

## INTRODUCTION

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**Benjamin Lazier and Jan Plamper**

WE HABITUALLY SAY that we see fear, that we smell it, touch it, breathe it. But how, after all is said and done, do we *know* it?

The chapters in this edited volume help us with just this question—how fear is variously constituted as an object of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The contributions to this book emerged from a workshop in which a distinguished group of scholars (representing the fields of neuroscience, clinical psychology, philosophy, political theory, literary studies, film studies, economic history, intellectual history, and history of science) and one novelist gathered to reflect on the predispositions they and their disciplines bring to bear on the phenomenon of fear, broadly construed. Some opted to present synoptic overviews; others, case studies. The unstated presumption of the workshop was to break down barriers between social-scientific, humanistic, and natural-scientific approaches to fear and to leave behind the binary distinction between nature and culture that has long underwritten their differences. These hopes were animated by recent works that combine the universalism of cognitive psychology with

the attention to cultural particularity found in much anthropological research.<sup>2</sup> It therefore came as a surprise to discover, at the workshop, how these boundaries were at times so readily reconstituted. As Lorraine Daston has remarked, developing a language beyond the terms of the hoary nature/culture distinction “would require nothing less than the functional equivalent of a discipline’s collective psychotherapy.”<sup>3</sup>

What would such therapy entail? And what new view would it produce? Supposing, for a moment, that humanities scholars, social scientists, and life scientists joined one another on the proverbial couch, what kind of landscape would reveal itself after the old edifice had been destroyed and the rubble cleared away?

Destroying the old edifice requires first that we reveal it for what it is—a toxic bequest, of use in its time but no longer. Most proximately, this bequest can be traced to a change in the understanding of emotions over the course of the nineteenth century. That is when emotions appeared for the first time as “hardwired,” as evolutionarily determined bodily reactions to objects or outer stimuli. In the work of Darwin, and later Carl Lange and William James, fear in particular became the “alpha emotion in the hierarchy of human affects.”<sup>4</sup> It was at once the most archaic and most modern of emotions. As Darwin wrote in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, “fear was expressed from an extremely remote period, in almost the same manner as it is now in man.”<sup>5</sup> This new view overturned earlier ideas, in which fear was often regarded as a passion subject to volition, imagination, and an ethical will.<sup>6</sup>

There are indications, however, that the phobic regime born of the nineteenth century is coming to an end.<sup>7</sup> Life scientists, for example, are recovering conceptual resources for their work in eras prior to the rise of Darwin, Lange, and James. Some, like the renowned developmental psychologist Jerome Kagan, have mobilized philosophers as historically and intellectually diverse as Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant to argue against the approach to emotions currently favored by experimental psychology. “Definitions of emotion that relied on taped verbal reports, filmed behaviors, or recordings of biological reactions,” Kagan says, are comparatively impoverished next to the “robust” knowledge about feelings produced by thinkers now retrofitted into the tradition of the humanities.<sup>8</sup> In part, this is because the methods of the life sciences have sometimes constituted fear as an object of knowledge in a fashion that denies the complexity of the phenomenon—the language of the laboratory can sterilize the recalcitrant messiness of lived experience. Summing up a

lifetime of experimental research, Kagan offered this suggestion: “Let us agree to a moratorium on the use of single words, such as *fear*, . . . and write about emotional processes with full sentences rather than ambiguous, naked concepts.”<sup>9</sup>

The chapters in this edited volume follow Kagan’s lead. They also trace a loose thematic arc. The first two contributions, by Richard McNally (an experimental psychologist and clinician) and Arne Öhman (a neuroscientist), together provide an overview of contemporary psychobiological approaches to fear, with particular attention to anxiety disorders. The third chapter, by Ruth Leys, situates the first two in an account of post-1960s psychological scholarship on affect, highlighting their historical contingency. In the process Leys mounts an attack on the work of Paul Ekman, a leading psychologist whose work on facial expression has enjoyed tremendous popularity in venues ranging from the Fox Broadcasting Company to the Department of Homeland Security. The next two chapters take the historicizing impulse still further. First, Jan Plamper extends Leys’s account by describing how emotion became an object of investigation for the life sciences, in this instance by way of the theories and practices of Russian military psychologists around the beginning of the twentieth century. Then, Jan Mieszkowski looks to the history of late Enlightenment discussions about the terror of encounters with the sublime to account for some of the peculiarities of fear in the modern theater of war. Whereas Mieszkowski focuses on the *spectacle* of fear in war, Corey Robin, a political theorist, follows with a contribution on the *politics* of fear in times of war and crisis. The economic historian Harold James rounds out this series of pieces on fear and calamity with an account of the psychology of mass panic in moments of economic collapse, with special attention to the origins of the Great Depression. The book then concludes with a chapter by Adam Lowenstein (a film scholar), who addresses the fear induced by horror films.

All told, the chapters gathered here go a long way toward contesting the phobic regime to which we are heir. They also reveal alternative categories—in the instance of this book, intentionality and admixture, temporality, spectacle, and politics—through which to think about fear across the disciplines.

## INTENTIONALITY AND ADMIXTURE

Everyday experience would seem to confirm Kagan’s point about the admixture of feeling. Any visit to an amusement park roller coaster will

do. Faces marked at once by pleasure and terror attest to a composite *Angstlust* in vivo.<sup>10</sup> Or at least they seem to. What facial expression can actually tell us is a matter of heated academic debate and biopolitical significance. For example, facial testimony animates the work of the psychologist Paul Ekman, associated with the most prominent contemporary effort to identify “basic” emotions independent of time and place. Ekman gained notoriety for a series of studies in which he traversed Papua New Guinea asking isolated villagers to identify the emotions on the faces of photographed persons from cultures they had never before encountered. Later, he was made editor of Darwin’s *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. And he has more recently become an expert in facial-recognition techniques, feted in the popular press and highly sought after by law enforcement agencies. He has the peculiar distinction of having become at once a foremost resource in the global “war on terror” and the author of a series of self-help books designed to aid the aggrieved half of fractious couples to determine when their partners lie.<sup>11</sup>

The article by Ruth Leys calls both the conclusions and presuppositions of Ekman’s foundational experiments into question. Leys focuses on the role of photographs in Ekman’s studies. In fact, her contribution might be read as one prolonged plea for taking the mediality and temporality of Ekman’s photos more seriously. Of course, these problems long preceded Ekman’s own experiments. Doubts about the ability of photography to capture the display of emotions on the site of the human face set in, Leys reports, with Darwin himself. Exposure times of cameras in the 1860s lasted several seconds, which meant that the subject had to keep still and “conserve” the emotion on her face. The problems with such an approach are numerous. For one, if the face truly is an embodiment of emotion, then such faces were at best embodiments of staged emotions, embodiments of feigned affect—the faces, in other words, of the fake. As Leys points out, this was one of several methodological deficiencies plaguing Ekman’s early experiments, a deficiency that endures, albeit in more complicated fashion, both in the filmic evidence at the core of Ekman’s later work and in one of the dominant natural-scientific approaches to visually registering emotions today—the “still” photographs of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and positron emission tomography (PET) brain scans.

The dispute about what such photographs and films can tell us hinges on a deeper set of arguments about the kind of entity that fear is and the kind of self that experiences, expresses, or lives it. Roughly, following Leys, we might speak of two competing positions: so-called intentional-

ist and nonintentionalist theories of fear. The first describes fear as a process, the second as an entity. The first is sometimes associated with psychoanalysis and phenomenology, the second typically with neuroscience. The first foregrounds questions of meaning and belief, the second tends to separate feeling from cognition. In sum, the two positions hinge on competing understandings of self and world. Nonintentionalist theories are thought to posit a discrete subject over and against a world of objects. Intentionalist theories, by contrast, speak of a porous, open, socially mediated self and of fear as always attached to the specific objects with which they are associated.

The distinction is itself a fairly recent innovation in the history of Western thought, in part because nonintentional theories gained real purchase only in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Until then, the dominant trend described fear as a subjective state of feeling, not a bodily response to an external stimulus. Aristotle, for example, held that fear (*phobos*) entailed a moment of evaluation (must I fear something and does it truly pose a threat?), and that it was subject to *moral* education (how do we teach the young a fear that will enable them to contribute to the good life?), not just the physical conditioning now associated with the name Pavlov.<sup>13</sup> Thomas Aquinas was also keen to distinguish human fear (*timor*) from animal fear. Fear in humans, he held, entailed an element of intellectual appraisal (*cogitativa* and *ratio particularis*), while animals instinctively fled or fought.<sup>14</sup> Even Descartes, whose distinction between cognition and emotion is sometimes thought to have prefigured the anti-intentionalism of the nineteenth century, spoke of volition in the management of fear as a “mastery of the passions,” involving the focus “on useful thoughts designed to generate one passion (e.g., courage) to counteract another (e.g., fear).”<sup>15</sup> Not until modern psychology came to dominate scholarly and public discussions about fear did the intentionalist approach lose sway.

We see both psychologists in this book grappling with this legacy. Richard McNally begins his chapter with a fascinating account of the felt need to produce a nonintentionalist theory in the first place. Psychologists eager to establish their discipline as (hard) science, he argues, were understandably uneasy with a tradition of thinking about emotion that privileged subjective experience over objectifiable, measurable indicators such as verbalization (cries of terror), physiological changes (a racing heart), and motor actions (flight). This approach had virtues: it inspired ways to measure fear beyond the self-reporting of the fearful, which in turn produced public and observable sets of data. But the approach raised

as many questions as it resolved, and McNally casts his lot with those psychologists who believe in patient self-reporting to get at individual, subjective states of feeling (or, in the psychological term of art, *qualia*).

We can begin to fathom the infrequency of such openly intentionalist partisanship once we consider Arne Öhman's contribution. Like McNally, Öhman acknowledges the importance of self-reporting, at least as one among many ways to get at the "multi-component responses" that comprise all emotions (a definition he adopts from the experimental psychologist Keith Oatley). But Öhman is fundamentally interested in the biology of fear, and he presents us with a survey of the findings that have made biological approaches to fear so powerful. He focuses on the role of the amygdalae—small, almond-shaped collections of nuclei in the anterior medial temporal lobe of the brain—in mediating functional relationships between threats and defensive behavior. This is important: the fact that the "fear network" is located in parts of the brain that evolved at the junction between reptiles and mammals indicates that it is extremely primitive. In evolutionary terms, the amygdala is anterior to the cortex, where the kind of cognitive processing associated with intentionality in fear—"willpower," "subjective feeling"—is thought to take place.<sup>16</sup> For those impressed by these findings, there is therefore something inescapably "nonintentional" about fear. But others such as McNally call into question this bottom-top hierarchy (amygdala over cortex), along with the linkage of one particular area of the brain with fear.

The argument about intentionality is not conducted only in the register of the natural sciences and their history. It figures also in the work of humanists. Take Adam Lowenstein's chapter, which addresses *Land of the Dead* (2005), the fourth horror film in director George Romero's legendary *Dead* series. Lowenstein takes the film as an occasion to inveigh against so-called cognitivist approaches to thinking about audience terror—elicited by the horror genre in particular and in more occulted fashion by the medium of film in general. "No physiological sensors or strategic interviews or questionnaire results can ever tell the whole story about . . . how exactly spectators interact with a film," he writes. Indeed, he thinks it is folly to say that the fear induced in moviegoers is a matter of stimulus generalization: that our fear of zombies in the theater is just another version of the fear we feel in the real world at the sight of the monstrous, distorted, deformed, and impure.

Instead, Lowenstein suggests we think of horror films as enacting a "cinema of attractions" (in the critic Tom Gunning's phrase). Or better, *recalling* such a cinema: for the cinema of attractions was one of the roads

not taken once Hollywood's cinema of narrative pleasures marginalized its competitors. Against the temporality of narrative, this argument has it, the cinema of attractions prized deferral, belatedness, and retrospection—a dramatization, say, of a Freudian psyche hard at work rearranging and retranscribing memories or strategically deferring action on experiences impossible for the subject to integrate at the moment of their occurrence. If Hollywood privileged the time of narrative, the cinema of attractions preferred what Lowenstein calls the “allegorical moment.”

There is a certain irony in Lowenstein's use of the phrase “cinema of attractions.” It recalls, after all, Sergei Eisenstein's notion of a “montage of attractions”—a theory of film that held that moviegoers could be transformed into proletarianized subjects not, or not only, with suitably ideological stories (for example, *Battleship Potemkin*) but on the assumption that the formal elements of a film could “train” viewers by means of a Pavlovian mechanism of stimulus and response. In other words, the montage of attractions imported the laboratory into the theater, whereas Lowenstein's work implicitly asks us to think, as does Leys, about how the phantasmatic and theatrical constructions of fear reassert themselves within the sterile confines of the lab.

Here, then, is where Lowenstein can help us think about Ekman and the approach to fear he represents. As Leys points out, Ekman's early work was roundly criticized, in part for its use of staged faces frozen in the form of synchronic snapshots. Ekman answered his critics, Margaret Mead among them, by turning to faces invested with diachrony and movement instead—in other words, to faces on film. His later experiments monitored the facial expressions of test-subjects exposed to traumatic or disturbing films, on the assumption that involuntary “micro-movements” reveal the truth of our feelings. But Lowenstein works on a medium whose success as an art form would seem to hinge on the ability to fake just what Ekman claims cannot be feigned. And if we take Lowenstein seriously, we realize that there is much more of the theater in the lab than we are accustomed to think. To describe what transpires in the lab requires that we consider how the phantasmatic and theatrical temporalities of fear play out in laboratory experiments predicated on their exclusion.

## TEMPORALITY

This brings us to a second motif in the book—temporality. Or to pose it in the form of a question: *When* does fear happen? The life sciences

provide us with several answers. At first glance, fear is triggered by an immediate threat, and the function of fear is to induce the organism to freeze, fight, or flee in defense. But things quickly become more complicated. There is first the evidence provided by the Pavlovian conditioning of animals, who are trained to respond with fear to a stimulus that in and of itself presents no threat. What this evidence means is up for debate. Some think it indicates animals are capable of anxiety about something that has not yet come to pass. The implication: even in animals, the temporality of fear involves a manifestation of expectation (the future) and experience (the past) in the present. Others, and here McNally comes to mind, warn against such a conclusion: rodents, he holds, are confined to the “temporal prison of the present” because they lack the capacity for self-representation that allows for the projection of the self into an imagined future or the recollection of the self from a lived past. Laboratory mice are presentists. Hence, one argument goes, models of fear developed in the animal lab are presentist too and cannot account for the temporal play at the heart of the human experience of fear.

There is a second way in which the life sciences insert temporality into understandings of fear, and that is in discussions of evolution. At first glance, this sounds counterintuitive. The life sciences are often accused of having no sense for history: not just the history of disciplines but for the ways historical developments have produced the objects of investigation for those disciplines. But there is a difference between history and temporality; the methodological stress on evolution might be hostile to the first but not to the second. After all, to stress the evolutionary background to fear is also to insist on the enduring importance of the distant past—call it “prehistory”—in the present.<sup>17</sup> It is also to insist on open futures (since evolution brooks no end or conclusion save extinction), albeit in most cases distant ones (given a pace of change generally too slow to register in a human lifetime).

To understand the role of more proximate historical horizons in manifestations of fear, it helps to consider the chapters by Harold James and Jan Plamper. James provides a careful, lucid analysis of the stock market panic of 1929: first, a review of the economic explanations that have been marshaled and rejected to account for it, and second, a survey of the strange temporalities at work in the psychology of mass panic. James concludes that it was not this or that economic event so much as a sense of history—a sense for radical alternatives to the present embedded in a dystopian, concocted fantasy of the past—that accounts for the course of events. “History actually induced the sense of crisis,” James reports,

as “fear arises when deep historical experience suddenly reemerges and becomes alive as a possible version of the present.”

By “history” James means something more like “historical imagination”—and a radically unstable, phantasmatic one at that. To take one example: observers of the crash unwittingly conflated the events of their day with a historical predecessor, the collapse of Friday, September 24, 1869. As James points out, this seems to be the only way to account for one of the most curious dimensions of the panic—the fact that the collapse, which transpired on Thursday, October 24, came to be known, quickly and erroneously, as Black Friday. Those who watched the market crash, it turns out, shared something with Lowenstein’s moviegoers: a febrile, temporal imagination in which present could be past, past future, and future already lived. If there is an economic logic here, James suggests, it is difficult indeed to discern. The nature of fear means that market panics may not be amenable to market explanations (or at least not to those inspired by the “efficient markets hypothesis”). Ben Bernanke once claimed that “to understand the Great Depression is the Holy Grail of macroeconomics.”<sup>18</sup> But if James is right, the social scientists and policy makers are doomed to failure. Their search is more like the Grail quest—“fundamentally futile”—than they may care to admit, and this futility is born of erroneous ideas about what fear is and how it is best known.

James focuses on the role of the historical imagination in the felt experience of fear. Jan Plamper’s chapter, in turn, broaches the question of what happens to fear as an object of knowledge when it is submitted to the temporalities of historical analysis. Plamper tracks the transformation of talk about fear among Russian soldiers from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. Discussions of fear were few in the war of 1812, and, when they did surface, were conducted in the lexica of morality and ethnicity (understood in terms of religion and sometimes climate, but not genetic inheritance). Half a century later talk of fear exploded in the wake of the Crimean War. This explosion took place across genres: in belles letters (Leo Tolstoy), in military theory, and above all in the newly established science of military psychology. In the hands of military psychologists, fear was transformed into a symptom of disease and sometimes into a disease proper (“shell shock” and its Russian variants), which was in turn to be submitted to medical-scientific practice (diagnosis, therapy, prophylactics). Like Leys, then, Plamper provides us with a story about how fear became an object of scientific inquiry. Implicitly, both raise the question of whether fear might even be

understood as a stable, enduring experience across time. To judge by the qualia or self-reporting of Russian soldiers—to use McNally’s language for a moment—the answer appears to be no.

## SPECTACLE

A third motif in this book hinges on the spectacular dimensions of fear. Literally: spectatorship seems to be intrinsic to the fear experience. Take first the example of the fear provoked by horror films, in which the spectacular nature of the experience is front and center. As Lowenstein points out in his chapter, there are very good reasons to make a sharp distinction between fear induced in the theater and fear encountered in the world. But it is worth considering the tantalizing, if counterintuitive alternative: that the horror show reveals a deep truth about fear, both within the theater and beyond.

The prospect is counterintuitive, because moviegoers are not confronted with an actual threat to life or limb. Theirs, it seems, is a faux fear, a simulation, manufactured for the purposes of titillation and delight. Fear is enjoyable, provided it is not the real thing, experienced from the perspective afforded by a safe place. But the prospect of taking the horror film as a model is also tantalizing, for two reasons above all. First, it asks us to think more carefully about the artifice and the spectacle at work in other instances of manufactured fear. Ekman’s findings, for example, were acquired by monitoring the facial movements of test subjects exposed to frightening or disturbing films. These test subjects were watching their own “horror show” in their own safe place—not the theater but the lab. More recent experiments using fMRI function similarly. It is common, especially in the popular scientific press, to conclude that such imaging provides access to the deep, biological truth of emotions. We are not watching the face, after all, but the brain. In truth, however, such experiments do just what Ekman did, only with a change of locus. Emotional reactions are still induced in test subjects (we are still watching those induced to fear), and there is still an elision between the laboratory and life.<sup>19</sup>

Taking the moviegoer as a model is tantalizing for a second reason. As Jan Mieszkowski suggests in his intellectual-historical reconstruction of what it has meant to be a witness to war, there is a sense in which even the most fearful of places, the battlefield, is experienced as a theater, not just by observers but by soldiers. Curiously, however, it is an experi-

ence of a theater staging a threat to the lives of others—not the self. The startling suggestion is that in war even combatants can never be afraid *enough*; a part of our psyche will always apprehend war as spectacle, as a horror show about someone else.

To make this argument, Mieszkowski first turns to a tradition of late Enlightenment thought about aesthetics. Figures like Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant famously invoked the category of the sublime to account for the pleasure we feel when exposed to terror, even scenes of others' demise, provided we view such spectacles from the vantage of a "safe place." They had in effect elaborated a new model of spectatorship, prompted by some of the horrific events of their day (the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 for Kant, the French Revolution for Burke). But there were good reasons to wonder about the ethical palatability of such a model. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge described it, Britain had given birth to a mass audience that consumed the stories of the suffering of others for breakfast: "Boys and girls, / And women, that would groan to see a child / Pull off an insect's leg, all read of war, / The best amusement for our morning meal!"<sup>20</sup> In other words, their safe place had become a bit too safe. According to Mieszkowski, fear was thereby banished from the experience of the sublime, "leaving in its wake only the imaginative artifice of Burke and Kant's staged terror—faux fear without the fear."

This tradition of thought took a curious but telling turn in Sigmund Freud's reflections on the origins of the First World War. How are we to account for the fact of modern mass war? Given the terrors it visits upon combatants and civilians alike, why do we make such easy recourse to armed conflict? Freud conjectured that something about the fear of death made it impossible to take its threat seriously enough. In the unconscious, he held, we are convinced of our own immortality. It is therefore impossible to imagine our own death—or rather, "whenever we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators."<sup>21</sup> Even those in battle inevitably construed themselves in part as observers immune to the threat of death. Mieszkowski therefore concludes that for Freud, "all fear is a product of a staged scenario in which there is no need to offer a qualifying 'providing we are in a safe place' because, emotionally speaking, we invariably feel that we already are." Mieszkowski leaves us to consider whether this disquieting conclusion holds not just for Freud but for us—and in particular for Americans left unmoved by sights of war from Afghanistan and Iraq.

**POLITICS**

There is a final, important series of questions animating the contributions to this book. Who rules? Who sets the tone in contemporary debates about fear? And to what effect? In recent years, the natural sciences have displaced, occluded, even excluded humanist discussions of fear. This trend, in which debates on “eternal” questions of humanity (free will, the self, emotions) moved from the domain of the humanities to the domain of the life sciences, only accelerated after 9/11. It is not difficult to understand why. Whatever the contemporary status of C. P. Snow’s “two cultures,” the natural sciences offer a seductive promise that the humanities cannot: empirically derived certainties for society of the kind manufactured within the confines of their experiments. Ekman’s faces, for example, have moved out of laboratories and into our airports in the form of Screening Passengers by Observational Techniques (SPOT) machines stationed at fourteen U.S. airports to register the “micro-expressions” of passengers, now coded as potential terrorists.<sup>22</sup> Critics of SPOT, Ekman writes,

have said that it is an unnecessary invasion of privacy, based on an untested method of observation, that is unlikely to yield much in the way of red-handed terrorists set on blowing up a plane or flying it into a building, but would violate fliers’ civil rights. I disagree. I’ve participated in four decades’ worth of research into deception and demeanor, and I know that researchers have amassed enough knowledge about how someone who is lying looks and behaves that it would be negligent not to use it in the search for terrorists. Along with luggage checks, radar screening, bomb-sniffing dogs and the rest of our security arsenal, observational techniques can help reduce risks—and potentially prevent another deadly assault like the attacks of September 11, 2001.<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, there was the counterbalance of writings—across the disciplines, spanning political science to medicine—on the politics of fear, penned with the aim of shifting public attention to fear as it is manipulated and produced.<sup>24</sup> But on the whole, the natural sciences have been spectacularly adept at exporting their laboratory principle to society as a whole. Just as fear must be stimulated or simulated in the lab in order to measure it, so fear must be nourished and then contained or, more precisely, nourished in order to be contained by a government at the ready.

Need this be the case? It is a difficult question to answer. If we follow the argument of the political scientist Corey Robin, the answer may

unfortunately be yes. Robin aims to demonstrate how the language of security mobilizes fear to justify the limitation of rights the state was theoretically constituted to protect. In itself, this is not news. But Robin goes further. He explains why recourse to such language is so tempting. He also suggests that liberal conceptions of the state in fact encourage the use of coercive power in the name of national security. Liberal stalwarts such as John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and Oliver Wendell Holmes may have articulated reasons for limiting the power of the state to use coercion on matters of religion, morality, and politics. But the exceptions they invoked in which coercion might be justified—"the security and safety of the commonwealth" (Locke), harm (Mill), "clear and present danger" (Holmes)—ensure that when states do exercise such power, they will do so on behalf of security.<sup>25</sup>

Still worse, the nature of the fear stoked by such language is peculiarly resistant to reasoned discussion or debate. As Robin points out, such language is frequently articulated in the conditional and therefore inhabits a grammatical space beyond the distinction between fact and fiction. When the television journalist Diane Sawyer asked former president George W. Bush to distinguish between the claim, stated as fact, that "there were weapons of mass destruction" and the hypothetical possibility that Saddam Hussein "could move to acquire those weapons," Bush answered: "What's the difference?" Robin holds up just this response as the most straightforward and revealing statement Bush ever made about the war. Like no other, it demonstrates that the conditional is a mood "where evidence and intuition, reason and speculation combine to make the worst-case scenario seem as real as the realest fact." And the perverse corollary is that the greater the threat, the less proof we demand on behalf of the claim that the threat is real.

The pathology Robin identifies is endemic, he thinks, to the liberal political order. It is a congenital defect. Life scientists such as Arne Öhman have a similar point to make, if in a different key. Öhman concludes his chapter with an impassioned plea against the understandable impulse to avoid danger—taken to an extreme, after all, avoidance is a hallmark of anxiety disorder, and it curiously reaffirms the gravity of the problems it is meant to solve. As Öhman points out, however, a version of such avoidance plagues many who do not fulfill any of the typical diagnostic criteria for the disease, and here he is thinking of America after 9/11. The extraordinary measures undertaken on behalf of national security and safety, he argues, hide a "sad truth": that we in fact have little control over the things we fear most, such as illness, accidents, or,

in this instance, terrorist attacks. Such measures also stoke the fires of the very fear they are meant to quench. Like Robin, Öhman would have us submit the question of security to arenas, like politics, better suited to contention and choice. Doing so might enable us to rescue ourselves from the Pavlovian conditioning of color-coded terror alerts. It might allow us to consider anew whether public resources are better expended on SPOT machines or on schools.

Or it might not. Whatever the new insights offered by the disciplines represented in this book bring into the process of how we know and live fear, it remains to be seen whether such insights can be of use in public discussion. If the chapters presented here are any measure by which to judge, this question ought to receive a qualified yes. How these insights are to insinuate themselves into the public arena in the first place, however, is a question that must remain unresolved for now.