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## Fear across the Disciplines edited by Jan Plamper and Benjamin Lazier

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**Plamper, Jan, and Benjamin Lazier, eds. *Fear across the Disciplines*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012. viii + 237 pages. Paper, \$24.95.**

This collection of papers edited by the historians Jan Plamper and Benjamin Lazier is based on a colloquium of specialists from across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. It is highly readable and worth close and reflective attention. It provides an integrating framework to bring together information acquired while pursuing a liberal education and following an urge to inquire. If it is not currently used to guide policy-making and funding, it should be.

Several inferences gain support from the essays. Fear is not a thing in itself. It defies rational thought. It is a word that refers to pre-traumatic stress anxiety, being placed in a mentally debilitating state. The findings of these chapters support the pervasive proposition that fear is the mind killer, tending to knock persons off their usual mental centers. Fear as it is studied is performative. It is an imagined condition enacted to please or to fit with one's company—supervisors, peers, or subordinates. That does not mean it cannot be studied but that it is challenging to do so.

The centerpiece of the collection is German studies specialist Jan Mieszkowski's chapter on the "Fear of a Safe Place." For Mieszkowski, fear presents two aspects: shock on the one hand and on the other dread and disquiet associated with the anticipation of danger, uncertainty about what is and what might or might not happen. Mieszkowski quotes Edmund Burke who in his 1757 work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, wrote, "No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain" (p. 101). In such instances the mind is petrified, suspended, and paralyzed by the horror that fills it. It is possibly "the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling" (pp. 101-102). Linking Burke to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Mieszkowski writes, "Fear is the experience of the vicarious, that is, fear divides us against ourselves" (p. 103).

In his 1867 poem "Dover Beach," the Victorian poet-essayist Matthew Arnold described fear as the place "where ignorant armies clash by night." How apt it was—and how literal! Jan Plamper's piece on early twentieth-century Russian military psychology makes the point that the expansion of literacy and the new mass media correlated with a soldierly articulation of fear. Tolstoy expressed one hope—religion, with its prayers, icons, and promises of life after death—and argued for breaking the silence of their fear. Both military psychiatric thought and Soviet psychopharmacological fear research were, in wartime, supplemented by shooting panicked, deserting soldiers.

*Fear across the Disciplines* raises broad-ranging questions about the degree to which the core curriculum of colleges and universities have been influenced by faculty who hail from the so-called Greatest Generation. In isolation, the essays would not raise such questions. Together, they beg the question of how deeply we have been shaped by post- and pre-traumatic stress disorders before they were recognized and named. Finally, if fear is the mind-killer and if fear is performative, then what about joy, love, and other storied states? Similar books of multidisciplinary colloquia may help, as this one does, in connecting the dots while guarding the dynamics and challenges of it all.

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