

CHAPTER 1

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## Introduction: Colors of Security

How does anxiety travel into artifacts of life, people’s ordinary practices, and public policies—policies that can sometimes engulf the world? This book traces fear, from the soup of indistinct but keenly felt worries over one’s own body, to the hard nuts of bombs and bastions. In between, and connecting them up, are smaller-scale sites and responses, like the hardware set up at airports or the barbed wire meant to keep some out or others in. I examine strategies for security against nature as well as against the machinations of human beings and their organizations.

Through various intermediaries of institutions and physical implementations, individual angst transmutes into the power of authorities who themselves, of course, come to have an interest in stoking the fears that feed them. Amidst the resulting confusions and ambiguities, we—all of us—are stuck with the goal of distinguishing the sensible from the non-sensible, the potentially constructive from the self-defeating. Bad things do happen, and death is the final outcome no matter what; but the routes to death can be more or less reasonable, more or less decent—a guiding assumption in the chapters that follow. This book is against security as officially practiced, favoring instead meaningful ways to extend lives and provide people with decent experience.

My analytic strategy is threefold. First is the effort to understand this massive social, moral, and political thing called “security,” and what goes on in its name. I try to explain where it all comes from, including the shapes and procedures that greet us at a place like the airport. A second goal emerges from the idea that, in the specific and sometimes hell-bent responses to threats, we can see how a particular world works. So studying security is a method, a way to learn how—through people’s scramble for survival, capacity, and position—“normal” life operates. A third focus is practical: I assume the role of consultant, the kind who is

seldom if ever brought in because I am looking for the benign in a situation that is more often in hunt for the demonic. I recommend, in the form of concluding “what to do” sections in each chapter, alternatives to the command-and-control tactics that so often take hold as public policy. Instead of the resort to surveillance, walls, and hierarchy, I indicate what I take to be more effective—and happier—solutions. I try to be very concrete: I get practical, right to the kind of equipment that should be present and how it should be used. This is a book of analysis and also a book of directions.

I do not shrink from the mundane things, the public and private artifacts routinely consumed in everyday life. They cumulate as pleasures and punishments in the course of a day or lifetime, and they can facilitate safety or danger at critical and unexpected instances. I am drawn to the late Susan Leigh Star’s call for an “ethnography of infrastructure.”<sup>1</sup> A well-designed lever calls forth the right kind of pressure in just the right spot to make it work and with that a special human satisfaction as well as functional outcome.<sup>2</sup> We can see this by watching closely and talking to people. When a contraption frustrates, individuals will turn their displeasure into random bangs, pushes, and pulls that may well further derange an object’s functioning. In happier outcomes, objects seduce with a “technology of enchantment,” as the anthropologist Alfred Gell once called it.<sup>3</sup> In my own research of some years ago, I came to appreciate how utility and aesthetics, pleasure and practicality, are never separate spheres. Our lives are the sum total of our interactions with ensembles of artifacts and other people, including the people who are involved in managing the appliances. A misinterpretation of the machine, among workers overlooking telltale cues of malfunction at a nuclear plant, say, or system managers misreading calibrations for a space launch, can generate terrible trouble.<sup>4</sup> And sometimes it can be ordinary people who notice, if they are provided the opportunity, that something has gone awry.

As the micro and macro intertwine, I try to capture something of the meet-up at security. Nothing is more micro than existential threat, the fear that one may cease to be through biological demise, but also through social death by faux pas that goes beyond the pale. Fear of failure, abject failure like messing in one’s pants, sticks on biography

and sometimes on history. Nothing is more macro than the collective action that could result. As they form businesses, open plays, build cities, or make wars, humans carry their quotidian humblings as continuous companions. You don't have to be whole-hog Freudian to think that our early worries stay with us not only as private trouble but also as public forces. Life continues reinforcing our original vulnerability, with both ridicule and humiliation always in potential play.

The driving force behind all of it is fear that one's taken-for-granted world is being lost—in a fleeting moment or a longer *durée*. Security, for my purposes, means being able to assume that day-to-day, moment-to-moment human planning can go forward. When the whole welter of personal and collective projects can be thought about and acted on, succeeded in, and failed upon, the normalcy of the human condition is in play. I am not directed toward security in the sense of material satisfaction—a decent house or full belly—however righteous such goals may be. I'm thinking of security as the feeling and reality that such goals are even possible to pursue, that there is a sensible and reliable world in which to act. It is a more-or-less state; no individual and no community can be fully secure either in feeling or in reality, but some are closer than others. Places, offices, bureaucracies, and functionaries that explicitly use the word “security,” as on their signs, uniforms, and mastheads, are working this idea as a professional and business practice. I am drawn to such designations in this book as relevant sites for thinking and further examination.

With so much at stake, there is a compulsion among those so charged with responsibility but also among many other people as well, to *do something*. Some individuals respond to disaster by fielding resources with imaginative generosity. Others may be mesmerized by routine and proceed as irrelevant bystanders. And still, as another alternative, there are scoundrels who revert to selfish power and reinforce their domination. All will be in evidence in the chapters that follow.

Although this book is overwhelmingly oriented to contemporary responses and from a U.S.-centric point of view, much of the basic repertoire is familiar enough to students of history and anthropology—particularly the darker sides that seem the most documented. In the cosmology of the Asmat people of southwest New Guinea, “Death

was always caused by an enemy, either directly in war or by malevolent magic. Each death created an imbalance that had to be corrected through the death of an enemy.”<sup>5</sup> The Black Death justified the search for witches or the demonization of Jews, the poor, the homeless, vagrants, or any Other who might have been locally available. “Moral panics” —as we now call them thanks to Stanley Cohen’s studies of how publics cook up shared fears—are at the ready for crisis deployment. Lynchings in the U.S. South were, in this framework, events of exorcising fears of sexual threat and impending social upheaval. From the surviving photos, it appears that the white audiences enjoyed these scenes of strange fruit—an “ecstasy of bigotry,” to use Christopher Lane’s phrase in a somewhat different context.<sup>6</sup>

Anyone researching security, even in more placid places like the contemporary United States, runs into some unusual methodological problems. Authorities, and sometimes individual persons as well, fear that revealing details of what they do to enhance safety will, in the wrong hands, undo whatever protections are in place. If enemies know where New York’s emergency headquarters are located (165 Cadman Plaza East, published on the city’s website, replacing the agency’s former headquarters, which were in the World Trade Center), they can zap it, bringing everything down. If access to emergency data is free and open, miscreants can get hold of that data. If bad guys know the locations of the pumping stations that keep water from inundating the city, they can disable them to create massive floods. The dilemma, instructive in itself, is that holding information secret also prevents people from knowing what to do when they might be of help. If you don’t know where the fire station is, you can’t run in and report the fire—especially salient when a big emergency knocks the phones out of commission. If those in charge become disabled, others can’t take over if the communication system is password protected.

As with all decisions about risk, there is a distributional effect to keeping things close to the chest. Some people have easier access to the inside information and strategic materials than do others. For whatever reason, some end up with more security privilege than others. It was indeed women and children first as the *Titanic* went down, but social class also had played a role; first-class passengers were more likely

to find a place on a lifeboat than were those in other classes. Second class came next, and third-class passengers had the least opportunity for survival. On airplanes, people in business and first class have special lines at security and when on board more toilet access when they need it. As Bridget Hutter and Michael Power remark, assigning risk and its trade-offs is a “moral technology.”<sup>7</sup> Choices must be made about whose protection counts the most, what sources of danger will be most guarded against, and which types of remedies will come on board and at what stage of remediation.

Somewhat similar issues arose as a methodological problem for me: who would tell me what sorts of information, given the risks of sharing? I wanted access to information for my possible publications and to fulfill the mandate of my grants. Some officials were not sympathetic even if they themselves had access (and sometimes they did not). If, in interviewing an official, I mentioned the word “security,” I risked a complete shutdown of what might already be a particularly closed bureaucracy, as was the case, for example, with the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA). Across the security world, outsiders have trouble learning from those who actually run the systems. Besides bother and more work for me, such knowledge barriers make it less likely that a nosy sociologist or someone else trying to be helpful might be of some use. All this, and more, contributes to what the sociologist Edward Shils, albeit referring to a different aspect of the problem, called “the torment of secrecy.”<sup>8</sup>

Information in this book thus comes from wherever I could find it. In my research on the subways and also in regard to the mayhem of Hurricane Katrina, I—along with advanced graduate students and colleagues variously working with me—carried out extensive interviews with a large number of relevant individuals. We employed other commonplace social science techniques as well, including use of government documents, websites, and journalistic trails, and some archival investigations. I also gained from my NYU seminar students, primarily undergraduates, who did fieldwork projects related to some of the sites of concern. Dear friends trusted me with their own sometimes-intimate experiences of public spaces, particularly at airports and in the restroom (another site of consternation). At some sites, such as airport

security gates, my close-in observation could only go up to the point where I would not be noticed as a suspicious character. Taking photos or video was a problem, something I wanted to do as a mnemonic assist when later reviewing my evidence and also for possible publication. At airport security, I received stern warnings to “put that thing away,” despite the fact that Transportation Security Administration (TSA) rules explicitly permit picture taking and absolutely forbid confiscating cameras or film that may be used in the process.<sup>9</sup> Similarly in the subways, MTA personnel and especially the transit police, do not take kindly to picture taking even though the transit rule book is similarly explicit: “photography, filming or video recording in any facility or conveyance is permitted.”<sup>10</sup> My coworker and I did take pictures but only surreptitiously. Officials’ security concerns cause my data on airport security in particular to end up fragmented in general, although several former high-ranking officials at the TSA did provide me with more than five hours of detailed conversation. Some of the incompleteness in the various accounts provided—from whatever site—is due less, I think, to informants trying to obscure what goes on and due more to the troubled uncertainties they themselves experience.

#### FRAGILITY AND DISASTER

Uncertainty—for them, for me, for us all—is a very big deal, beginning with problems at the root of sense making and the deep need for a dependable world that more or less stays constant to our experience. Humans live, as Melvin Pollner and others have taught us, on the edge of deep quandary.<sup>11</sup> We agree to treat the world as “just there,” regardless of the philosophical problems of relativism. Language itself, it is frequently enough observed, rests on “mere” social agreement. We use words under the convenience they mean more or less the same thing across individuals and regardless of situation. The “social construction of reality” is only the academic gloss on the more complete and profound fragility of experience. Call it common culture or call it a conspiracy to get by, but only benign lies provide the “ontological security” we have in our own self-identity and “the constancy of the

surrounding social and material environments” we must take for granted.<sup>12</sup> We accomplish a normal, everyday existence by reassuring, through our constant and sometimes arduous mutual reinforcement, that things are indeed as we make them to seem. Or as the actor and commentator Lily Tomlin averred, “Reality is a collective hunch”—but, we need to add, an unstable and not fully believed one at that.<sup>13</sup> Absurdity beckons, threatening to upset all applecarts; we join together to ward off the “ontologically fatal insight,” as Pollner again phrases it, that is always up for grabs.<sup>14</sup>

#### ENTER DISASTER

With reasons to be scared in general, we are sitting ducks for more concrete and substantive threats that we can identify and articulate through bad dreams and sometimes actual human experience. At least some of these crises in artifact, nature, or both scare “in new and special ways,” and, writes Kai Erikson, “elicit an uncanny fear in us.” “It involves,” he says, “the destruction of sense” resulting in “epistemological confusion and ontological uncertainty.”<sup>15</sup> At such moments, it almost follows logically, institutional and organizational routines lose their sufficiency for reassurance. So the arsenal of *reassurance* has to begin very soon and with gusto. The events of 9/11, of course, brought it home to the United States in a distinctive way—for Americans a “new species of trouble” indeed had been born.<sup>16</sup> As the buildings crumbled, so did the taken-for-granted idea that no such thing could happen. The need was to reconstruct the sense of reality that preceded the attack.

Such reconstruction is always necessary, but complicated by a context of uncertainty as to what actually to do. With regard to 9/11, it was especially ambiguous as to what it might mean to re-secure public life in the United States. The prior situation had, of course, its threats—crossing the street and getting cancer—but only those in our military were vulnerable to foreign enemies. The new trouble was given the word “terror.” No one really knew of what the threat actually consisted, much less what it might mean to respond to it effectively.<sup>17</sup> Almost by definition, the inventory of techniques and locations of attack is practi-

cally infinite, but defense must be radically more focused. Only a few places can be fortified with walls and guns (“hardened” in the security lexicon), and there must be a selection of which types of people to be wary of—but from a huge population of candidates. This puts, as security experts sometimes point out, the opportunity for initiative always in the hands of the attacker, increasing both the level of anxiety and the uncertainty of proper defense. No permanent solution exists, making the war on terror ongoing, fueled by the continuing sense of being at risk against an agile (and “tricky”) enemy.

We see in political and organizational life that the least viable stance is to express ignorance of cause or remedy. Not knowing is not an option for those charged with the collective well-being. Thus it happens that, in the words of a scholar who has examined responses up closely, “individuals and organizations sometimes act not because they understand risks, but because they feel they must act.”<sup>18</sup> In her extraordinary and unique ethnography of Boston security planners’ response to 9/11, Kerry Foshier (on the scene at the time) observes, “No local fire chief or emergency manager wants to be the first to turn in a plan that has sections saying ‘we haven’t figured out how to handle this yet.’”<sup>19</sup> It would not fit with the necessity, which, as Ulrich Beck states, is the more general necessity, of ‘normalizing’ non-calculable hazards.<sup>20</sup>

Normalizing can go in radically different directions. There was my own immediate sense of humanistic shared responsibility. It did not carry the day. Instead, as we all now know, there followed the campaign against the likes of al-Qaeda, as President Bush was to explain to the Prime Minister of Japan, “to smoke them out of their caves, to get them running so we can get them.”<sup>21</sup> Those with a different attitude would be astonished by the absurdities of the aggression that found favor. Once again, it could have gone differently; it was not predetermined that I and those like me would be so far off the mark. A President Al Gore might well have used his bully pulpit to shape an alternative outcome. Our “allies,” including some British officials, were outspoken in their reluctance to make war in Iraq, and the U.K. electorate was never on board. In dealing with the terror against their railroad trains post 9/11, the Spanish authorities pulled out of Iraq, rather than intensifying their military efforts there or anywhere else. Perhaps most famously, in another part of the world and after a different type of conflict, both sides

in South Africa entered into post-apartheid reconciliation rather than follow up on settling scores.

The historian John Mueller sees the organization of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as almost uniquely mired in old war models, unable to engage in any practical appraisal of the actual security dangers that face the country.<sup>22</sup> As evidence of this incapacity, he quotes James Woolsey, the CIA director in the early 1990s, testifying following the collapse of the Soviet Union: “We have slain a great dragon, but we now live in a jungle filled with a bewildering variety of poisonous snakes.” Even though the danger posed by, say, “rogue states” was minimal, the hawks went at it. Or as Mueller says, “There seems to exist something that might be called a catastrophe quota . . . when big problems go away, smaller ones become magnified in importance to compensate.”<sup>23</sup> Rather like the moral panics that Stanley Cohen describes which keep popping up in the domestic public realm, foreign threats also fill the vacuum of fear agendas. And they then take over other agendas as well, including the need to deal with much larger and genuine threats less amenable to a discourse of dragons and demons. So even though, at least according to a NASA Report issued by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, global climate change is a “threat to global stability (that) vastly eclipses that of terrorism,” individuals —and not just Americans but also conscientious citizens of even the most enlightened nations (Norway, for example)—have trouble taking it in.<sup>24</sup>

Scholars of risk often document the “irrationality” of risk judgment in everyday life. People underestimate the chance of death by car and overestimate the chance of death by plane. A key explanation given in the literature is that people worry less about things over which they sense potential control (the car wheel) versus things over which they lack control (airplane equipment).<sup>25</sup> Never mind that yearly U.S. highway fatalities are more than tenfold the number of deaths at the World Trade Center. The annual number of terror deaths worldwide since the late 1960s, when the State Department started record keeping, comes to the number of Americans annually lost in bathtub drowning. Rather than a war on terror, maybe we should have a war on baths. But tubs, with their helpful aura of hygiene and comfort, are not eligible. Terror carries *dread*, and dread, the risk literature tells us,<sup>26</sup> lowers the threshold for taking action. Or it enables authorities to take action on our

behalf. As Mary Douglas argues,<sup>27</sup> and in ways to be specified in this book, they transfer decisions and dilemmas to institutions to take care of it—outsourcing, in effect, the imponderable dilemmas of what to do. The authorities then take license—indeed *must* do so—regardless of their own incapacities, the inherent ambiguities, and surrounding misperceptions of actual risk. The transfer of ambiguity to outside institutions and the bureaucratic layers of authority they represent can amplify and add further distortions along the way.

The key distortion is the insinuation of plausibility if not certainty that authorities have effective tools, when they are, in fact, operating from the seat of their pants. We will see a lot of that in this book. Among the more vaguely benign tools was the color code alert system that came after 9/11. Specific colors indicated level of danger and degree of precautions that should be exercised: red for “severe,” orange for “high,” yellow for “elevated,” blue for “guarded,” and green for “low risk.” Blue and green were never used in the ten years of the system. Probably no one ever went to jail for doing something “yellow” under times of “orange.” But the whole setup conveyed misinformation in its gross exaggeration of the degree to which there was a plan that made any real sense. Foshier notes, in regard to official changes in the colors of threat level, that “most planners and responders had little or no idea what was supposed to change about their activities” when color changes were issued.<sup>28</sup> There they were in front of her, the emergency managers from various and diverse agencies in the Boston area, trying to coordinate but with difficulties—that they were not eager to reveal—of “getting it together.” Foshier adds, “There was also the difficulty that nobody quite knew what ‘it’ was supposed to look like when they got it ‘together.’”<sup>29</sup> The problem was beyond color alerts.

#### MODELING TROUBLE

The misguided trust in the functioning of the institutions contrasts with suspicion about ordinary people and how they respond to disaster. It is not universal, by any means, but the trust in emergency officials is a frequent fallback in public opinion, often reinforced by those in power.

Political leaders, police authorities, and military commanders intone noble intentions and strong capacities, while casting suspicion on the ability of those below to cope with unexpected changes in the social or natural world. Not infrequently, they portray those further down, especially those well below, as disorderly and indeed on the verge of riot.

In striking contrast to the scenarios of crowds running amok, sociologists and other systematic observers document something closer to empathy and mutual assistance. Instead of acting crazy, people remain orderly and resourceful. As the pioneer disaster-researcher Enrico Quarantelli writes, “The research evidence indicates . . . it is the human beings and their informal groupings and linkages (rather than formal authorities) that typically rise to the daunting challenges that disasters pose.” Quarantelli observes, “Formal, highly hierarchical, structured and bureaucratic organizations, whether pre-impact planned or post-impact imposed, are both the source and locus of most problems in community crises.”<sup>30</sup>

Let us look at the collapse of the World Trade Center and how people behaved in real life and in real time. Thanks to extensive interviews of survivors by phone (eight hundred cases) and face-to-face (three hundred) carried out by a federal government–sponsored study, and augmented from other sources, we know a lot of what went on.<sup>31</sup> First are the mortality data: while about three thousand people died as a result of the tragedy about five times that many survived. A good number (in Tower Two especially, about 18 percent) were able to use elevators. But many had to make do with the stairs, quite ordinary ones (see figure 1). They encountered smoke, water spewing from sprinkler systems, and building debris.

Significant numbers of interviewees (17 percent) reported being helped by others. There are many anecdotes of individuals physically carrying the disabled in wheelchairs or lifting those too obese or otherwise unhealthy to make their way down (in some cases, two at a time took turns carrying somebody down). There is no indication of pushing or crushing of other human beings. As a survivor of Tower Two who walked down from the 78th floor described the situation, “People were having general conversations, seemed calm, and walked at a steady pace, no sense of panic.”<sup>32</sup> Some of the stairways did become



*Figure 1.* Building occupants making their way down the shared stairway as a city firefighter (who did survive) makes his way up WTC1. © John Labriola, 2011.

very crowded but apparently remained orderly. A worker at Tower Two making her way down from a floor in the nineties explained,

My coworker, who is a diabetic, hadn't eaten breakfast yet. We stopped on the stairs to rest for a minute. A lot of people seemed to be stopping, probably due to the heat and needing to catch their breath. On the 64th floor, another coworker turned to me and said (he or she) was getting tired and didn't feel well. I said "We will take a little break" and I gave (the occupant) mints.<sup>33</sup>

As the study authors concluded,

The "first responders" were colleagues and regular building occupants. Actors of everyday heroism saved many people whom traditional emergency responders would have been unable to reach in time.<sup>34</sup>

Some firefighters and building personnel (guards, monitors, Port Authority staff—who indeed stayed on duty) also were singled out for their brave efforts. Rather in contrast, an impediment to survival was the request for occupants to go back up and return to their workspaces (“shelter in place” is the official lingo), which would have probably brought them death. An announcement urging people to return to their desks was heard, at one point, through the Tower Two intercom. In making their way down the stairs, some said they were delayed by firefighters trying to go up (likely to their own deaths, although not in the case of the firefighter pictured in figure 1, who did indeed make his way out safely). Although everyone involved had reasons for fear—the impacts of the planes, smoke, and physical disarray were in strong evidence—few possibly had a sense of the buildings’ impending collapse. So, it must be said, the “orderliness” of the crowd and the mistakes made by authorities did not occur within the immediate eye of catastrophe—as in the immediate aftermath of the atomic explosion at Hiroshima, I would imagine, or in the early instants of a bursting dam. Compared to the slower demise of the *Titanic*, the rapid sinking of the *Lusitania*—accomplished within eighteen minutes of a strike by a German torpedo—led to more disorder (with no advantage going to social class; in this case, young men had the best chance of survival). But short of such utter and sudden upending of reality which is when no type of aid can make much difference, it appears that calm holds.<sup>35</sup>

The proclivity toward effective mundane response somewhat aligns with what security analysts now refer to as “resilience”—the capacity of organizations and infrastructure to rebound after assault. Particularly under conditions of uncertainty, it makes most sense to rely on strategies of resilience rather than trying to do an advance load-up of protections against particular but uncertain forms of threat. The doctrine of resilience is increasingly gaining favor in security circles. But resilience, too often a mere cliché of security argot, means honoring the ad hoc. It means building on the capacity of real human nature, social nature, to rise to the occasion. Performing well in complex and difficult conditions, according to an eminent student of the nuclear power industry, “depends upon deep historical and contextual knowl-

edge of the worksite.” There should be encouragement, the authority concludes, of “doubt, discovery, and interpretation rather than command and control.”<sup>36</sup>

But after accepting such wisdoms as a generic key to the security issue, we do not have much by way of next steps—something this book tries to remedy. What we need is “a researchable concept of resilience in positive terms.” In Jörg Potthast’s words, we need “a more fine-grained empirical description” of what goes on in real-life activities that make up resilience.<sup>37</sup> For me, the places to look are the close-to-ground practices of which the 9/11 survivors are an example but that need to be expanded with what goes on in much more ordinary conditions. This is where, arguably, real security occurs, and it includes, most especially, the rehearsals people go through as they tend to more quotidian problems of danger and difficulty. In several of the case studies that make up this book, I try to show the remedy and social repair systems at work. I also sometimes trace, pace the warnings of Quarantelli, how misguided official efforts to establish order can throw things out of whack. In ways parallel to the way legal systems and police act to amplify and sustain criminality, the “ironies of social control,” as Gary Marx explains, so it is that so-called solutions exacerbate problems in the security sphere.<sup>38</sup>

Official response can be so off the mark it might itself be viewed even as panic. Sociologist Lee Clarke thus uses the term “elite panic” to characterize what he sees as a common higher-circle reaction. Witnessing the social order they are supposed to maintain as under threat, elites field the artillery. Their fear of *others’* panic, especially of those lower down, justifies enhanced tools for command and control. The fear of riots is part of a broader panic model in which elites see the masses as emotional and ready to be unhinged, but view themselves as rational and “going by the book.” It colors interpretations of protest movements as well as distinctions elites may make based on notions of class and “breeding.”

People, and not just the elite, tolerate, and even encourage, instruments of emergency authority to pervade wider and wider zones of life—“mission creep” in organizational parlance. “Militarism,” as used

by political scientist Chalmers Johnson, means not that a country has a strong military, but that the military involves itself in activities that would otherwise be more appropriately considered civilian.<sup>39</sup> In his report on the great Chicago heat wave of 1995, Eric Klinenberg points out how replacing social workers with police as primary agents to deliver service—using the punishing branch of government to do what the giving branch had done before, as he puts it—led to more suffering and death than would have otherwise occurred.<sup>40</sup> More generally, as the shift takes place, soldiers and police replace ordinary people’s civic engagement and the public offers deference toward the designated authorities. Resources go for the presence of military instead of rescue personnel or social service professionals. Police are put into the schools instead of counselors or therapists, as Kathleen Nolan describes.<sup>41</sup> Money goes toward border guards, along with walls and patrol cars, instead of information kiosks and welcome wagons. And in dealing with nature, authorities erect bastions of control instead of preserving soft paths of marsh and creating buildings that float.

The drug war is a well-known exhibit for the radical perversity of the fear/control model at work. Prior to a rather recent historic era, drug use was a private problem, if a problem at all in the United States. Families and churches handled it, with therapists later coming into the picture, sometimes like Doctor Freud, prescribing it for themselves. Before the late nineteenth century, there were no illegal drug substances in the United States (Coca Cola once contained cocaine); it was not until 1932 that a national control regime finally outlawed a range of what have become illicit substances. Thanks to the elite panic, terrible events now take place within the United States and various other parts of the world. To feed the illegal European and U.S. markets, gangs, sometimes murderous ones, infiltrate police regimes and corrupt large segments of societies far and wide. In the United States, drug-related incarceration has increased more than twelvefold since 1980, virtually turning young men of color into an incarcerated population—in jail, formerly in jail, headed for jail, or on the run to avoid jail.<sup>42</sup> It is not at all far-fetched to say, as indeed many have, that the war on drugs is a war on a people.<sup>43</sup> It is also, more indirectly, a cause of fiscal catastro-

phe at the state and local levels. It makes the country weaker, something ruefully acknowledged by former President Jimmy Carter, who urged, echoing sentiments from a growing number of the political and corporate elite, that the drug war be “called off.”<sup>44</sup>

In other realms besides the fight against drugs, the cure can also be worse than the disease—indeed, it is part of the etiology of the disease itself. Intelligence units—snoopers, watchers, and investigators—create elements of the very troubles they “detect.” In a way that is hardly even controversial, they profile and in so doing help constitute the nature of their criminals as well as the type of malfeasance they are out to find. Relying on stereotype, such as membership in social or religious groups, they choose where they will look, who they will ask about, and which dossiers they will examine. They immerse themselves in the locations and among the social types they think most likely lean toward nefarious behavior. So their targets are, if the intelligence officials have any skills at all, indeed those who most easily can be seduced into conspiring with an agent provocateur.

Besides whatever injustices this creates, and the American Civil Liberties Union thinks the privacy invasions are clear and present, the practice is sociologically suspect. Outside agents incubate bad thoughts into evil manifestations among those most susceptible. It is akin to what Ian Hacking calls “making up people,” a complexly organized process of labeling and classification that creates a distinctive group.<sup>45</sup> Police agents egg their preselected individuals onward toward crimes that loom large on the security agenda. Putative wrongdoers can be nudged over the line into committing crimes, or at least become prepared to commit them. Their arrest through entrapment then can become the basis of still other resentments, from neighbors, kin, and acquaintances who believe their community has been inappropriately targeted and persecuted. There is a low legal threshold to prove conspiracy and even lower to generate charges and jail. As of September 2010, the entrapment defense has never been used successfully in a post-9/11 federal terrorism trial, helping sustain a conviction rate of about 90 percent in federal terrorist court cases.<sup>46</sup> Looked at from the other side of those in the fearful majority, the dynamic of court charges, pleas, or perhaps trials—regardless of merit (and sometimes there *is* merit)—gain strong

media coverage and add fuel to anxieties of there being bad people out there.

No U.S. politician, left or right, can speak ill of the efforts to nail the bad guys. Compared to other public policies, questioning antiterrorist measures is less possible. In mundane spheres of life, there are energetic debates, for example, about what is the best health-care policy or about the relative advantages of iPad versus Kindle, paper versus plastic. But when it comes to security, despite enormous activity and financial expenditure, there is little debate on priorities relative to other goals. Security is thus a rather strange thing in the world, overwhelmingly myopic in its insistence that hardly anything else counts. The silencing of those who perceive the shortcomings of such an attitude, as will be displayed in this book, feeds irresponsibility.

Myopia is deviant in terms of common human practice. Normal people do not have just one goal; they have many. They do not search for one prize, but for numbers of them simultaneously. They can indeed dance and chew gum at the same time; they can screw in lightbulbs while they sing; they can write a thesis while watching a child. Duties and pleasures, local scenes and those farther away, priorities of the moment and those to come in the future—all are juggled in our blinks of thought and life practice. In statecraft as well as organizational administration, responsible individuals deal with the many things that count and try to figure out how to make them count together.

In settings where I have spent a good deal of time—among urban planners, architects, and especially product designers—dealing with more than one thing is a professional mandate as well as common practice. One sees this whether individuals are laying out a landscape or reconfiguring a can opener. The term often used is “lateral thinking.” Designers (of whatever professional sort) have as point of departure how people actually function in the world, and their job is to facilitate as many aspects of that functioning as possible. As part of the research that they do, they strive—if they are good—to notice not just what is officially accomplished by a given artifact or facility (an appliance, a university building, a subway line) but also all the ways it operates in life practice.

We now often use the term “decentering” when such lateral thinking is used as a political and intellectual practice, part of the postmodern turn in the academic world.<sup>47</sup> But it is also a more ancient practice of Zen, a focus on what is there as opposed to what is “supposed” to be there by dint of social convention or professional ideology. Out of such clarity, a designer can envision—if all goes well—new potentials for what can be brought into being. Light on academic logics or Buddhist principles, designers pitch and use laterality as the best way to respect and enhance human practice—and yes, usually for them, the profit bottom line along the way. Security, we can see, is boastfully the opposite of all this. It is an extreme case of what Douglas says is a hazard for institutions more generally in how they “think”: “it blocks personal curiosity, organizes public memory, and heroically imposes certainty upon uncertainty.”<sup>48</sup>

What to do? It would be naive to suppose that there were zero threats “out there,” and I readily acknowledge, as we so poignantly learned with the July 2011 massacre of eighty-four young people in a Norwegian summer camp, that even quiescent societies can be hit by horror. However an exaggeration in terms of actuarial statistics compared to other threats, attacks are likely. But even so, we spend absurdly too much and sacrifice beyond what makes sense as we enshrine the possibility in national policy and local practice. But politically, if for no other reason, there is no choice but to do something.

The question is how can we act in a way that creates a better world and not an inferior one? Maybe there are tactics that, at least compared to the alternatives, really do enhance safety without having much, if any, effect on civil liberties or interfere with the pleasures of daily life. I am advocating a program, in effect, of civilianization—of a civilian invasion of what otherwise is thought properly military. I push reforms, many quite small scale and modest, but significant as they might gather force. And in some cases, the changes I advocate are not so small scale at all, but reach to the largest transformations of human identity and national stance. For each realm taken up in this book, I make suggestions for ways in the here and now to generate collateral benefits—to respond to the fear system in ways that add to rather than subtract from our well-being and that enhance the world, all round.

## PLAN OF THE BOOK: ORDER OF SEARCH

To get to the plausible alternatives to end security as we know it, this book reaches across life settings, policy terrains, and urban infrastructures, lowly artifacts included. After this introduction I take up in the chapter that follows what might at first appear an unlikely setting for examining security dynamics: the public restroom. There are lessons to be taken from this venue, so often ignored in serious scholarship and indeed the usual basis only for jokes. Here we can see anxieties in play and all sorts of unsavory mechanisms, both at the micro and macro level, that come in response. One key element is taboo against speaking substantively; only the off-color and beating around the bush can speak at the site. This invites mischief as fear distracts from substantive conversation about real human need. In the vacuum of serious discourse, authorities create inconvenience, humiliation, and even—not so rare—death. God is again in the details, living, as William James taught us to suspect, “in the very dirt of private fact.”<sup>49</sup> The toilet allows us to see the combination of factors that repress—the usual culprits of class, race, and gender discrimination—but also soulful anxieties that come with the more basic human territory. Some degree of capitalist plot is happening, but that is only part of the story—a larger lesson to be considered across other less intimate realms, whether market-based or not. Whatever the combination of sources, I point the way toward a safer and more pleasant toilet and one with the promise of ecological reform.

Moving up from the toilet, at least metaphorically, is the subway—the subject of chapter 3. Fellow sociologist Noah McClain and I spent numbers of months researching the New York subway system, stimulated by the post-9/11 campaigns to increase security for passengers. We focused on the way security interventions meshed—or failed to mesh—with existing procedures of subway work, much of it already oriented, as we learned, toward enhancing safety of riders. We found out a great deal we did not anticipate about the way subways operate. Because the system is already so thick with remedies, we learned, there is always a danger that new interventions will upset what is already in place. We can see, from the subway in particular, something of

the way official provisioning of safety can indeed contradict safety as actual practice.

Rising further up still (literally as well as metaphorically this time) we come in chapter 4 to air travel, perhaps the most notorious venue of the security apparatus. We learn once again from the appliances and procedures, this time of the especially elaborate system of precautions in the post-9/11 world of flight, that much, in concept as well as in the detail, is quite beside the point. And some of it, as per pattern, runs counter to making things safe at all. The choices that have been made are just that, choices—explicable in the specifics of their moment in the United States' political and moral history. I offer up alternative ways to deal with the fear of others' flying, ways that at the same time enhance other human goals, simple ones like convenience and complex ones like contentment. The trick is to offer a response to fear of flying through less odious forms of intervention—and indeed enhancements of pleasure.

Nothing could be more directly linked to U.S. events of terror than Ground Zero and successive attempts to rebuild, the topic of chapter 5. I treat the replacement skyline of New York as a great mishap and wasted opportunity. Security measures display, on the ground, some rather new ways that political authority combines with market forces to shape the world. Although there were, as usual, varied aesthetic and moral visions of what should happen at the site, the pugilist instinct predominated. Post-9/11 measures to protect the downtown called for not just any sort of buildings, but those that would show the enemy that we could build tall and powerful. The result is a different kind of building in the form of One World Trade Center, a.k.a. "Freedom Tower." The "program" for the structure, still in another way, created vulnerabilities through misguided hardening up.

In a very different urban setting, that of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, we see command and disarray in the way that city meets river—the topic of chapter 6. I describe how threats from nature become part of the social-political apparatus—with the Katrina disaster the unhappy result. It has become rather common to observe that "there is no such thing as a natural disaster,"<sup>50</sup> and Katrina is surely a poster child for that assertion. Much of the history of the New Orleans area was a kind of

Katrina in the making. Building levees, canals, and other infrastructural elements for the sake of safety yielded eventual mayhem. I trace out some of the details of the “downward precautionary spiral.”<sup>51</sup> Each effort at a fix leads to a successive effort of the same sort, accumulating not as a series of individual safety features but as vulnerability to events of catastrophic proportion.

The book concludes by further drawing out some larger lessons. In anticipating danger, we learn, people rely on prior understandings and capacities—hardly a surprise. Extant goals and routines go at the danger, like chemicals on the surface of an oil slick. This includes forces of authority, more or less on standby, that come to bear. They do their thing. So do individuals struggling to stay on their feet and get families and communities back on course—in a word, to regain prior levels of security. It can be, like those chemicals on the slick and the remedial teams trudging across the beaches with their rakes and machines, that remediation creates more trouble than it solves—sometimes tragically. It is not always easy to know the difference, to be able to do something without making things worse. At the end of the book, thinking across the various sites and circumstances, I indicate how to know which is which. Indeed, as I argue, there are principles to follow, as local and national imperatives, for dealing with impending threat. The key is to exercise massive bias toward making life better all along the way.