Five New York poets, two psychologists, one emergency-room physician, one sociologist, one Washington-based consultant, one London-based theater director, and last but not least, the chief hostage negotiator of the New York City Police Department: This was the team built for an unprecedented project, and not by accident. The team’s composition is at least as attention-grabbing as “man bites dog” — the journalist’s classic example of a good story. And the journalist’s six classic questions present themselves immediately, of course: who, what, when, where, how and why?

The “what” has been the work of the entire group, from our very different perspectives. The “how”, of course, is the core of the book, by its central contributors, artist Rachel Parish and longtime NYPD chief hostage negotiator Jack Cambria. The when and where, meanwhile, are simply stated: The discussions and experiments that led to this book took place from late 2012 to mid-2015, and were centered at and around John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, in midtown Manhattan.

The authors of this Prologue, however, are uniquely positioned to set the scene, and to answer the “who” and “why” questions. On the “who”: Unusual as the combination of talents offered here may be, we have worked together in different subsets many times before. Chris and Maria, as veterans with decades of experience in the study and practice of nego-
tiation and related fields, have worked together over enough projects and decades that neither of us can remember how the collaborations started. Maria and Chris have worked with Jack for almost two decades, and Maria has worked with the NYPD’s Hostage Negotiation Team as a group for much longer. Rachel has worked with Chris for nine years, on multiple projects, and with artists in New York on many more. And so on. The group is diverse, but also (and in a quite New York way) connected on multiple levels.

And now, the “why”: This too exists on more than one plane. On a personal level, we were shocked by the death of NYPD Detective Lydia Martinez, whom we saw as the sort of police officer that other police officers might wisely strive to become. We shared a strong motivation to honor Lydia’s life by helping to create some small contribution to the possibility of training more police officers to think like Lydia in the future.

On a larger scale, our field, imbued with typical Western thinking, has mostly accepted an apparent dichotomy between art and science. The proposition that there is science underlying many of the precepts, emotions, techniques and effects of art has only recently begun to be the subject of serious scholarship. But there is now a growing body of such research. Discoveries in the last 20 years about the brain, and particularly in the area of neurolinguistic programming, have established that the dichotomy is a false one (see Alexander and LeBaron 2017 / LeBaron and Alexander 2017, and research cited therein; LeBaron, MacLeod and Acland 2013, and research cited therein; Jendresen 2017; O’Shea 2017.) Much of this research and writing has even emerged, as with the works just cited, since the project described here began; we have been pleased, but also a little surprised, at the pace with which (some of) our admitted guesses have acquired scholarly backing.

Yet we remain aware that what this team has created is an experiment, with the usual combination of successes and failures. It is worth emphasizing that we expect as much
learning to arise from the things that did not work as from the things which did. This too relates to a concurrent line of inquiry being pursued by one of our team members. Through residencies at Duke University, the Shop Front Theatre in Coventry, and East15 in Essex, Rachel developed a project known as the International Failure Institute. This project directly engages professionals in articulating their failures, arguing that the failures provide some of the best insight into understanding both interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. Frequently, if studied, these failures can lead to new, forward-thinking approaches to solving seemingly intractable problems. Indeed, in this area, negotiation and its related fields could stand to pay even more attention to the sciences, which have long known this and have pursued its logic vigorously.

We hope this book honors the concept. And with that, it’s time to turn the subject over to the core members of the team. We welcome their spirit of innovation and risk-taking, as they add to the long-established field of police science what might be argued to be a whole new field. Perhaps it might be called “police arts.”
In The Meantime

*Maurice Emerson Decaul*

The gods looking down from safety resume their dispute about humans

the interventionists argue for decisive but limited action

fire plague, while the peaceniks remind the others of Diomedes

stabbing Aphrodite, Diomedes piercing Ares with his spear

the hubris of man. The peaceniks throw up their hands

let man kill man his blood is his blood, they argue what is it to us

if he destroys himself & Zeus meant to speak up

but the debate had moved on to topics of importance

while below him, people marched & fought & declared their lives mattered.