

Managing Fear in a Risk Society: Pretrauma and Extreme Future Scenarios in Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow*

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Abstract: An example of near-future climate fiction, Nathaniel Rich's 2013 novel *Odds Against Tomorrow* envisions a catastrophic, global warming-related flooding of the New York City area. Despite the novel's (post)apocalyptic focus, a large part of it can be in fact perceived as pre-apocalyptic, inasmuch as it explores people's traumatic responses to potential future disasters, even before they actually happen. The aim of the article is to analyze the novel's depiction of the culture of fear, which has permeated the modern society as a consequence of it becoming what Ulrich Beck famously termed a "risk society." In a risk society, human industrial and technological activity produces a series of hazards, including global risks such as anthropogenic climate change. In the novel, Rich shows how financial capitalism commodifies these risks by capitalizing on people's fears and their need for some degree of risk management. Finally, the paper looks at the text as a cli-fi novel and thus as a literary response to the pretrauma caused by environmental risks.

Keywords: climate fiction, climate change, risk society, the culture of fear

The present-day reality has frequently been described as dominated by fear related to various hazards connected with modernity. The moderns experience continuous anxiety about present and future risks, both real and imagined. The preoccupation with fear, risk, and potential danger is seen by many as characteristic of post-millennial reality, and it finds reflection in a growing fascination with fictional catastrophic scenarios which can be found, among others, in dystopian and apocalyptic novels. One of such texts is Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013), which is the subject of analysis in this article. It is a near-future climate fiction novel which envisions a global warming-related flooding of the New York City area. Despite the novel's (post)apocalyptic focus, a large part of it can be in fact perceived as pre-apocalyptic, as it explores people's traumatic responses to potential future disasters, even before they actually happen, thus turning the novel into a literary study of fear and pretraumatic stress.

Drawing on sociological and philosophical studies of fear and risk, the article analyzes the novel's depiction of the culture of fear, which has permeated the modern society as a consequence of the perceived omnipresence of hazards and uncertainties effectuated by the industrial and technological progress that characterizes risk societies. The analysis focuses on the protagonist's paranoid personality and explores his pretraumatic response to potential future catastrophes, externalized in an obsession with extreme disaster scenarios.

The Culture of Fear and the Risk Society

As one of the primary emotions, fear has always accompanied mankind, ensuring its evolutionary survival by triggering quick responses to threats. With the onset of

the modern era, people began to believe that civilizational progress would usher in a time of security and freedom from fear (Bauman 1). However, the opposite turned out to be true and, paradoxically, despite living in a world of medical and technological advances, heightened security, and state protection, the moderns have come to perceive reality as increasingly more frightening (Lynch 155).

Consequently, since the turn of the millennium, the society has been repeatedly described as a “culture of fear.” The concept was introduced by Frank Furedi in his 1997 study *Culture of Fear: Risk Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation*. In the study, Furedi points to the modern society’s increasing loss of confidence and growing preoccupation with potential challenges to safety. In a culture of fear, there exists a constant and potentially contagious sense of anxiety about possible negative developments, and fear becomes a lens through which individuals’ perception of reality is filtered. According to both Furedi and Lars Svendsen, this attitude dominates in the Euro-American culture, despite the relative security of the modern society in comparison to previous historical eras (Lynch 157). Desh Subba even posits that we live in “an extreme fear age” (45), in which various fears have accumulated to an alarming degree and new fears continue to emerge. This recognition of the multiplicity of fears corresponds with Furedi’s statement that “fear today has a free-floating dynamic and can attach itself to a variety of phenomena” (4). It follows, then, that nowadays only the presence of fear remains constant, whereas its objects continually shift. Such a perception of fear ties in with Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of “liquid modernity,” which continually flows, undulates, and reinvents itself. What is more, the kind of anxiety that is experienced by the moderns in this everchanging reality may often seem to be disassociated from any target or intentional object. As Bauman writes,

fear is at its most fearsome when it is diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached, unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause; when it haunts us with no visible rhyme or reason, when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen. (1)

Such “liquid fear”—unspecified and unfocused—exists even when there seems to be no immediate threat or danger that could trigger it. Such a fear stems from an awareness of potential rather than actual dangers and from a speculative approach to the future in which these dangers might (or might not) materialize. Bauman labels this type of fear “derivative fear,” or “second-degree fear” (2). It is characterized by the general feelings of vulnerability and insecurity that are perceived to be relatively constant: Bauman sees this attitude as a “steady frame of mind” (3). This corresponds to Lars Svendsen’s characterization of modern anxiety, which he sees as constantly present in the background, influencing the manner in which we interpret the surrounding reality; he calls this “low-intensity fear” (46). This perpetual tension that both Bauman and Svendsen describe stems from the belief in the many dangers that lurk within the uncertainty of the future. The anxiety thus generated alters individuals’ perception of the world, leading them to detect even more potential dangers. Hence, such derivative fear “acquires a self-propelling capacity” (Bauman 2), creating a vicious circle of fear.

Based on all of the above interpretations it may be posited that fear has undergone a transformation from a primary emotion that is instinctual and primal, to a

secondary emotion that is constructed, learned, and perpetuated. Furedi even states that fear goes beyond being a mere emotion and becomes a new paradigm of experiencing and interpreting reality:

Fear is not simply a reaction to a specific danger, but a cultural metaphor for interpreting life. It is not hope but fear that excites and shapes the cultural imagination of the early twenty-first century.... It has become a cultural idiom through which we signal a sense of growing unease about our place in the world.
(vii)

Thus understood, fear may become a cultural trope and a means of expressing and navigating the uncertainties of the modern reality.

Furedi perceives a connection between “the growth of anxiety and fear of modernity and the growth of the ‘risk society’ within Euro-American culture” (Lynch 158). The “risk society,” a well-known concept introduced by Ulrich Beck¹, is characteristic of what Beck calls “new modernity” or “second modernity,” which he considers to be affected by “side effects of successful modernization” (*World* 87). In a risk society, human industrial and technological activity has produced a series of hazards, which Beck labels “new risks” or “manufactured uncertainties” (“Revisited” 216). What turns the modern era into a risk society is the unprecedented scale on which these risks are produced, as well as the fact that they are man-made and cannot be predicted, accurately assessed, or insured against (Sørensen and Christiansen 10, 16). These risks are deterritorialized and democratic, as anyone can be equally affected, regardless of race, gender, social class, or nationality (Svendsen 50). Such globalization of risk causes Beck to talk about “a global community of threats” (*World* 8), which points to the manner in which fear and the perception of pervasive risk have permeated individual perceptions of reality on a cultural scale, leading to the solidification of the culture of fear.

Despite the prevalence of anxiety in the modern era, the assessment of its role in human life is far from unequivocal: fear can be construed in two contradictory ways – positivist and negativist. According to the first stance, fear is mostly a motivating factor that provides an impulse for action and transformation. Fear positivism is primarily advocated by Desh Subba, who underlines that, when used properly, fear plays a significant role in inspiring progress (145). Fear positivism remains in a dichotomous relation to fear negativism, according to which fear is likely to become an impediment to growth and self-realization. Most importantly, fear can be weaponized and used as a tool for control, manipulation, and exploitation for financial and political profit. All in all, fear eschews clear-cut interpretations. Both attractive and repellent, addictive and undesirable, potentially beneficial and highly destructive, fear manifests its paradoxical nature through the interplay of these polar opposites.

Pretrauma and Cultural Transmediations of Fear

Both the sense of fear and the perception of risk are future-oriented, as they involve negative projections of probable future events (Svendsen 38). Beck situates risk in a

1 See *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1986), and *World at Risk* (2007).

suspended position between the present and the future, as he talks about “this peculiar reality status of ‘no-longer-but-not-yet’—no longer trust/security, not yet destruction/disaster” (“Revisited” 213). Thus, risk scenarios inevitably entail feelings of tension, uneasiness, and apprehension about events to come, which also affect the individuals’ response to the present. As a result, the future replaces past events and the historical perspective as the frame of reference for and the primary factor determining the present (Lynch 162). Still, while it is certainly true that the moderns are much more forward-looking than previous generations, there does exist a connection between past experiences and the perception of future risk. An often-quoted example is the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, which fractured the American sense of security and severely distorted Americans’ perception of risk and the degree of danger in their everyday lives (Furedi 4; Svendsen 55; Kaplan 3). It can therefore be stated that past traumas translate into future traumas.

The fact that the future can be as traumatic as the past can lead to “Pretraumatic Stress Syndrome,” which, in contrast to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, describes the psychological response to future-related trauma (Kaplan xix). Thus, modern anxiety may be referred to as pretrauma – psychological torment related to constant anguish about the future materialization of present risks. One of the strategies that can be used to work through pretrauma and to channel the feelings of anxiety is to “confront coming disasters in fictional transmediations” (Bruhn 229). Due to the fact that potential future disasters lack materialization in the present, they require “some form of narrativization, visualization, or mediatization” (Mehnert 129). Hence the popularity of fictional catastrophic scenarios which prefigure various cataclysms. According to E. Ann Kaplan, these manifestations of pretrauma have become pervasive in all the media, and can be seen as an important element of the modern culture (xix). While it can be argued that it is pretrauma in the first place that induces such visions, Kaplan also believes that the visions further pretraumatize the public. The latter pretrauma, however, may be viewed from the positivist perspective, as it can bring about a modification in the audiences’ attitudes. Disaster stories may also be seen as a form of preparation for the inevitable (Bruhn 230). These perceptions coincide with what Beck concludes about risk comprehension: full understanding of risks is only possible through mediations, both scientific and popular. Beck sees dramatization of risk as a tool that can be used to politicize risks and stir the public from stagnation (“Revisited” 214).

Climate fiction novels like *Odds Against Tomorrow* can be analyzed in terms of their usefulness for the purpose of such dramatization, as they contextualize climate change, shaping the readers’ environmental imagination and providing a visualization of the potential materialization of climate-related risks. However, apart from simulating potential scenarios, climate fiction reflects current concerns and anxieties. In fact, it can be considered a literary response to the pretrauma caused by environmental risks. It both utilizes the readers’ already existing fears and projects future horrors. By inducing fear in readers—pretraumatizing them—climate fiction sensitizes them to critical issues in the present and facilitates their perception of the social and psychological dimensions of both climate change and its consequences.

Managing Pretrauma in *Odds Against Tomorrow*

Odds Against Tomorrow is categorized as a climate-fiction novel, i.e. one that features the effects of anthropogenic climate change. It is, however, an example of a variety of cli-fi in which the problems of global warming and the environment seem to be secondary themes and serve as a backdrop to the main plot. This is confirmed by Rich's comment that it is not a novelist's obligation "to write about global warming or geopolitics or economic despair ... [but] about what these things do to the human heart—write about the modern condition, essentially" (qtd. in Evancie). Rich further elaborates that he sees the emergence of climate fiction as a direct response to the changing conditions of modernity: "a new type of reality ... which is that we're headed toward something terrifying and large and transformative. And it's the novelist's job to try to understand, what is that doing to us?" (qtd. in Evancie). Rich's focus in the novel is thus not on climate change specifically, but on our response to environmental disaster and, even more to the point, the mere risk of such a disaster, as well as to other new risks that exist within the risk society. In other words, Rich is looking at the effects of pretrauma related to unspecified but intuited future terrors. It is fear of the future and the way it is experienced both globally and, especially, individually, that is in the forefront of the novel.

The novel's protagonist, Mitchell Zukor, is a risk analyst whose job is to predict worst-case scenarios in order to scare his clients into hiring his company's services of limiting corporate liability should these predictions materialize. Mitchell's professional success is closely related to his fear-mongering talent, which results from his own obsessive anxiety about various catastrophic developments. For Mitchell, imagining catastrophic future scenarios has turned into a combination of an unconventional hobby and a method of dealing with his anxiety: worst-case scenarios "opened wormholes to a sublime realm of fantasy and chaos. Worst-case scenarios, he said, were for him games of logic. How vast a nightmare could he imagine, and to what level of precision? What was possible? What should we be afraid of?" (3). Even though he claims to treat his predictions as a mere mental challenge, his display of bravado is evidently false. His compulsive bouts of calculating risks have all the tell-tale signs of panic attacks: "late in the evening he raced out of his bedroom with a panic, cheeks flushed, eyes haunted. He flipped on his desk lamp, pounded numbers into his calculator, and scrawled equations and odds ratios. It was a near-nightly ritual" (3). Mitchell attempts to use math to defuse his fear: by distracting himself, but also by discarding his anxiety by means of rationality and science. He studies precedents and statistical data to determine the balance of probabilities and convince himself that a given tragic scenario is not likely to transpire.

Mitchell falls victim to Bauman's derivative fear—his anxiety is relatively constant and it spirals into a vicious cycle. For instance, fear causes him to take anxiety medication, and it is also fear that leads him to discontinue using it: he dreads the possible side effects to his brain. Like any other person suffering from anxiety disorders, Mitchell looks for ways to ease his angst; only in his case the medicine is also his poison. The belief in the tranquilizing effects of envisioning extreme scenarios is an illusion: in reality they "fill... him with very real terror" (3). And yet, like any other

sedatives might, they become indispensable to him, which testifies to the addictive character of fear, an aspect which has been indicated by Bauman (129). Bauman highlights the paradoxification of fear in a liquid society, in which it becomes both desirable and harmful. This dichotomy can be said to mirror the analogous distinction between fear positivism and fear negativism.

Mitchell embodies both of these two paradoxes, as the fear he propels and perpetuates within himself is both overwhelming and motivating; he finds his research into disasters simultaneously frightening and thrilling:

The bad news brought a rush of excitement; it fortified, too. It reached an intimate part of him. It didn't merely feed his fears, it also fed his fascinations.... He went further afield, into doomsday prophecy and eschatology.... He read Nostradamus, Malthus, Alvin Toffler. He read Prophets and he read Revelation.... Mitchell loved Revelation. The Christians were excellent worst-case scenarists. (70-71)

The delight with which Mitchell both absorbs and generates end-of-days imagery is not uncharacteristic—fear can indeed be attractive, judging by the general appeal of apocalyptic fiction and film, or even sensational news reports. In fact, an analysis of the language used in the novel in reference to fear when applying Mitchell's narrative perspective indicates that fear animates him: on a free night he anticipates "a nice long evening of panic" (44), reading about gloomy prophecies is "tremendous fun" (70), the details of his horrific extreme scenarios are "delicious" (73), and the facts he learns from disaster research are "thrilling" (69). Unable to break free from fear, Mitchell convinces himself that fear can be exciting and productive.

Still, Mitchell's eagerness to immerse himself in fear-inspiring thoughts results in an increase in pretraumatic stress response, which is connected with the omnipresence of Beck's manufactured uncertainties. The list of possible future complications that leave Mitchell pretraumatized is long and ever-expanding: terrorism, public health scares, nuclear plant explosions, electric grid crash, the collapse of industrial agriculture, massive blackout, electromagnetic pulse radiation, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The protagonist experiences "liquid fear," which is constant and mostly unspecified, with its objects continually shifting, as the risk society provides a plethora of possible complications. He admits to being stuck in a loop of fear: "the more I learn, the more I find there is to fear" (63). There is a connection between a greater awareness of the negative consequences of human activities and the sense of fear. Contrary to the famous Emersonian claim that "fear always springs from ignorance," Beck believes that in a risk society the opposite is true (Lynch 164; Svendsen 66). With the development of science, our understanding of various potentially disastrous phenomena grows, as does the awareness of human agency behind many Anthropocenic risks, leading to heightened anxiety.

Although the awareness of new risks increases, the risks cannot be precisely predicted or prevented, and Mitchell is acutely aware of this fact: "the worst scenarios were always the ones you didn't anticipate, at least not until too late" (23). Though such a realization might lead to a paralyzing sense of powerlessness, Mitchell does try to take precautions: his door is equipped with four locks and a biometric panel, and he keeps substantial amounts of money in his freezer for fear of ATM malfunctions. He clearly

aims at creating a sense of security – a symptom of what Bauman calls “a securitarian obsession” of the moderns, which is, according to Bauman, an example of another fear-related paradox—the growing sense of insecurity seems to clash with the advanced safety arrangements of modern societies (129). Whether or not these arrangements are effective, they are not sufficient to eliminate the general sense of threat.

Endemic to the risk society, the pretraumatic sense of being surrounded by potential future dangers is further exacerbated by past traumas, especially those experienced on the global level. Kaplan refers to such collective traumas as “border events” and gives examples of 9/11, hurricane Katrina, and hurricane Sandy, all of which have profoundly impacted Americans—in social, political, cultural, and psychological terms (xvi). In *Odds Against Tomorrow*, such an event is the Seattle Earthquake, which destroys the whole of Seattle while Mitchell is in college, undoubtedly leaving an indelible mark on both his psyche and that of his whole generation, which is later dubbed “Generation Seattle” (11). This past trauma contributes to Mitchell’s perception of the world as unstable and dangerous: “Awfulness can happen at any time. That’s what’s so awful” (65).

This attitude is in sync with Mitchell’s job, in which fear is used as a business strategy: “It’s essential, in this line of work, to frighten clients. To convey a sense of implacable doom” (31). Mitchell is adept at selling fear due to his intimate understanding of fear and the mechanisms which govern it. Part of the allure of the job also comes from the selfish sense of comfort he acquires when catalyzing other people’s fears: “During consultations his clients nervously swiveled in their chairs as he guided them through scenes from Hell. It felt good to spread the darkness around. Misery liked company” (71). Among his clients, fear begins to operate as a secondary emotion—it is not an instinctive reaction to immediate danger, but the constructed outcome of Mitchell’s skillful apocalyptic narration. The effectiveness of his fear-mongering is additionally enhanced by the infectiousness of anxiety in a culture of fear. People are already fear-conditioned by the proliferation of bad news in the media and they are vulnerable to tricks which further intensify their anxieties. Seeing his clients’ eager response to his ghastly visions, Mitchell understands the contagious nature of fear: “A feeling was building. An urban malaria, a future-affected anxiety disorder. Whatever kind of disease it was, it had become infectious” (51). He correctly diagnoses society with pretrauma—a sense of unease about the future, which affects people like a disease.

The disease also increasingly affects himself, as Mitchell’s job is clearly taking a toll on him. Mitchell continues to have anxiety attacks, which he visualizes as cockroaches crawling inside his stomach; he suffers from hair loss, fatigue, nausea, and exhaustion, which are said to be caused by the excessive presence of fear in his life. He is described as having “the subtracted look of an automaton or mannequin” (83), which strongly implies that centering his professional and private existence around fear has drained the life out of him. The reader can also infer Mitchell’s uneasy relation with fear from his nearly obsessive fascination with a college acquaintance—Elsa Bruner—whom Mitchell describes as a “walking worst-case scenario” (10) due to a rare heart condition which can kill her at any moment. Mitchell expects Elsa to be at least as paranoid as he is, and yet Elsa enjoys life and is not afraid to do things which

he would regard as risky, considering her condition. Mitchell seems to be jealous of Elsa's bravery and maintains correspondence with her, hoping to discover her secret. Always rational, Mitchell suspects Elsa of employing "a larger philosophical strategy" (82) and he plans to appropriate it for his own use.

Despite all his rationalism and constant preoccupation with disaster research and risk prediction, Mitchell fails to foresee the greatest disaster of his lifetime—hurricane Tammy, which completely floods Manhattan and devastates large parts of New York state. The flooding is a man-made disaster related to global warming—Tammy was preceded by a heatwave and a drought of unprecedented proportions, which made the ground unable to absorb water. Mitchell does sense the approaching cataclysm but is unable to specify its exact nature. His failure in imagination with regard to Tammy may be seen as a corollary of it being an example of Beck's manufactured uncertainty—unpredictable and incalculable by its very nature. Moreover, according to research into anxiety and environmental risks, people have a propensity to dismiss the latter as unlikely and remote (Bader et al. 68). Mitchell's analytical mind seems to fall victim to this widespread tendency. He studies and speculates about whole catalogs of potential risks which could certainly be categorized as Beck's manufactured uncertainties, and yet climate change issues appear to be last on his mind. Considering his vigilance with regard to present threats, his disregard for factual evidence is perplexing. He observes the erratic behavior of animals, and he notes the unusual heat and its consequences. He does realize that anomalous weather causes an increase in the collective sense of pre-traumatic stress: "anxiety was in the air. No longer was it free-floating, it had coalesced, settling into something heavier, tangible—a sludge of anxiety. You had to wade through it on the way to work; it sucked you down from underfoot, like quicksand" (107-108). There is no doubt the society is experiencing some sort of pretrauma on a global level. Mitchell, however, focuses mostly on the benefits his company can reap from this global anxiety: "The coverage of the heat wave and the drought, however exaggerated, seemed to contribute to the anxiety that had settled like a poisonous cloud over the country after Seattle. This worked to FutureWorld's advantage. Nothing better prepared for future fears than present anxieties" (75). Mitchell's perspective reveals an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms of fear—he correctly assesses the role of the media in spreading anxiety, as well as the temporal nuances of pretraumatic stress, namely that it is induced by the perception of the present as threatening. He remains oblivious, however, of the scope of the approaching disaster until the last moments before it happens.

This proves that cataclysms like Tammy cannot be predicted due to their unprecedented character and the consequent lack of data to extrapolate from: "Like all major catastrophes, it surpassed the limits of imagination. And what was human imagination, after all, but the reconfiguration of past events?" (234). Past traumas fail to prepare one for the future, when each disaster is more traumatic than the previous one. Mitchell is forced to admit that even his sophisticated calculations and his talent for statistical analysis fail when confronted with the volatility of the risk society: "Natural disasters have been trending upward for the last three decades ... it will get worse, but by how much, I have no idea, our expectations are constantly being surpassed. The scales need to be recalibrated" (235).

Paradoxically, the traumatic experience of surviving Tammy does not deepen Mitchell's paranoia. On the contrary, he feels that the enormity of the superstorm handicapped his apocalyptic imagination; it also convinced him that the future of the world is so bleak that there is no point in trying to predict it: "Now when he thought about the future, all he found was blankness. There would be no long term" (237). He thus seems to have acquired a fatalistic perspective which, though pessimistic, at least makes fear redundant: submitting oneself to anxiety is pointless when disasters are both certain and unavoidable. He begins to doubt the purpose of human efforts to control the complications which he had tried so hard to predict: "The message was: disorder always won in the end. The idea that man could order the world to his own design was the most pitiful fairy tale ever told" (236).

His newly acquired fatalism undermines his hitherto unshakeable faith in rationalism. In fact, the first signs of this mental shift can be seen earlier: shortly before Tammy, he makes an impulse purchase—a work of art in the form of a fully functional canoe, which later saves his life during the flood. The artistic school which produced the canoe expressed a praise of spontaneity in their artistic manifesto: "Rationality has made a mess of this world.... We want to trust our impulses more" (98). Mitchell's spontaneous act is probably subconsciously triggered by the fact that Elsa always scribbles a drawing of a canoe in her letters. The canoe can thus be read as a symbol of freedom from fear—which is what Elsa represents to Mitchell. Eventually, he, as well, seems to have gained an immunity to pretrauma, having realized that "living in fear [is] no kind of life" (187).

At the novel's conclusion, Mitchell quits futurism and starts an eco-friendly venture. By his own admission it is the first time in his life when he is doing something without thinking it through. This may mean that he has relinquished his attempts at control, having realized their pointlessness in an unpredictable world of incalculable risks. Paradoxically, then, irrationality may be the only rational response to the erratic reality of a risk society. And yet the novel offers no simple solutions to the problem of either global or individual pretrauma. Throughout the novel, Mitchell struggles, though with little success, to manage his fear, first by immersion in the reality of omnipresent risk and by pragmatic risk assessment, and later by trying to abandon rationality altogether and reconciling with the inevitability of disasters. Although he seems to have accepted the ubiquity of risks, he becomes an eccentric recluse, as if to shelter himself from the knowledge about the rise of Anthropocenic risks, which threaten to rekindle both his sense of fear and his apocalyptic imagination.

An analysis of the novel's depiction of fear reveals a negativist approach to pretrauma: the protagonist's obsession with extreme worst-case scenarios is devoid of any positive aspects. It has a deleterious effect on his mental and physical health, leading him to seek methods of reducing his pretraumatic stress response to the risks posed by modernity. Moreover, his compulsive preoccupation with preventive measures and extreme scenarios neither helps to assuage his fear nor works to prevent catastrophes. What is more, the only manner in which fear is used effectively in the novel is for exploitation and manipulation, as the protagonist's fear is easily transferred onto other people. Rich shows fear as omnipresent, infectious, and destructive, aptly portraying the culture of fear, in which fear becomes the dominant mode of processing

and assessing reality. The novel depicts Beck's new risks as triggers for pretrauma in a risk society, susceptible to instilling anxiety over potential catastrophic complications, which can be neither accurately predicted, nor prevented.

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