

# “That Great Mother of Danger”

GIL ANIDJAR

**ABSTRACT** Were one to trust the experts of “the risk society,” and the countless volumes that take risk as their object, one might conclude that we have lost sight of danger. How secure is the distinction? This essay registers the discursive proliferation that has surrounded risk, as opposed to the poverty of theorizations of danger. Since Mary Douglas’s famous 1966 contribution, it is as if the two terms were synonymous. Yet linguistic usage, along with other counterexamples, signal that we might learn from attending to danger in its specificity. The essay then turns to Sigmund Freud, that little-recognized thinker of danger. It was Freud who located loss—and the mother—at the center of what he strikingly called the “danger-situation.”

**KEYWORDS** danger, loss, Freud, danger-situation, mother

Loss is everywhere today, yet not everything is lost. We are, you might say, in danger. And the danger is clearly—it is a clear and present danger—that we might lose everything. To the extent that there is such a thing (“everything”), it is already marked as lost. Everything is at risk.

At risk or in danger? Were we to trust the experts of “the risk society” and the countless volumes scrutinizing the growth of “security” (as concept, concern, or value; in industry, finance, or the homeland), we might conclude that we have lost sight of danger. How secure is this distinction?<sup>1</sup> Sociologists and anthropologists, who, not long ago, might have laid the strongest claim to the territories of danger, have now notoriously foregrounded risk and given it pride of place, as have jurists, medical professionals, seismologists, and real estate developers. Historians, too, have written histories of risk.<sup>2</sup> Security experts, criminologists, and racists of all sorts (let us maintain the distinctions among these for now) have cared for and whipped up fears and anxieties—these magical, medicating, and sustainable words—and certainly played a prominent part in the discursive proliferation of risk.<sup>3</sup>

And what about danger? Since Mary Douglas's famous 1966 intervention *Purity and Danger*, danger has hardly been a topic of focused and reflexive attention, an object of theoretical concern.<sup>4</sup> Following Franz Steiner, Douglas associated danger with power, an association Steiner had elaborated, tracing it etymologically, conceptually, as well as sociologically and, one might say, politically ("the older meaning of the English word danger," Steiner wrote, "is 'power,' jurisdiction, 'dominion,' 'the power to dispose or to harm'").<sup>5</sup> These aside, I have found no monograph that, in any way comparable to the innumerable volumes devoted to risk, lingers on danger. How are we to think danger in its distinction (or lack thereof) from risk? Where are we to find a thinking of danger? Heidegger's dramatic equation of danger with Being (or Beyng) notwithstanding ("Beyng is unqualifiedly in itself from itself for itself the danger" [*Das Seyn ist in sich aus sich für sich die Gefahr schlechthin*]),<sup>6</sup> is there a philosophy, much less a philosopher, of danger? I do not speak of dangerous philosophies, nor of dangerous philosophers, both of which seem, with all due respect to Nietzsche, less of the future than a thing of the past.<sup>7</sup>

Now, there is no doubt that the political control and coercion of what Michel Foucault called "dangerous individuals" testifies to a novel, and broad, preoccupation with danger. The entirety of the so-called security industry in its military and medical, police and political, juridical and journalistic, financial and technological registers would certainly confirm the ubiquity of danger, of "clear and present danger."<sup>8</sup> Historically, the rise of psychiatry and of its involvement in penal law operated, Foucault suggests, as a kind of containment mechanism for what was emerging as a larger problem, a "reaction to the dangers inherent in the social body" and the identification of new sites of "control of the dangers hidden in human behavior" (among them what Foucault calls "the absolute danger, death").<sup>9</sup> The dangerous individual—really the rise of the criminal as the focal point of social control and, one might add, political redirection—seems to have emerged together with dangerous classes (to which Foucault does refer) and dangerous races (to which he does not).<sup>10</sup> Equally specific in her historical coverage, but more attuned to the intersections of gender and race, Ellen Feder will add "the dangerous individual(s) mother."<sup>11</sup> At stake, Foucault makes clear, is the dangerous subject, more than danger "itself." Interestingly enough, the essay on the dangerous individual includes an interlude of sorts, where Foucault himself relates the emergence of insurance plans to "the idea of risk" ("DI," 146), and criminal probability to "criminal risk," to "the risk of criminality," and to the criminal as "a creator of risk" ("DI," 148). Foucault goes on to underscore "the key notion of risk" in civil law, only to return, with no further comment, to the "notion of the *dangerous state* of an individual," to "the problem of the dangerous individual" ("DI," 149).

We may thus acknowledge, as Foucault himself seems to, that risk can involve danger (just as security may endanger liberty), but we appear to have given up on

exploring danger, learning and defining it, attending to it “as a thing in itself” and to the way it exceeds risk.<sup>12</sup> There is, Franz Steiner uniquely recognized, no “sociology of danger,” no philosophy or theory of danger.<sup>13</sup> Yet, as a society, as a “public culture of danger,” we do very much expect to be protected from it and from its, presumably collateral, carriers.<sup>14</sup> We loudly clamor (those among us whose voices can be heard, that is) for protection, for safety and security.<sup>15</sup>

Consider nonetheless what grammar teaches us with regard to these two words that are, after all, imperfectly synonymous: risk and danger.<sup>16</sup> We might choose to *take* a risk, even to “run” one (whereas we run *toward* or *away from* danger), but if we *expose* ourselves to danger, we are truly taking something other than our chances. Take a risk, then, and *have* a chance at winning. Find yourself in danger (hardly a choice, for most of us, and certainly not a casual one), confront danger, and you might have nothing left to take, nothing left to keep, and a whole lot to lose. All too often, in fact, you will have lost everything. Should you escape with your life, as I pray we all shall (sadly, prayers—for what else is left?—are likely to provide no more than a temporary reprieve as we remain in mortal danger of not lasting *forever*), you will not have reaped the benefit of any investment, nor will you have chanced upon some big win. You will have *faced* danger and survived (some do get their kicks this way, of course).<sup>17</sup> More or less intact, one hopes.

Risk, in other words, involves, if not always a decision or a choice, something like a chance—a chance to be taken, an opportunity to be seized.<sup>18</sup> Akin to a promise, which must carry the threat of not being kept or delivered upon, risk implies an *augmentation* of sorts.<sup>19</sup> You are taking a risk, and it might be dangerous, yes. But should you escape that danger, you can expect a supplement or benefit. Granted, others (less important others) may lose everything—side effect or collateral damage—but you will not only keep what you had; it is likely you will have gained something. That is why risk, the risk society, produces winners and losers. Still, “everyone is a winner,” at least in kindergarten and other trickle-down accounts. Danger, though, does nothing more than spare—if it spares—survivors. In its wake, we are *diminished*, and some will have lost everything. You could say that danger befalls us regardless of whatever agency we still believe in. Danger cannot be beaten. We might prevail, sure, even grow stronger for a while. But that is because danger must be fought, or else escaped, and first of all encountered. Fight or flight, but also—lose.

In the dark light of danger, then, there would be two kinds of losses, at least. Two grammars or two arithmetics. One of augmentation (risk), the other of subtraction (danger). The former implies a gain or a win in the offing. The other constitutes nothing more than a motion and an experience toward . . . nothing.<sup>20</sup> As Roger Munier explains, *experience*, the word, comes from the Latin *ex periri*, a traversing of danger (*periculum*), a putting (of self) in danger. Going toward nothing,

driving (in German, *fahren*) toward danger (*Gefahr*), experience goes nowhere fast (*elle va vers le rien*), it merely traverses and is in this way perilous; it is itself peril or danger.<sup>21</sup> Thus, and though thinking loss without contrasting it to gain should not be too challenging, I would contend that the weight we have given to risk, as opposed to danger, demands some consideration. Just as in “creative destruction,” recycling, and other proverbial omelets, we take for granted that something (a product, a construct, a gain) always comes of nothing (destruction), and without loss or depersonalization. As Heidegger put it after Hölderlin, who may thereby have failed the test of danger, “There, where danger is, grows the saving power.”<sup>22</sup> Heidegger might as well have said that danger keeps alive the promise of salvation (note that Hölderlin’s German mentions no “power,” only salvation, perhaps the rescue or securing, the release even, *das Rettende*), that danger is risk. Yet danger brings closer the end of all promises, and of all threats too. Elsewhere, I have tried to argue that the production-destruction dyad, along with its loss-gain iteration, is not exhausted by the First Law of Thermodynamics.<sup>23</sup> There will be loss, in other words. And everything is in danger.

Do we know this to be true?

Sigmund Freud, a great and unacknowledged thinker of danger (of danger, as distinct from anxiety or from vulnerability), offered surprising elements toward an answer of sorts. Having expanded our hearts and minds—which is to say, our unknown and unknowing souls—toward past, future, and impossibly unclear yet present dangers (absent ones too), Freud acknowledged our incapacity to truly consider the end of all things, beginning with the thing itself, or so we think, the self. Danger—which Freud rendered, in the wake of that massive project of translation better known as “anthropology,” with the word *taboo*—speaks to us of a determining structure.<sup>24</sup> We do not, says Freud, we cannot, *believe* in our own death, for it is not available to apodictic certainty (unbeknownst to many, Heidegger would soon agree).<sup>25</sup> You might say that what Freud clarified is the vacuity of an all too familiar historical division. People used to believe in life after death, our secularists in charge tell us. Now they believe in death after life. But such “modern” or “secular” belief—“Don’t you *believe* in science?” they ask—remains wedded to a persistent trust in eternal life, and in the credible possibility of *not dying*.<sup>26</sup>

The impossibility and the uncertainty—rather than the denial—of death is, you might say, a Humean, all-too-Humean lesson. That everybody has died before me is, after all, no evidence that *I* will die. Why, after all, should I believe it? One might call such reasoning Cartesian. The founder of modern subjectivity (who searched, too, for certainty) could not have cared less about death, and Spinoza refused to concede that the task of philosophy was ever “to learn how to die.” And he was right for the most part, as few of his peers, poor men, ever gave that much thought to the matter of the end, the end of all matter.

Which might be why Freud insisted that danger has little to do with death, and everything to do with loss.

With all the attention devoted to trauma, little notice has been taken of the fact that Freud had also raised the question of danger, that he explicitly asked, in a manner few have with such explicit directness, “What is danger?” Having attended to danger at some length in *Totem and Taboo* (“Behind all these prohibitions there seems to be something in the nature of a theory that they are necessary because certain persons and things are charged with dangerous power”),<sup>27</sup> Freud deepened his reflections in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, coining a phrase that might have produced entire libraries of commentaries (but did not, nor did it register in dictionaries of psychoanalysis). Freud wrote there of the “danger-situation” (*Gefahrsituation*).<sup>28</sup> Analytically incisive and discriminating as he was, Freud contrasted it with the “trauma-situation,” considering the differences as well as the relatedness between the two concepts (for both trauma and danger are, in fact, psychoanalytical concepts and should be treated accordingly). Freud understood that one situation could—easily, albeit not always—turn into the other.

What Freud was seeking, after his fashion, was an originary experience. More accurately, since we will see that “experience” might be what is precisely missing (Munier’s reflections notwithstanding), Freud was looking for an account of the conditions, the mechanisms, whereby a psychic and emotional structure could shape our perceptual apparatus and make danger perceptible, felt, and recognized. What is it that is felt when danger occurs? What is it that can be *recognized* as danger? What are the conditions that make it possible for a living being to feel or know, to experience, danger? Otherwise, put, what is danger, what must danger be, such that we can proceed to fight or flee it, respond to it (with anxiety or depersonalization), sometimes by playing dead or freezing in its face, at other times by constructing massive—and always phantasmatic—security apparatuses toward its prevention and annihilation?

As he considers the psychic life of the infant (the infant each of us remains), Freud summarily dismisses the possibility of equating the fear of danger, the anxiety around it, with the fear of death. No infant could know its own death, much less fear it. Danger, the originary danger, is to be found elsewhere. It is to be found (if one can put it this way) in *loss*, and in the fear of loss. And yet something might be gained after all. More precisely, something might be *learned*. (Steiner suggested that there might a relation between the sociology of danger and the sociology of learning.)<sup>29</sup> For danger, Freud reminds us, is indeed *learned*—a program for systems and practices of education, and adult education, too, in the age of nuclear proliferation (no, not just the 1950s), which might very well be described, after Jünger, as a “school of danger” (*Schule der Gefahr*). For “man does not seem to have been endowed, or has been endowed but in small measure, with an

instinctive recognition of the dangers that threaten him from without. Small children are constantly doing things which endanger their lives, and that is precisely why they cannot afford to be without a protecting object.”<sup>30</sup>

Human beings do not know danger. They must learn it, learn to recognize danger before they react or respond to it. Until they do so, they must be protected. Ideally, that is. They require a protecting object, in any case, which, Freud underscores, is the very subject whose loss the infant has always already “experienced.” It is this very condition (or, we might repeat after Freud, situation), “the condition of the infant who is completely surrendered to the mother’s inclination,” that, Adriana Cavarero insists, “raises a number of questions, and not just in the field of psychoanalysis.”<sup>31</sup> Staying close to—or inclined toward—that field, or at least to Freud, for a little longer, we might register that, hesitant as he famously was to acknowledge or accept Otto Rank’s “trauma of birth,” Freud nevertheless underscored loss and a repetition of loss (which might be perceived or conceived as separation, only after a translation that is itself an instance and a form of loss).<sup>32</sup> This repetition would be, strictly speaking, without subject and without beginning, for such beginning (birth, loss, separation) was never, in fact, experienced. “My birth is not an experience that forms part of my life” is the way Anne O’Byrne aptly put it, later adding that it is “a moment irretrievably lost to my experience.”<sup>33</sup>

But with the loss of birth, with birth as always already lost, it is the mother who may begin to appear as a different kind of object. Or subject.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, unlike the natural, given (and gendered) object she is taken to be, Freud says that the mother is, first of all, lost. And so perhaps first of all to herself. She is, in any case, less an object to be related to and then used (as Winnicott had it) than the precipitate of a repeated loss.<sup>35</sup> For this loss, the loss of what was never there to be had, is also what must be lost *again* for the mother to emerge as mother, to become the obviously concrete object and subject she allegedly is (in notorious contradistinction with the “abstract” or “hypothetical” father, who later redirects loss and separation, establishing it once and for all as an *interdiction*). We do not know our own mother, not from the experience of birth and not without losing the originary loss of the mother. Just like our favorite figures of care and security (motherland, mother earth), the mother, to repeat, can only become “concrete”—which is to say, once again, available, and dangerously so, to loss and separation—when she “returns”—that is to say, when we lose the originary loss (impossibly originary, since lost) that is our birth, the loss of she who will become our mother. It is this double, iterated loss, a double mediation and a double exposure (as a child *exposed*), that produces the mother as given (“repeated situations . . . have created an object out of the mother”)<sup>36</sup> and concrete (whereas the father is *given* as abstract in the absence of mediation), and the mother as dangerous (dangerous because lost, dangerous because endangered, and dangerous, too, because protective). We



might remark that danger here is, indeed, a situation that affects and determines the mother herself; the mother as subject is, in other words, endangered.

Thomas Hobbes's "evil genius" (as Cavarero describes it) was to recognize that it is not "in giving birth" that the mother gives life (and endangers her own) but rather "because the very survival of the newborn depends on her."<sup>37</sup> Like loss, like danger, the mother is, you could say, iterative. In other words, then, Hobbes's own words, "The title to dominion over a child, proceedeth not from the generation, but from the preservation of it; and therefore in the estate of nature, the mother in whose power it is to save or destroy, hath right thereto by power."<sup>38</sup> There where danger grows, the mother saves the day again. But only sometimes.

Hobbes's state of nature notwithstanding, this is no doubt another way to say that a mother is not born (not even by *giving* birth, not simply so) but made, although it might be more accurate to acknowledge that she is *unmade*. Or indeed, exposed (Winnicott will famously say: destroyed). Something that may explain why the mother, endangered, is only rarely—one might say, after Cavarero, aberrantly—the *subject* (or author) of danger, and that further accounts for the well-known tropes of the dead, absent, or spectral mother.<sup>39</sup> It is, in any case, "the absence of the mother that is now the danger," as the iterations of loss, the repetitions of the loss of a loss, occur as danger—the danger of loss, which might also be the fear of loss. Danger is, danger begins without beginning, as the repetition of a loss, the fact and fear of a loss that must itself be lost in order for the mother to remain and for danger to be averted (for now). The mother, always already lost, is dangerous and protective, protective because dangerous, dangerous because endangered: the mother emerges as the mother of all danger. Our first experience of loss, and of homeland security, our first experience—which is not an experience, yet remains the truest of experiences—of danger.

Fatherhood, pace Freud, was no advance of "spirituality." Nor was motherhood an advance in "security." Certainly not for mothers. Yet they might both be conceived as forms (instances and occasions rather than subjects) of "danger behavior." Accordingly, as Steiner advises, "instead of explaining danger behavior in terms of negative values, we may—and should—explain value behavior in terms of positive danger."<sup>40</sup> Cavarero underscores, and Toni Morrison powerfully narrates, the relation between mother and infant as dangerous, a danger situation that, though it might be reciprocal, is neither symmetrical nor equal. "Here, there are not in fact two, so to speak, equal wolves," writes Cavarero.<sup>41</sup> What is rather found, if not always confronted, is a power that, exceeding both by far, can overwhelm and destroy (sometimes, but only sometimes, also protect and even save), regardless of the state of its subjects, or, for that matter, of its agents. Where danger is—and danger *is*, as Heidegger reminded us—mothers stand first in the line of loss, and of protection. In the line of danger. They confront danger, are themselves dangerous

and also endangered. Some may fight, others may escape. Some will freeze in the face of danger, others will play dead. Some will kill for protection. And too many have died, and continue to. Then again, what Morrison makes clear in her chilling, and ever-so-pertinent, account of slavery and its horrors, of danger and its wake, is that there might be no state of play. No risk to take, only danger to face.<sup>42</sup>

Yes, some dangers are imaginary, but, Steiner insisted, such dangers are not less real because they are imaginary. On the contrary, danger's capacity to grow (by infection, contagion, or pollution, as anthropologists taught us long ago) only confirms that where danger is, it is not salvation that grows. And certainly not by any measure of necessity. For, as every mother knows and all-too-often experiences, and as Steiner recalls, the endangered is dangerous, always dangerous.<sup>43</sup> And the dangerous all-too-often endangered. To face danger, Steiner continues, "is to face another power. Indeed, again, the older meaning of the English word danger is 'power,' 'jurisdiction,' 'dominion,' 'the power to dispose of or to harm.'"<sup>44</sup> Danger is neither natural, nor political. It is both natural and political. It might very well be "maternal," receiving us into a world in which we are lost, sometimes found, but from which we cannot be protected, nor, it seems, saved, not entirely—and again, certainly not without loss (there will be no "winners," and those are rarely mothers). In this world, not everything is at risk, but everything is in danger. And on the front lines, mothers.<sup>45</sup> But danger is, finally, not better known, nor better understood, under that more popular moniker, "power." Nor is it served by the mad foregrounding of risk or the desperate rhetoric of choice. Or of security. For danger, the great mother of danger, grows.

---

**GIL ANIDJAR** teaches in the Department of Religion and the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University. He has written on Freud in a number of publications from *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (2003) to *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (2014). He just completed a manuscript titled "The Sovereignty of Mothers."

#### **Acknowledgments**

My gratitude to Joëlle Marelli and Beatrice Marovich for conversations that were essential to the writing of this essay.

#### **Notes**

1. "It is widely held that the concept of risk is to be determined as a counter-concept to security," writes Niklas Luhmann (*Risk*, 19). Luhmann acknowledges that the "distinction between risk and danger plays no significant role in the voluminous literature on risk research," although he himself proposes that one should be made, as "the distinction presupposes . . . that uncertainty exists in relation to future loss." There will be loss, Luhmann seems to say, either because of a decision ("We then speak of risk—to be more exact of the risk of decision"). "Or the possible loss is considered to have been caused



- externally, that is to say, it is attributed to the environment. In this case we speak of danger” (21–22).
2. Beck, *Risk Society*; Luhmann, *Risk*; Beck and Kewell, *Risk*; Dufourmantelle, *Power of Gentleness*.
  3. In the growing field of “critical security studies,” which now includes philologists, the word *danger*, often liberally deployed, sometimes quite rare, never seems to be subjected to scrutiny. Hovering between the given and the constructed, between the real and the imaginary, its conceptual labor or tenor remain hidden or implicit. See Neocleous, *Critique of Security*; Lennon, *Passwords*; Hamilton, *Security*; Masco, *Theater of Operations*; and more recently, Moses, *Problems of Genocide*.
  4. Mary Douglas’s trajectory provides a pertinent illustration. Douglas herself had barely used the word *risk* in *Purity and Danger*, but she went on to publish two books that explicitly foreground risk in their titles and content (Douglas and Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture*; Douglas, *Risk and Blame*). In *Risk and Blame*, Douglas herself dedicates a chapter to “Risk and Danger.” There, she underscores the difference between the two terms and criticizes Ulrich Beck, who himself “uses the word ‘risk’ as danger,” she says, “disregarding its origins and its technical applications and its intimate present connection with probability theory and the theory of rational choice” (45). Insisting, as many have, on the calculative dimensions of risk (“The question about risk has to be: how safe is safe enough for this particular culture” [41]) and reiterating her past claim about danger as “the most primitive idea of all” (40), Douglas—who refers to risk only as a concept—surprisingly laments that “European culture . . . has ended by turning the word for ‘risk’ into a word for ‘danger’” (53). Yet, her own “incitement to discourse,” her own turn from danger to risk, in which she joins Beck and innumerable others in favoring the term *risk*, goes unmentioned.
  5. Steiner, *Taboo*, 213; and see Anidjar, “You Stand within His Danger,” of which the present essay is a continuation. There, I elaborate on Steiner and danger, though I might add here that Mary Douglas herself once acknowledged a striking debt. “Rereading those lectures [i.e., Steiner’s *Taboo*] gives me a shock of recognition,” Douglas writes.
 

Why did I not acknowledge his influence more fully? I did say straight away that *Purity and Danger* (1966) was conceived and planned according to his teaching, but much of *Natural Symbols* (1970) and *many of the things I have written subsequently on risk* are without specific acknowledgement. Much of what I have written on the Pentateuch more recently sounds to me now like quotations from *Taboo* (1956). (“Franz Steiner,” 6; emphasis added)
  6. Heidegger, “Danger,” 51; and for two rare and distinct elaborations, see Neyrat, *L’indemne*; Lacoste, *Être en danger*. I am not suggesting that Heidegger wrote a full tractate on danger, merely that he ostensibly, if not quite successfully, called attention to danger—that is, toward Being—as worthy of attention.
  7. Nicolas Rescher ignores danger altogether in his *Risk*. More recently, Anne Dufourmantelle, who also wrote *In Praise of Risk*, tragically succumbed to danger. John C. Caputo credits Derrida as he attends to “Spirit and Danger” in an essay by this title.
  8. See, e.g., Kessler, “Legal Discourse”; Mendelson, “Clear and Present Danger.”
  9. Foucault, “Dangerous Individual,” 134–35 (hereafter cited in the text as “DI”). See also, much earlier, Sarbin, “Dangerous Individual.”
  10. See, e.g., Morris, *Dangerous Class*; Standing, *Precariat*; Vesely-Flad, *Racial Purity*; Bhattacharyya, *Dangerous Brown Men*.

11. Feder, "Dangerous Individual(s) Mother." I return to the association of mother and danger below, though it should be clear that here and elsewhere, *danger* might be said to perform a conceptual labor that has not taken it—danger—as its object.
12. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 118. Having thrown the gauntlet of "an entity in its own right," Winnicott goes on to address the philosopher, as he knows he must. More precisely, Winnicott turns to "an armchair philosopher," who might object to, well, the object, if that is, the latter is not only a "thing in itself" but something to be "destroyed," indeed, if it is destroyed. By way of a solution or resolution, Winnicott suggests a change of position, or should one say, positions. "Should the philosopher come out of his chair and sit on the floor with his patient, however, he will find a [different] position," one in which relation implies destruction and destruction survival. "But there may or may not be survival" (120). There is, as I shall be arguing, danger.
13. Steiner, *Taboo*, 190. Julia Kristeva certainly recognized the significance of power and attends to Freud's "danger" in its relation to loss. There, however, she mentions neither the "danger-situation" nor the mother (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 212n2). And when she offers what may be read as a summary of Mary Douglas's work, Kristeva writes that "the danger of filth [*le danger de la saleté*] represents for the subject the risk [*le risque*] to which the very symbolic order is permanently exposed" (69).
14. Carlo Caduff builds upon Foucault's work, drawing from it the notion of a "public culture of danger." Caduff's compelling argument—where the word *risk* is as ubiquitous as the word *danger*—does not engage that conceptual distinction nor does he offer a theorization of danger (Caduff, *Pandemic Perhaps*).
15. In his brief essay on danger, from which I extract my own title, Ernst Jünger asks us (as Karl Marx had as well) to "remember what an important role was assigned to the concept of security in the bourgeois epoch just past" ("On Danger," 27); it is only remarkable that Jünger seems to have thought that epoch was past.
16. Walter Benjamin's memory might be invoked here, which must be seized as it flashes in a moment of danger. Of danger and not of risk. Incidentally, a random search for the word *Gefahr* and its derivatives in Benjamin's writings yields hundreds of occurrences, whereas *Risiko* barely appears.
17. Apter, *Danger*.
18. Boholm, "Semantic Distinction."
19. Acknowledging the current primacy of risk, Fabrizio Battistelli and Maria Grazia Galantino add "threat" to their exploration of the lexicon that occupies me here ("Dangers, Risks, and Threats").
20. Aside from "fight or flight," which is all too well known, psychologists and psychiatrists have sought to acknowledge a broader range of responses, offering, for instance, "freeze, flight, fight or fright" (Bracha et al., "Does 'Fight or Flight' Need Updating?"). Others have pointed to "depersonalization" as another response to danger, a dramatic depletion and loss, which, in our nuclear and environmental age, we might well take into account; see Noyes and Kletti, "Depersonalization."
21. Munier, *Le contour, l'éclat*, 33–34.
22. Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, 28; and compare: "In the essence of danger, where it is as the danger, there is the turn to guardianship, there is this guardianship itself, there is that which saves of being [*das Rettende des Seyns*]" (Heidegger, "Danger," 69).

23. See Anidjar, “Destruction of Thought.” The First Law of Thermodynamics posits the conservation of energy in the universe. As Ingo Müller has it, it is an “assumption” that holds great power over physics and that, in spite of the Second Law, which posits dissipation (or entropy), leaves little room to think destruction, a concept mostly absent from the vocabulary of modern physics (*History of Thermodynamics*, 22).
24. Asad, “Concept of Cultural Translation.”
25. Jankélevitch, *La mort*.
26. Farman, *On Not Dying*.
27. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 22; as Freud goes on to explain, the word *taboo* has among its connotations “dangerous” (23).
28. Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*. For a brief but illuminating discussion, an exception to confirm the rule, see Stolorow, “Relevance.” Referring to Freud, Melanie Klein did make use of the phrase (in *The Psychoanalysis of Children*, for instance [93, 170]), but—and this is just one example—it goes unmentioned in Hanna Segal’s *Introduction* or in Kristeva’s *Melanie Klein*.
29. Steiner, *Taboo*, 186.
30. Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, 168.
31. Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 123.
32. In a chapter titled “Undoing,” Madelon Sprengnether elaborates on loss and separation and on the significance of the mother-infant relationship as “formative” (Sprengnether, *Spectral Mother*, 120–53). I have learned much from Sprengnether’s arguments, most importantly with regard to Freud’s struggles with Otto Rank on “the trauma of birth,” but though she acknowledges “the situation of danger” or “danger-situation,” Sprengnether does not grant it conceptual or theoretical force.
33. O’Byrne, *Nativity and Finitude*, 41, 104; I am grateful to Beatrice Marovich for alerting me to this work.
34. It should be evident by now that, though I borrow the phrase “that great mother of danger [*jene große Mutter der Gefahr*],” from Jünger, it is the suggestive proximity of danger and mother that seemed to me necessary to explore in this section of the essay.
35. Winnicott’s essay, from which I quote above, was originally titled “The Use of an Object.”
36. Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, 170.
37. Cavarero, *Horrorism*, 22; the phrase “evil genius” appears in Cavarero’s *Inclinations*, 122, where Cavarero briefly alludes to the same Hobbesian matter and *mater*.
38. Hobbes, quoted in Cavarero, *Horrorism*, 22.
39. Kohon, *Dead Mother*; Dever, *Death and the Mother*; Åström, *Absent Mother*; Sprengnether, *Spectral Mother*.
40. Steiner, *Taboo*, 196.
41. Cavarero, *Horrorism*, 23; Morrison, *Beloved*.
42. Essential reading here are those theorists of race and of the lost mother, of the mother as endangered and dangerous, dangerous because endangered; I refer in particular to Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*; and Sharpe, *In the Wake*.
43. Steiner, *Taboo*, 188.
44. Steiner, *Taboo*, 213.
45. Rose, *Mothers*.

## Works Cited

- Anidjar, Gil. "The Destruction of Thought." In *Thought: A Philosophical History*, edited by Panayiota Vassilopoulou and Daniel Whistler, 307–19. New York: Routledge, 2021.
- Anidjar, Gil. "You Stand within His Danger." *Boiling Point* (blog), *Foundry*, July 2020. University of California Humanities Research Institute. <https://uchri.org/foundry/you-stand-within-his-danger/>.
- Apter, Michael. *Danger: Our Quest for Excitement*. Oxford: One World, 2007.
- Asad, Talal. "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology." In *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, 171–99. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Åström, Berit, ed. *The Absent Mother in the Cultural Imagination: Missing, Presumed Dead*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Battistelli, Fabrizio, and Maria Grazia Galantino. "Dangers, Risks, and Threats: An Alternative Conceptualization to the Catch-All Concept of Risk." *Current Sociology* 67, no. 1 (2019): 64–78.
- Beck, Matthias, and Beth Kewell. *Risk: A Study of Its Origins, History, and Politics*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2013.
- Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Translated by Mark Ritter. London: SAGE, 1992.
- Bhattacharyya, Gargi. *Dangerous Brown Men: Exploiting Sex, Violence, and Feminism in the War on Terror*. London: Zed Books, 2008.
- Boholm, Max. "The Semantic Distinction between 'Risk' and 'Danger': A Linguistic Analysis." *Risk Analysis* 32, no. 2 (2012): 281–93.
- Bracha, H. Stefan, Tyler C. Ralston, Jennifer M. Matsukawa, Andrew E. Williams, and Adam S. Bracha. "Does 'Fight or Flight' Need Updating?" *Psychosomatics* 45, no. 5 (2004): 448–49.
- Caduff, Carlo. *The Pandemic Perhaps: Dramatic Events in a Public Culture of Danger*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.
- Caputo, John C. "Spirit and Danger." In *Ethics and Danger: Essays on Heidegger and Continental Thought*, edited by Arleen B. Dallery, Charles E. Scott, and P. Holley Roberts, 43–57. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Cavarero, Adriana. *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*. Translated by William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Cavarero, Adriana. *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*. Translated by Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016.
- Dever, Carolyn. *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Douglas, Mary. "Franz Steiner: A Memoir." In Steiner, *Selected Writings*, 3–15.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.
- Douglas, Mary. *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Douglas, Mary, and Aaron Wildavsky. *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technological and Environmental Dangers*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Dufourmantelle, Anne. *In Praise of Risk*. Translated by Steven Miller. New York: Fordham University Press, 2019.
- Dufourmantelle, Anne. *Power of Gentleness: Meditations on the Risk of Living*. Translated by Katherine Payne and Vincent Sallé. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.

- Farman, Abou. *On Not Dying: Secular Immortality in the Age of Technoscience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.
- Feder, Ellen K. "The Dangerous Individual('s) Mother: Biopower, Family, and the Production of Race." *Hyppatia* 22, no. 2 (2007): 60–78.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Dangerous Individual." In *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, 125–51. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 20, edited by James Strachey, 77–175. London: Hogarth, 1959.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo*. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 13, edited by James Strachey, xiii–162. London: Hogarth, 1955.
- Hamilton, John T. *Security: Politics, Humanity, and the Philology of Care*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Danger." In *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, translated by Andrew J. Mitchell, 44–63. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. New York: Garland, 1977.
- Jankélévitch, Vladimir. *La mort*. Paris: Flammarion, 2017.
- Jünger, Ernst. "On Danger," translated by Donald Reneau. *New German Critique*, no. 59 (1993): 27–32.
- Kessler, Mark. "Legal Discourse and Political Intolerance: The Ideology of Clear and Present Danger." *Law and Society Review* 27, no. 3 (1993): 559–98.
- Klein, Melanie. *The Psychoanalysis of Children*. Translated by Alix Strachey. New York: Grove, 1960.
- Kohon, Gregorio, ed. *The Dead Mother: The Work of André Green*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Melanie Klein*. Translated by Ross Guberman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Lacoste, Jean-Yves. *Être en danger*. Paris: Cerf, 2011.
- Lennon, Brian. *Passwords: Philology, Security, Authentication*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Luhmann, Niklas. *Risk: A Sociological Analysis*. Translated by Rhodes Barrett. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993.
- Masco, Joseph. *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Mendelson, Wallace. "Clear and Present Danger— from Schenck to Dennis." *Columbia Law Review* 52, no. 3 (1952): 313–33.
- Morris, Lydia. *Dangerous Class: The Underclass and Social Citizenship*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Vintage Books, 1987.
- Moses, Dirk A. *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- Müller, Ingo. *A History of Thermodynamics: The Doctrine of Energy and Entropy*. Berlin: Springer, 2007.

- Munier, Roger. *Le contour, l'éclat*. Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1977.
- Neocleous, Mark. *Critique of Security*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- Neyrat, Frédéric. *L'indemne: Heidegger et la destruction du monde*. Paris: Sens et Tonka, 2008.
- Noyes, Russell, Jr., and Roy Kletti. "Depersonalization in Response to Life-Threatening Danger." *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 18, no. 4 (1977): 375–84.
- O'Byrne, Anne. *Nativity and Finitude*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- Rescher, Nicolas. *Risk: A Philosophical Introduction to the Theory of Risk Evaluation and Management*. Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1983.
- Rose, Jacqueline. *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.
- Sarbin, Theodor R. "The Dangerous Individual: An Outcome of Social Identity Transformations." *British Journal of Criminology* 7, no. 3 (1967): 285–95.
- Segal, Hanna. *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*. London: Karnac, 1988.
- Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Spillers, Hortense J. *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Sprengnether, Madelon. *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Standing, Guy. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury, 2011.
- Steiner, Franz Baermann. *Selected Writings*. Vol. 1. Edited by Jeremy Adler and Richard Fardon. New York: Berghahn Books, 1999.
- Steiner, Franz Baermann. *Taboo*. In Steiner, *Selected Writings*, 103–219.
- Stolorow, Robert. "The Relevance of Freud's Concept of Danger-Situation for an Intersubjective-Systems Perspective." *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 23, no. 2 (2006): 417–19.
- Vesely-Flad, Rima. *Racial Purity and Dangerous Bodies: Moral Pollution, Black Lives, and the Struggle for Justice*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017.
- Winnicott, Donald. *Playing and Reality*. London: Routledge, 2005.