

David Campbell, "Introduction: On Dangers and their Interpretations"  
*In Campbell, Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*,  
pp. 1-15  
Week 6

Campbell begins by looking at the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and asking why this was considered to be a danger to the United States. He observes that "danger is not an objective condition. It is not a thing that exists independently of those to whom it may become a threat." Instead, "danger is an effect of interpretation" (2). Interestingly, he notes that terrorism was not seen as a major danger to the US. The changed perceptions of the dangerousness of terrorism in the wake of Sept. 11 illustrates his point nicely. Danger results "from the calculations of a threat that objectifies events, disciplines relations, and sequesters an ideal of the identity of the people said to be at risk" (3).

Campbell argues that "contrary to the claims of epistemic realism ... as understanding involves rendering the unfamiliar in the terms of the familiar, there is always an ineluctable debt to interpretation such that there is nothing outside of discourse" (4). Rather than adopting the standard approach of narrative historiography, Campbell seeks to employ a "logic of interpretation that ... concerns itself with considering the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another." (4). His approach is to ask "how certain terms and concepts have historically functioned within discourse" (6).

Based on this approach, Campbell suggests that a "a more radical response" to current dangers is needed – one that is "directed at the modes of interpretation that make these challenges available for apprehension, the strategies and tactics by which they are calculated as dangers and the means by which they come to be other" (8). He seeks to understand "the roles that danger and difference play" in shaping the identity of the US.

Campbell then turns to a discussion of identity and state, observing that identity is not fixed, but rather is defined in relation to difference and other. This leads to a non-traditional definition of the state. Statehood is produced by "a discourse of primary and stable identity... which is constituted in time .... Through a stylized repetition of acts and achieved, not through a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition. (10). States are always in the "process of becoming" as they do not exist apart from the ongoing process of their creation. The "national state" is thus an "unavoidably paradoxical entity."

The articulation of danger thus becomes not a "threat to the state's identity" rather it is "a condition of possibility" (13.)