

# Chapter 2

## Uses and Misuses of Threats in the Public Sphere



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The purpose of this chapter is to outline, on the basis of previous studies in which I had to deal with threat, particularly in the fields of health, mental health and environment (Jodelet, 1989, 1998, 2001, 2011, 2015, 2017; Jodelet & Scipion, 1992, 1998; Jodelet, Ohana, Biadi, & Rikou, 1994), the framework of a psycho-sociological approach to how the notion of threat is used in the public sphere. That is the space of discourses, narratives and representations circulating in communications and daily social exchanges, as well as in the debates enlivening the scientific, political and media spheres, their stakes and the resulting consequences for social life. This requires a dual approach. On the one hand, a clarification of the meanings of the notion of threat and its positioning in relation to other terms to which it has been linked, particularly those of catastrophe and risk is needed. On the other, the uses, legitimate or inappropriate, which are made of the notion in scholarly, media and popular commentaries must be identified. By doing so, it will be possible to identify the underlying dimensions, such as evil and fear, which give it overtones contributing to present-day anxieties and, thereby, to outline the framework of an analysis that aims at identifying the phenomena and processes that it brings into play.

### Concerning the Notion of Threat

The notion of threat is generally associated with other terms: catastrophe, risk, danger, peril, nuisance, stress, fear and awe; even fright, dread and terror. This approximation has contributed to obscure its meaning, since these terms themselves do not refer to

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phenomena or processes of the same order. Catastrophe, risk, peril and danger refer to an externality in relation to the subject, individual or collective, who experiences it, be it real or imaginary; even if the subject triggers the situation by his/her conduct, as in the case of smoking, traffic, the practice of extreme sports or non-compliance with medical prescriptions. Stress, fear, fright, etc. designate a state that one feels when faced with a risk, danger or peril. Works on risk observe this distinction in their analysis, but do not clarify the status of the threat. But this situation is changing as shown by the series of works in social and political sciences and philosophy (Beck, 2001; Bonelli, 2008; Bourg, Joly, & Kaufman, 2013; Boy, 1999; Ferry, 1992; Lovelock, 2008; Laugumier, 2008) and the publication of a book encouraging one to “rethink the risk society” from a psychosocial perspective (Caillaud, Bonnot, & Drozda Senkowska, 2017).

The existence of semantic shifts identifying the term threat with those of catastrophe, disaster, risk, peril, danger, nuisance, stress, awe, fear, etc. have, in the past, led it to lose all specificity in favour of the role of umbrella concept or metaphor. But the recent uses that are made of it call for a specific elaboration crossing the various fields where threat takes on diverse forms; notably in the case of environment, health, scientific and technical progress, economy, politics, social life (crime, poverty, unemployment, exclusion and marginalization, war and terrorism).

Indeed, considering the narratives related to risks, whether they pertain to ecology, science and technology, social sciences, literature, film fiction or the media, there has been an evolution in how the notion of threat is used. Simply used, initially, as the announcement of a possible danger, it made a more pronounced and specific entry from the end of the 90s, with the recognition of the seriousness and the scale of environmental or health problems. Later, the emergence of terrorism called for more subtle elaborations of its meanings. With the entry into the 21st century, further evolution has occurred that, overstepping the framework of scientific findings, shifts insidiously from threat to catastrophe, resulting in a cataclysmic vision of our future, associated with terms that cause anxiety. Some examples allow to illustrate this evolution

Thus, we observe a “return of the catastrophe on the scientific scene” (Clavandier, 2015). This notion and the events corresponding to it in the past, distant or near, have been adopted, not without debate, in scholarly thought with worrisome overtones. At the point that the concept of “catastrophe”, replacing the concept of “crisis” (Moreau, 2015), has become, together with the development of “disaster studies”, a central theme today in the thinking of the social sciences, including anthropology, history, ethnology and sociology. In addition to some major works (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith, 2002; Mercier-Faivre & Thomas, 2008; Moreau, 2017; Neyrat, 2008; Stengers, 2008; Walter, 2008), several journal issues have been devoted to it (Communication, 2015; Le PortiQue, 2009; Terrains, 2010).

This scientific concern has had an impact on the public sphere, as shown by the case of the “Doomsday Clock”,<sup>1</sup> created, as far back as 1947, by a group of scientists at the University of Chicago as an alert to nuclear dangers, followed subsequently by ecological, economic and technical dangers that, linked to the mismanagement of governments, are threatening the world with global collapse. Since then, this theme has continually fuelled literature, films, television, songs, comics and games.

Today, this concern particularly permeates the written domain (media and books), as illustrated in an issue entitled “The apocalypse according to novelists and philosophers”, published by “The Literary Magazine”,<sup>2</sup> shortly before the holding of COP 21 that was described as an “international gathering that is as much anticipated as it inspires indifference, since it is expected to be much ado about nothing, leading to delaying tactics”. Beyond the catastrophic scepticism asserted as evidence, this example is interesting from a double point of view.

On the one hand, we note, a dozen titles, chosen from among the 55 books published in France by those who are now called “collapseists” or “collapsologists” (“effondristes” and “collapsologues”, in French) and who have appeared since the 2000s.<sup>3</sup> As an indication, let us note some eloquent titles:

- *Introduction to the century of threats* (Introduction au siècle des menaces, in French). 2004. Blamont, J.
- *Collapse. How societies decide on their disappearance or their survival* (Effondrement. Comment les sociétés décident de leur disparition ou de leur survie, in French). 2005. Diamond, J.
- *The sixth extinction* (La sixième extinction, in French). 2015. Kolbert, E.
- *How everything can collapse. Handbook of collapsology for the use of the present generations* (Comment tout peut s’effondrer. Petit manuel de collapsologie à l’usage des générations présentes, in French). 2014. Servigne, P. Stevens, R.
- *Why everything is going to collapse* (Pourquoi tout va d’effondrer, in French). 2018. J. Wosnitza.

On the other hand, these publications clearly illustrate how the media can draw a picture which, often deleterious, is likely to influence the public position. Contributing to “the spirit of the times”, they cause what can be called a “nocebo” effect. Opposite to the appeasing placebo effect, this reinforces anxiety-inducing feelings, scientific doubts and suspicions regarding public policies, as well as demands for protection and security. These concerns have also fostered political discourses that use the notion of threat to mobilize attention and forge a vision that affects “living together”.

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<sup>1</sup>The Doomsday clock uses an analogical device, where midnight represents the end of the world and each year is located in the minutes preceding it. According to the global situation, the number of minutes has varied from 17 to 2; this lower interval has been registered since 2018.

<sup>2</sup>July-August 2015 issue of the *Magazine Littéraire*.

<sup>3</sup>During the same period, 50 similar texts published in English were registered (cf. Turner, 2014).

This phenomenon is illustrated by several surveys. I will mention two. The first concerns the belief in the Apocalypse,<sup>4</sup> whose warning signs are seen in global warming and climate change by 55% of the respondents, in international terrorism by 22%, food riots by 18%, the rise of religious fundamentalism by 17%, the financial crisis by 16% and bird flu by 8%. The second survey is based on the evocations induced by the terms “risk”, “danger”, “threat”, in a sample representative of the French population, (Bonardi, 2017). Threats cause more extreme and negative assessments than risks and dangers: they are more formidable; their occurrence is more random; they are less controllable. In the face of threats, greater vulnerability and insecurity are experienced than in the face of risks or dangers. In addition, it is worth mentioning the file recently published in the daily newspaper, *Le Monde*. It mentions 300 testimonies registered in response to a call upon its reading public,<sup>5</sup> besides a survey carried out, in October 2018, at the University of Albi, on a sample of 1600 persons. Both documents confirm the confusion and dejection felt by the public when faced with the threatened future state of the world.

## Threat Approach Framework

These uses and misuses of the notion of threat in the social discourse give it multiple physiognomies, making it sometimes incommensurate compared to the related concepts of risk and danger. There is an important consequence here. It is theoretically posited that the modelling with regard to risks gives, thanks to the collaboration between the different research and management organizations, the means for a transversal approach to the various domains where they are observed and studied: health, environment, finance, security, work, society, crime, delinquency, war, terrorism, etc. All this seems difficult in the case of threats, given the history of its use. Can we therefore envisage establishing a framework that would allow a comprehensive and transdisciplinary approach? I will try to contribute, based on the paradigm of social representations (Moscovici, 1961, 2000, 2013), taking up and developing a first review (Jodelet, 2017) on the ways common sense constructs the concept and the tools it has to do it.

Among these tools, dictionaries provide a general approximation of the notion of threat. The definitions given in French dictionaries (Larousse, Littré) highlight the interpersonal dimension of the threat. Identified as a warning, it is the expression of an intention to harm, harm others or coerce them to act against their will. Less dramatically, it can simply assume a pact or a social contract instituting conditionality in the exchange where the announced malfeasance comes in response to the non-satisfaction of a request or a desire. Secondarily, the threat concerns a sign

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<sup>4</sup>Survey carried out by the Institute of Public Opinion Poll, Sofres, in 2008, on a sample of 1000 participants, representative of the French population.

<sup>5</sup>“Le succès inattendu des théories de l’effondrement”. *Le Monde*, 6th February 2018, pp. 6–7.

announcing something to be feared; it then aims for objective occurrences, observable or foreseeable states of fact, whether or not it is a result of a human action.

Moreover, in common usage, to threaten is to put someone in danger, to let someone fear damage or harm. Such a process refers to a state of fragility. The reference to danger, to damage or harm, to vulnerability today finds an amplified echo in the worries that have arisen because of the collective situations peculiar to our modernity, calling on us to “think about catastrophe” (Bourg et al., 2013). It should also be noted that catastrophe has become, in recent years, a central theme in the reflection of the social sciences, in particular anthropology, ethnology, history and sociology. Besides some major works (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith, 2002; Mercier-Faivre & Thomas, 2008; Moreau, 2017; Neyrat, 2008; Stengers, 2008; Walter, 2008), scientific reviews have devoted special issues to it (*Le PortiQue*, in 2009; *Terrains*, in 2010; *Communications*, in 2015).

However, little work has been done to improve the approach of dealing with threat as such and in its diverse facets, independently of the domain where it is observed. To advance in this direction, in its analysis we must distinguish the source, the target, the situation, local or global, individual or collective, where it intervenes, to determine the modalities of the danger it represents. It will then be necessary to specify the danger carried by the intentions or the responsibility of the source, the mode of intervention (material or symbolic) qualifying the danger, and the feelings experienced by the target.

To these distinctions, we should add clarifications differentiating threat from crisis, catastrophe and risk. While these last terms apply to a vast range of occurrences: natural disasters (earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic raids, floods, extreme climatic episodes, famines, etc.); accidents (air crashes, wrecks, extreme technological accidents, etc.); pandemics; tragedies produced by mankind (attacks, wars, massacres, etc.), the notion of threat applies to categories of more limited cases. Even if we can say that certain signs are warnings of a climatic or health threat, most of the natural disasters arise without perception of threat. This applies also to accidental episodes. Only the actions attributable to human production are a matter of threat, strictly speaking. On the other hand, threat takes place on a temporal scale different from crisis and catastrophe. While the latter register a break between a past state and a state that they produce, threat anticipates a situation to come.

Moreover, threat widens the scope of the notion of risk that is presented in G. Breakwell’s chapter. While risk is quantifiable, predictable and controllable, threat implies both a degree of inevitability in its occurrence, uncertainty in its actualization, and unpredictability in its effects. While risk is defined by technical-scientific conditions and material effects, threat may be situated in and/or target the sphere of ideas (religion, ideology, political project, human and republican values, etc.).

Finally, threat can be assigned to the various levels of social reality: individual, interpersonal, intergroup, and societal. It can intervene between two entities, be they individuals or groups. It can exceed the framework of the interaction and present a collective or massive nature, especially in its most recent forms. It can emanate from a group or take aim at a population, even if the actors or the concerned victims are individuals; or make up a restricted number, as occurs in terrorist attacks. In

this regard, it has been shown (Bonelli, 2017) that collective threats “do not exist in a natural state” but as a social elaboration implying the intervention of “threat entrepreneurs”, a category inspired by that of H. Becker’s “moral entrepreneur” (1985). These social actors build, within a given domain of action, their cause against what limits or opposes it, and may be consequently considered as menacing it. This remark shows the complexity of the approach of threat sources and targets. It points out the interactive character of its production, perception and evaluation.

## Sources and Targets of Threats

Social psychology research (Caillaud et al., 2017) has amply shown the role of the intentions, judgments, and evaluations bound to the interpersonal or group interaction, in the emergence and qualification of threats and their consequences for behaviour. The sources of threat are imputed to social actors or to institutional frameworks, which entail classifications threatening social identity. In these various cases, the sources and targets of a threat are either particular individuals or particular groups. On the other hand, the sources and targets are defined jointly to the extent that the threat is implemented with the intent of nuisance or influence, or is simply the result of a categorization and/or a social comparison affecting the individuals or groups involved.

But if we take an objective risk acting in a global way into consideration, as in the case of environmental risks, we go beyond interaction. The source of the threat refers not to an intention but to a collective responsibility producing material or symbolic conditions that are harmful or dangerous on a large scale. The threatening character of a process or event is then established by the gravity it presents to the human community or the natural world, such as the nature of the damage it engenders with, in the background, deadly processes for human beings, living species and natural resources. To be able to identify it when there is no directly experienced evidence, requires an effort of information and designation related to the social community, through the dissemination of scientific information, political speech or media.

This global dimension should invite psychologists to reason not only at the level of interpersonal and intergroup relations, but also at a collective level. They should refer to threats that are not only a matter of social interaction but of the course of history and the evolution of the world and call for a new, engaging view of values in the analysis of social relations on a larger human and temporal scale. Within this framework, it seems important to dwell on two dimensions of threat: the harm it implies, the fear it arouses, the feelings it provokes, in those who suffer or observe it. A recent issue of the journal “Nouvelle revue de psychosociologie” (2017) illustrates the rise of such anxieties.

## The Evil Carried by Threat

The meaning and imagery of evil and fear have varied throughout history (Delumeau, 1978). Currently, various authors have reported an “anguish over evil” in our historical era. In particular, since the political horrors committed in the twentieth century, this anxiety has been diffracted in the questions of the human sciences and philosophy (Wathée-Delmotte & Deproost, 2000). It has found a new space of expression in the postmodern literature on environmental risks and in media or political commentaries relative to terrorism. One could, therefore, advance the idea that threat refers to the idea of “social evil”, in various forms: evil “by” society, evil “for” and “of” society. On the one hand, some states of the world or the environment that could be considered the result of an evil produced “by” society. On the other hand, some individual or collective enterprises, due to their damaging implications, threaten an evil “for” society. Finally, the repercussions of these situations are a state of malaise “of” the society.

To which one could add that the changes due to globalization and technological progress have reinforced this anxiety, because of the comments on catastrophe that they have induced in the writings of the thinkers of our time, particularly those who consider it necessary to play on the “heuristics of fear”, an “enlightened catastrophism” or an “emancipatory catastrophism” to awaken consciences and mobilize accountability (Anders, 2012; Blamont, 2004; Bauman, 2007; Dupuy, 2002; Jonas, 2013).

From this perspective, a question arises. Under what conditions can a social evil become a threat for a community, a group or an individual? It has been shown (Rouquette, 2003) that there is the possibility of identifying a social evil without perceiving it as a threat, if one is not concerned by the beliefs and practices it involves. This process reveals a paradox of the individual or collective relation to the threat: it is necessary to pose the inevitability of a phenomenon with deleterious potential so that it becomes a threat. As a result, social evils may exist that are not perceived as threatening by individuals. At issue here is the question of freedom: the risk that I am not free to avoid becomes a threat; on the other hand, if I am free to not believe in it, it does not threaten me. This question of freedom is operationalized in social and cognitive psychology under the category of “control”. But it also implies a psychological and ethical commitment that deserves to be studied. The psychological commitment has to do with the subject’s feelings. The ethical one concerns the assessment of a real or potential threat to others than oneself. A movement in this direction is emerging, with regard to terrorist threats, with interventions in favour of de-radicalization.

But it is necessary to go further in the analysis to identify the specificity of the threat in relation to the phenomena that carry a potential risk, danger or nuisance which, in theory at least, are objective, measurable, and controllable by preventive or corrective measures (Breakwell, 2010). The literature then insists on the subjective and vaguer, indefinite nature of the threat whose social construction involves emotions, feelings and interpretations of lived situations. Here we touch upon the question of emotions and fear.

## The Fear Engendered by the Threat

I will limit myself here to the emotional factor considered central in the evaluation of threats. Researchers call upon “fear”, whose analysis reveals different levels, with some going so far as to speak of a “culture of fear” (Morin, 1993).

Emotions are present at different levels: the anticipation of threat and the harm that it makes us dread, the experience of the damage suffered, its memory for those who lived through it and recall it, the observation of an objectified effect of the threat. The emotions and feelings thus mobilized are of a different nature: fear, awe, defensive reactions, amazement, anger, rancour, hate, etc. The work of developing the meaning of the threat is also different: in particular, the pair fear/hate intervenes in the aftermath, whether the threat has been experienced or simply observed. It is at the moment of this post-event elaboration that the models of interpretation proposed by the culture and the media will come into play. It is at this point that an emotion like fear can be manipulated.

Such a process was mentioned in 1950 by Bertrand Russell in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech: “*What desires are politically important?*”. Russell emphasized the indissoluble link between fear and hatred, bringing contemporary societies back to tribal-type functioning, with respect to the unfamiliar, the strange, and especially in relation to others, to outsiders that we fear and treat as enemies. His analysis, strictly psycho-sociological, highlights the mutual determination of fear and hatred. It finds a current application in the social processes that the common uses of threat, within media communication, have with regards to the threats related to intercommunity relationships.

Moreover, besides Delumeau’s (1978) important historical study and others concerning the factors involved in the production of fear, be they social, such as rumours (Lefebvre, 1989; Morin, 1993) or neurobiological (LeDoux, 2003), various work has been carried out in psychology and the social sciences. When once examining these approaches of fear (Jodelet, 2011), I was able to identify the relationships between fear and knowledge, the role of representations and the “production of meaning” as a “symbolic plug” against threats and fear; the shaping of threats by the media and their manipulation by political power (Thorisdottir & Jost, 2011), and their play in intergroup relations. I will remember here the effects produced by the fear of death awakened by current events, referring to “the management of terror” model. This “Terror Management Theory” (Salomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991) discusses the role of fear of death in changing attitudes to social problems and in defending culturally established worldviews. This theory posits that in order to overcome the “insoluble paradox” born of the desire to preserve life and the certainty of its being inevitably finite, individuals would adhere to mystical or religious belief systems or find refuge in submission to authority or in community belonging. This theory has found an important echo, following the attack on the World Trade Center.

In addition, various studies (Huddy, 2003, 2005) have shown a tendency for people with diffuse anxiety to become less tolerant of difference, more likely to use



stereotypes and to show aggression towards foreigners as well as to conform to cultural norms and have a preference for political leaders affirming a strong nationalist vision, a desire for revenge against terrorists and even engagement in wars.

A number of authors have specifically emphasized the collusion between the media and politics to create fear: Glassner, on the culture of fear (2000), Noam Chomsky on the making of consent (2004, 2008), Al Gore on the politics of fear (2004), or filmmakers like Moore (2002). They identify a number of techniques used to raise baseless concerns and divert citizens from real social problems and a fair awareness of their issues. The notion of “emerging fears” (Furedi, 2005) is added to this conception of a media and political construction of fears. These appear against the backdrop of widespread anxiety because of the failure of the “political imagination” which, incapable of facing crucial social issues, exploits the collective sensitivity by worrying it.

All these models underline the consequences that the awakening of fear has on the relations between groups, and on the refusal to accept minorities or groups marked by a national, ethnic, racial, religious or sexual difference. This kind of analysis could be applied to the way in which the media and those who use them for political purposes, deal with terrorist threats, exacerbate fear, accentuate social disruptions and run the risk of counteracting spontaneous reactions to threats.

## The Answers to Threat

Indeed, as in the case of risk, threats call for and lead to avoidance measures which can be individual or collective. Concerning risk, individual responses are analysed, drawing on the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, resilience) proposed by Kubler-Ross (2005/2009), and which are partially applicable to a threat. Concerning threats, precaution and prevention are the collectively advocated and supported measures, even when it comes to implementing individual behaviours. Added to this is the protection that may correspond to an offer or a social demand for security, or to the adaptation advocated by public policies. To this, the positions or attitudes expressed by both individuals and groups must be added.

Threats brandished by “collapsologists” or “collapsologs” have generated currents of thought that contrast with positive visions and practices: notably “transhumanism”, which postulates that reason, science and technology can be put at the service of the protection of the human condition: “survivalism”. This promotes the learning of survival techniques and has resulted in a significant number of literary, film and television productions. On the other hand, various movements, such as the anti-pesticide appeal by “Nous voulons des coquelicots” (We want poppies) or “Il est encore temps” (There is still time) in France, organize regular marches or petitions to protest against mismanagement by public authorities. It is worth mentioning, furthermore, movements of revolt, anger and collective condemnation on the social scene as in the case of the fight against agro-food risks or movements of defence of unspoiled nature against the establishment of technical infrastructures.

At the private level, a variety of attitudes or behaviours are implemented to dismiss the notion of threat. They take many forms:

- The denial by which the consciousness of the threat to which one can be exposed is erased, as in the case studied by Zonabend (1989), where people working or living near a nuclear power station declare that they do not perceive any threat because of the technical control exerted on its functioning.
- The challenge by which we face the threat to remove it. An instance often found in the attitudes of patients suffering from chronic or lethal diseases, of which Fischer (1994) offers a magnificent account. This attitude has recently been illustrated by the public's response to terrorist attacks, when the will to continue to live and enjoy life as before was affirmed and put into action.
- Defence by the establishment of protective behaviour: there are now training courses in risk avoidance procedures during a terrorist attack, as well as the existence, on a collective level, of some nations planning to build walls to protect against immigration.

These collective or individual responses have met with mixed reactions. In particular, socially advocated precautionary or preventive measures have been debated and contested by reason of the anxiety they foster, of the individual responsibility they presuppose, and of the social control they imply and the potential for revolt that they can engender (Bronner, & Géhin, 2010).

Other reservations stem from the fact that the validity of scientific knowledge is called into question. Expressed in connexion with measures taken against risks, these reservations take on a particular tone with regard to threats that imply a collectivization, a communalization of concerns, while the debate about threats takes on a collective dimension. It is spotted at all levels of social communication, from the private scene of family discussions to political and decision-making circles or the media sphere.

It has been said that the anti-science and anti-progress sentiments, the fear of change, reappeared at the end of the 20th century in a pacified climate, leading to describe scientific concerns and expressions of secular sensitivity to risk and threats, as “displacement mechanisms”. This was a borrowing of Freud's formula (1925/1965), which refers to the belief systems that make it possible to face existential anxiety in times of peace and social calm. But the same is not true today, with worsening climate warnings and an increase in the number and severity of terrorist attacks that reinforce anxieties and turn risks into threats. Terrorism is a case in point, as the media and political spheres take possession of information, interpret it and make use of it, which, reinforcing fears, leads to negative consequences for social unity. They divert from reflective work to confront and overcome feelings of anxiety and threat, favouring partisan conflicts and ideological orientations.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the dimensions specifying the characteristics of the threats that have just been examined, it is possible to set the framework for an analysis applicable to the threats that affect the different fields of observation: environment, health, scientific and technical progress, economy, politics, social life (crime, poverty, unemployment, exclusion and marginalization, migration, war and terrorism). It will then be necessary to isolate the factors which lead from risk, danger, nuisance, peril, etc. to threat, and which concern:

- The nature and location of the threat in the physical, material and natural world, or in the discursive, symbolic and ideological one.
- The cause of the threat, which leads either, in the first case, to the engagement of a human responsibility; or in the second case, to aim for pernicious intentionality.
- The responsibility in the occurrence of the threat that can be direct or indirect, individual or collective. In all cases, it is attributed to or contracted in the name of the protection of the common good.
- The intentions underlying the perpetration of the threat when it comes directly from a human source. They then refer to concrete or ideological objectives. These can range from intimidation, destabilization or change of opinion to nuisance and destruction. They can be a punishment, retaliation when there is imputation of fault or even sin, as in the case of fatwas.
- The conditions and effects of the threat: the uncertainty and imprecision of its occurrence; the extent of the damage it causes, which may go as far as death; the dimension of the evil that it involves as concerns the imaginary.
- The state of the threat targets: their vulnerability or resilience; the effects they are affected by at the level of experience and cognitive processes; the emotional dimensions of their relationship to the threat (anxiety, fear, etc.).
- The collective processes inducing the threat or induced by it: the role of political and media outlooks in the crystallizations of antagonistic social positions; massive mobilizations in the face of a threat; the guilt of vulnerable populations likely to become socially threatening by their protest or revolt.

For each of these dimensions, to specify its presence, form, and relevance for threats pertaining to the different fields singled out by research (from environmental to societal problems) would provide a comparative picture of threats. It would thus be possible to define modes of intervention adapted to their confrontation and to avoid the deleterious effects of certain confusion of ideas in rhetoric too often inclined to generalization.

These few proposals, which respond to the desire to outline a sort of inventory of the paths to follow in order to construct a threat analysis across domains and disciplines, certainly do not exhaust the problems raised by their emergence in the contemporary world. Nor have they sufficiently incorporated the richness of the reflections of social philosophy and the debates of which they are the object. It was simply a matter of sketching out a few lines of research that would allow a

psycho-sociological approach to contribute to reflection and joint efforts, from an interdisciplinary perspective.

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