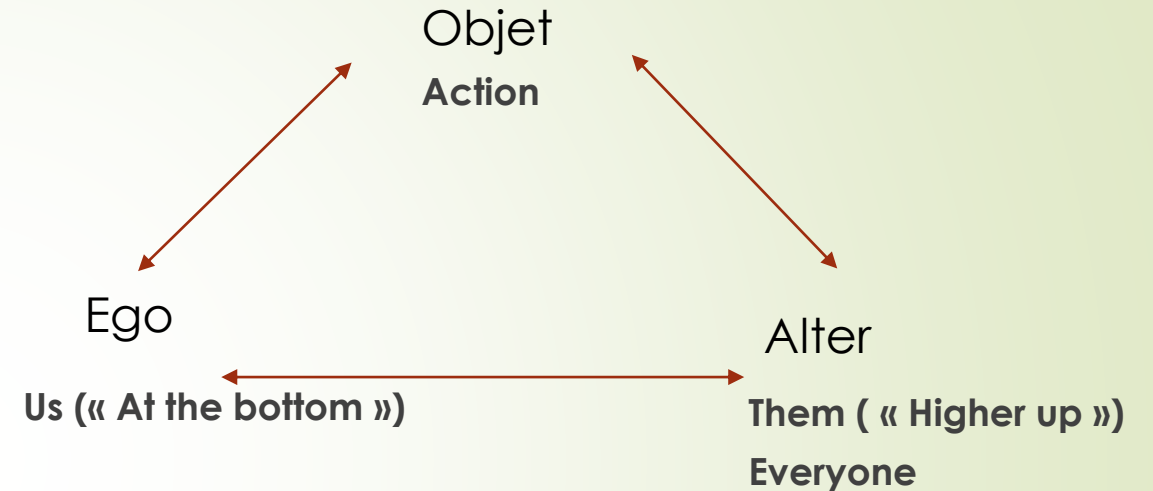
## FG precarious public 1 :

**P1:** You can't manage higher... Manage yourself at the bottom! And then, higher up, it will follow.

**P2:** So, you're saying it doesn't matter to you because if action is taken at the bottom, it will change things at the top? Because everyone will do as you do tomorrow?

**P1:** Well, yeah. Instead of saying "Buy, buy, buy," no. "Reuse, trade, change."

**P5:** Start from the bottom, with the people at the bottom, the smallest ones to... [...] to reach higher up. [...] But maybe it won't necessarily come to a vote.



# Pragmatic analysis: population vs. system

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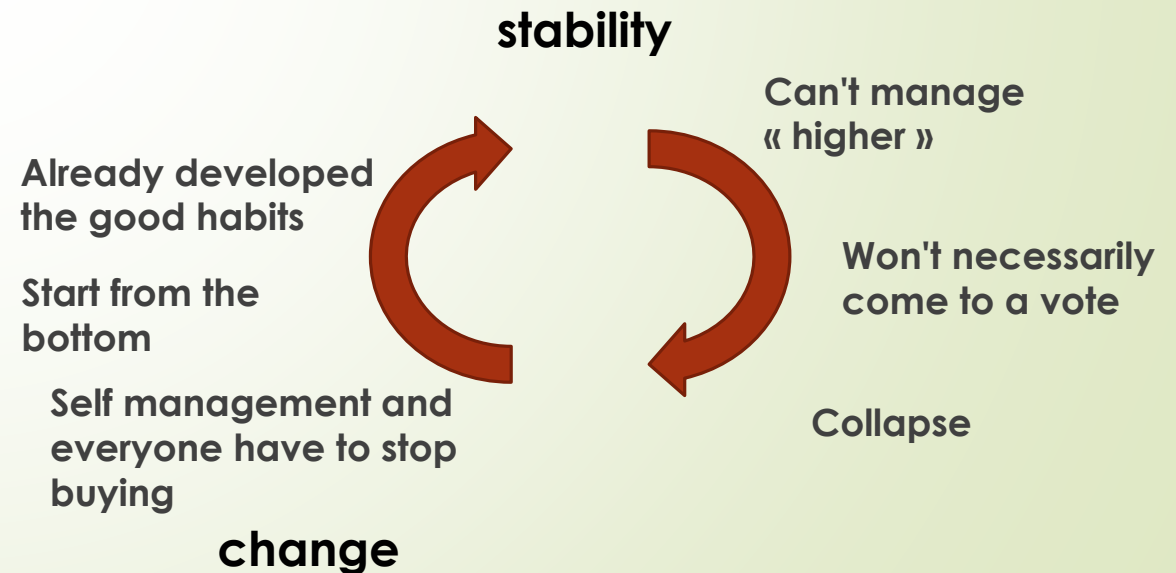
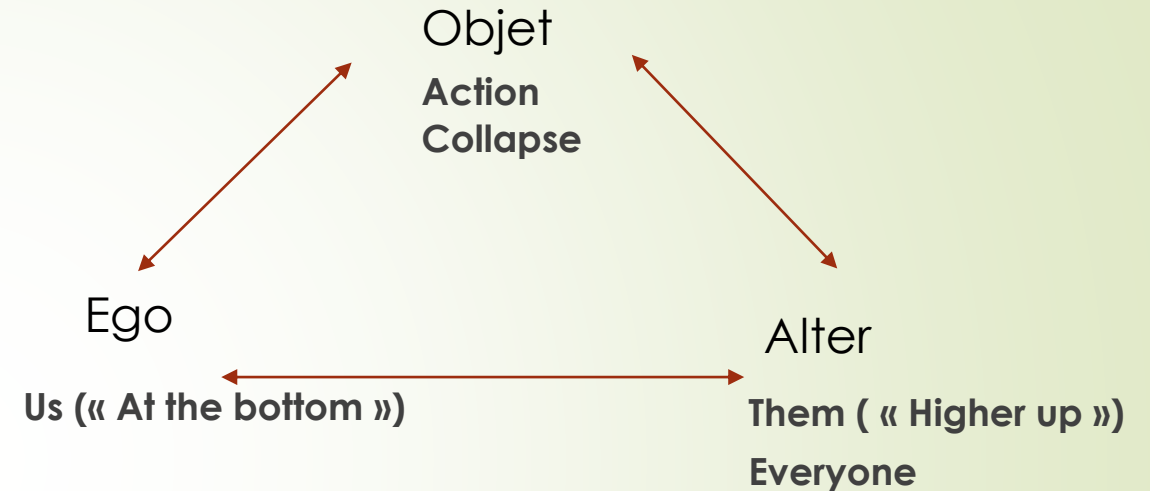
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**P2:** And that's valid if there's no collapse. Because if everything stops tomorrow, if we can no longer buy tons of junk from China... [...] We, at the bottom, who have already developed good habits, we'll manage



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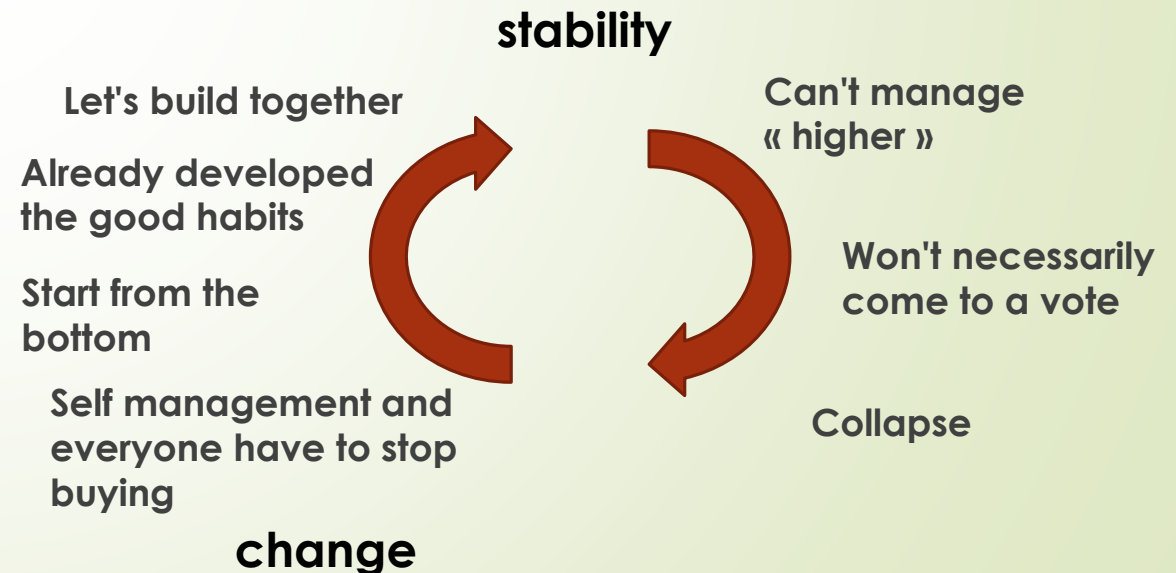
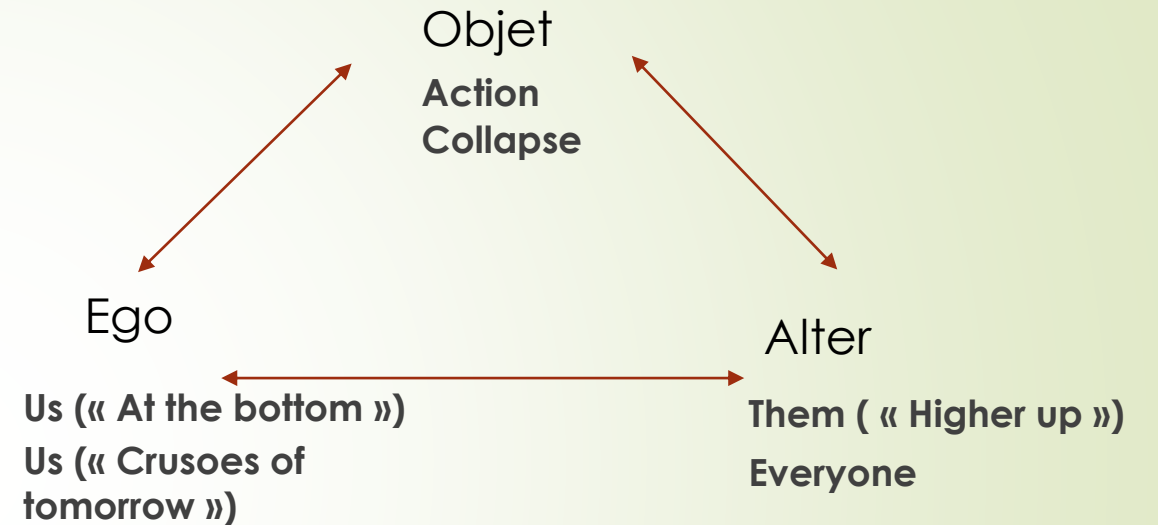
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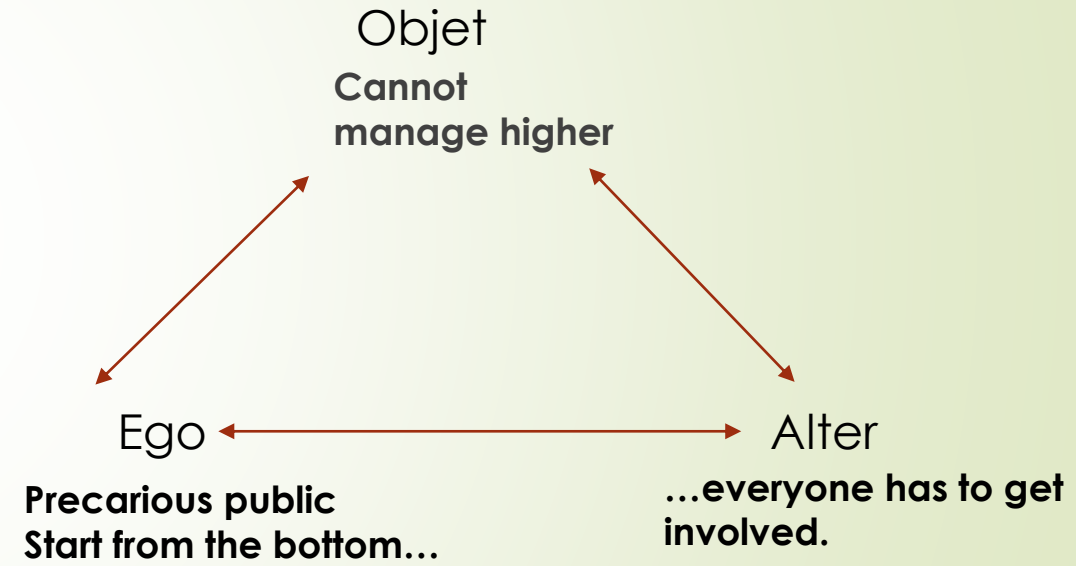
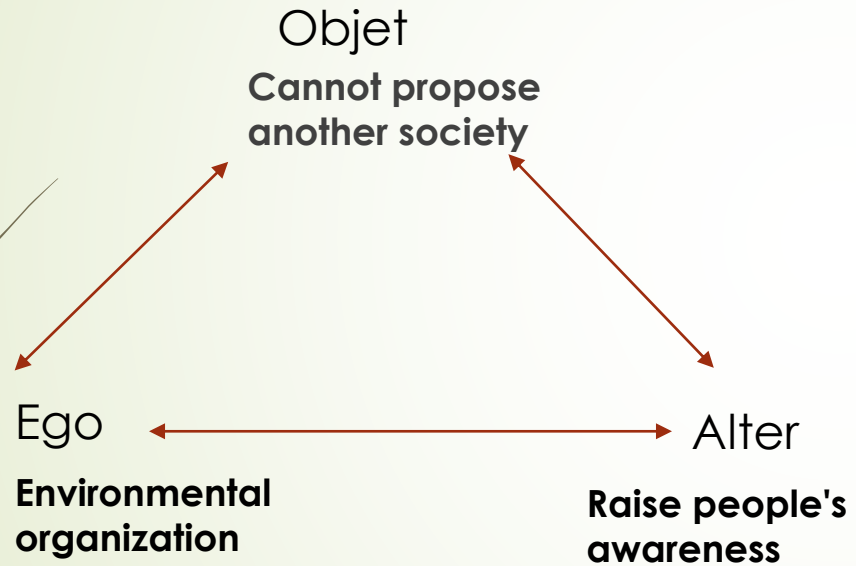
**P2:** And that's valid if there's no collapse. Because if everything stops tomorrow, if we can no longer buy tons of junk from China... [...] We, at the bottom, who have already developed good habits, we'll manage

**P5:** It's a bit like saying that if... [...] I'll use a phrase, huh. There's a phrase, uh... "Let's be the Crusoes of tomorrow," you see [...] And the Robin Crusoes are... It's... It's us. It's... Let's build, let's build, that's it. Let's build together. We might be able to go further.

**P2:** Hm. Oh, yes.



# population vs. system





# Discussion

- ▶ Every group wants societal change and every group discusses the tension between individual and collective responsibility...
- ▶ ...but groups don't have the same societal project, which is related to the way they talk about human beings...
- ▶ ...and their social positions.
- ▶ In conclusion, it is important for social representation theory to acknowledge the existence of a material world (Batel et al., 2016).



Grazie per l'attenzione!

Thank you for your attention!

Merci pour votre attention !



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# Social representations of ecological transition between groups with different social position: a focus group study

Leroy Alexis - alexis.LEROY@univ-amu.fr

Phd student at LPS, Aix-Marseille University

Thesis supervised by Raquel Bertoldo and Valérie Fointiat



# Annexe 1 : Quotes

- ▶ **Pro economic growth:** « We must place ecology at the heart of the economic model, betting on investment in transportation, energy, and the technologies of tomorrow. We must put ecological ambition at the center of the productive model by seeking to produce differently and change behaviors within a framework of sustainable development”
- ▶ **Pro economic degrowth:** “Economic growth cannot be the answer for today and tomorrow; we need to rethink our entire system, as it is neither viable nor sustainable [...] We must initiate economic degrowth, which involves less comfort in life, less progress, and questions our technological needs as well as our social structures”

## Annexe 2 Research questions and public (Socio démo)

- ▶ How the tension ego-alter influence social change project regarding to ecological transition with different social groups ?
- ▶ 8 focus groups with 4 publics différents (2 FG/public).

### Extinction Rebellion

FG1: N= 4, (1 W, 3 M,  
MY: 40)  
FG2: N=5, ( 4 W, 1M,  
MY: 28)

### Environmental awareness organization

FG1: N= 5, (1 W, 4 M,  
MY: 32)  
FG2: N=4, ( 4 W,  
MY: 34)

### Precarious public

FG1: N= 6, (5 W, 1 M,  
MY: 52)  
FG2: N=7, ( 7 W,  
MY: 72)

### Industrial manager in energy sector

FG1: N= 6, (2 W, 4 M,  
MY: 54)  
FG2: N=5, ( 2 W, 3 M  
MY: 48)