

# The Absence of Methodology in Securitisation Theory

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## The Absence of Methodology in Securitisation Theory

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With its comprehensible framework that is easily applied to different contexts, securitisation theory is one of the most popular approaches among students writing a thesis in Security Studies. The content of these dissertations usually consists of a brief overview of the securitisation framework and a discourse analysis of a given topic. What is most commonly missing from the dissertations is a section on methodology. Is this merely the fault of stressed prospective graduates who, in the final throes of their degree, struggle to complete their theses in due time? Or is there a more complex reason behind it? A quick survey of the empirical research in Security Studies finds that almost none of the manifold of monographs, papers and conference articles discusses methodology (see Hansen 2006 for a rare exception). Just like the students' theses, empirics follow on theory without explaining the methodology, i.e. the ideas that inform the methods used.<sup>[1]</sup> In his *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*, Jackson (2016b) has argued that a focus on ontological debates has prevented International Relations (IR) scholars from dealing with methodology.<sup>[2]</sup> A similar problem is present in Security Studies. Going beyond Jackson, I will show how the theoretical conceptualisation of security prohibits the formulation of a concise methodology. Within Security Studies, an examination of securitisation theory as framed by the Copenhagen School (CS) seems particularly useful to support my argument. Despite a vibrant debate on its theory-building and conceptualisation (see in particular Balzacq et al. 2015), scholars have not succeeded in formulating a coherent methodology.

Securitisation theory is based on the general idea that the "existence and management of certain issues as security problems does not necessarily depend upon objective, or purely material conditions." (Balzacq and Guzzini 2015, 3) Rather, it conceptualises security as a speech act. In other words, agents socially construct threats in speaking security. Today, there is a vast literature on the empirical application of securitisation theory. Examples include, but are not limited to, migration (Huysmans 2000); organised crime (Stritzel 2017); AIDS/HIV (Sjöstedt 2011); the European external borders (Neal 2009); military security (Stritzel and Chang 2015); and environmental security (Floyd 2010). The approach has also been applied to non-Western contexts, thereby significantly increasing its reach (Bilgin 2011, Greenwood and Wæver 2013, Vuori 2014, Kent 2016, Jackson 2016a, Wilkinson 2016). However, neither do these studies discuss their respective methodologies, nor do they follow a standardised methodology in the sense that there are established criteria for the application of a particular method. In light of this observation, Wæver (2003, 21) has hoped that "the diversity is a sign that theory [...] can generate/structure different kinds of usage and even produce anomalies in interesting ways." However, the diversity also points to the theoretical contradictions at work.

Overall, surprisingly little emphasis has been put on the development of methodology in IR in general and Security Studies in particular (see Milliken 1999). Only recently, a debate has slowly but surely been picked up (Salter and Mutlu 2013, Shepherd 2013a, Aradau and Huysmans 2013, Fierke 2015, Jackson 2016b). While these volumes have most certainly advanced the general discussion, they only partly address the conundrum of securitisation studies. What is at stake here is not a lack of methodological care. Rather, the theoretical conception of securitisation has helped to prevent the development of a coherent methodology. A fresh discussion of securitisation theory may thus help to detect its pitfalls and better enable researchers (and students) to contribute to the development of a methodology of securitisation.

This essay seeks to make a contribution to this academic project. More precisely, I will reflect on the theoretical conception of securitisation to identify the main challenges to the formulation of a consistent methodology. I will ask:

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How has the conceptualisation of securitisation prevented the formulation of a coherent methodology?[3] Consequently, I will revisit the most prominent texts written by and on the CS to reconstruct the theory-building on securitisation, including John L. Austin's speech act theory and Jacques Derrida's subsequent critique.<sup>[4]</sup> Drawing on Austin and Derrida, I will give two different answers to the seemingly superfluous question of what securitisation actually is. While Derrida has been instrumental for those viewing securitisation as a speech act event, the CS increasingly uses a re-reading of Austin to conceptualise securitisation as an intersubjective process. Building on those two framings of securitisation, I will then show the theoretical and methodological contradictions that follow. The conclusion serves as a space for reflection on the findings produced in this essay.

## Speech Act Theory Revisited

Before I attempt to reconstruct the methodology of securitisation theory, it is necessary to revisit the intellectual roots on which the approach rests. For their conceptualisation of securitisation, the CS draws heavily on John L. Austin's speech act theory. Emphasising the constructedness of security, securitisation is framed as a speech act. The notion of speech act captures specifically how actions are performed through language. Besides Austin, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of theories of meaning in general and of Austin's speech act theory in particular has informed the conception of security. While the Derridean elements in the theory have been commonly interpreted as the basis for framing securitisation as a speech act event, a re-reading of Austin points to the intersubjective nature of securitisation. Therefore, both approaches will be reconsidered as a basis for the following discussion.

### *John L. Austin's How to Do Things with Words*

In his *How to Do Thing with Words* (1962), John L. Austin presented the first systematic account of the use of language. The purpose of his lectures was to "consider [...] some cases and senses [...] in which to say something is to do something; or in which *by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something." (Austin 1967 [1962], 12)[5] Doing so, he demonstrated that there are utterances that change the social reality they describe.

Austin distinguishes between three distinct levels of action beyond the utterance itself: locutionary (the act *of* saying something), illocutionary (what one does *in* saying it), and perlocutionary acts (what one does *by* saying it). Stating is thus understood as performing an act. The "total speech-act in the total speech-situation" (Austin 1967 [1962], 148) then includes the three different aspects of locution, illocution, and perlocution.<sup>[6]</sup> For no all-encompassing description of a given situation will ever be possible, the totality of a speech act is impossible to delimit. However, it is possible to analyse the three distinct levels, which correspond to distinctions between aspects of the state of affairs that they bring about (Sbisà 2006, 2).

Locutionaries simply refer to the act of saying something with a certain sense and reference, i.e. with a certain meaning.<sup>[7]</sup> An illocution is the act that we generally and *eo ipso* perform in uttering a locution (Austin 1967 [1962], 98). Thus, it explicitly refers to a direct action through speech. Illocutions describe what one does in saying something, including utterances such as warnings, orders, or promises. Illocutions are performative for the uttering of the sentence is part of an action. They are only successful if the following felicity conditions are met: a speech act must be conducted according to (A.1) an accepted conventional procedure with a certain conventional effect, (A.2) by appropriate persons and in appropriate circumstances, (B1) in the correct and (B.2) complete way, and there must be (? 1) certain thoughts and feelings of the speaker, to which (? 2) the speech act is conducted accordingly (Austin 1967 [1962], 14–15). An illocution will also not be successfully performed if there is no securing of uptake by a relevant audience i.e. if the audience does not hear and take what someone says. Thus, the effect of an illocution amounts to understanding the meaning and the force of the speech act. The illocutionary force of an utterance is "equivalent to the illocutionary act that an utterance of that type by default performs so long as the performance is not undermined by fatal flaws." (Sbisà 2013, 30–31)

Illocution roots in extralingually institutionalised practices (Krämer 2001, 141). Commonly, this is interpreted in a way that illocutions must be performed in accordance with a conventional framework. Sbisà (2006, 2013), however, has argued that illocutionaries rather bring about a *conventional state of affairs* for such speech acts produce conventional results that are characterised by liability to annulment, particularly in the case of subsequent opposite

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illocutionary acts or a later discovery that the speech act was void. The illocutionary effect is thus understood as “the creation, cancellation or change of *deontic* states of affairs concerning the participants in the ongoing interaction (that is, states consisting of the conjunction or disjunction of an agent with a modal predicate belonging to the deontic kind [i.e. rights, obligations or entitlements]).” (Sbisà 2013, 32, see also Sbisà 2006, 2009) In contrast, perlocutionaries refer to what one does by saying something. Perlocutionary acts are performed with the intention to produce a further effect, thereby having consequences on others by, inter alia, convincing, persuading, alerting or deterring. Perlocution occurs when some effect is produced in the audience of the speech act due to some feature of the speech act itself (Sbisà 2013, 35). These effects must not be conventional but are specific to the circumstances of utterance.

In his lectures on speech act theory, John L. Austin has drawn up a comprehensive and elaborate theory of the use of language. Most importantly, he has shown that speaking essentially means doing something. It is his notion of illocution, i.e. what one does in saying something, which has inspired subsequent theorists to engage with and develop his approach according to their needs. One of these theorists is Jacques Derrida, whose work, alongside that of John Austin, is part of the basis on which securitisation theory rests.

## *Jacques Derrida's 'Signature Event Context'*

In his ‘Signature Event Context’, delivered at a conference in 1971 and published in 1972, Jacques Derrida first presented his reading of Austin. The article is generally held to have significantly evolved speech act theory as it deconstructed the theories of meaning and communication on which Austin (and others) based their approaches (see also Derrida 2001 [1988]-a, Derrida 2005 [1978]). In this section, I will briefly reflect on Derrida’s approach to communication in general and on his account of Austin’s speech act theory in particular.

Before addressing Derrida’s critique, it is useful to start with the general assumption that to Derrida, writing, not language, is the condition of speaking (Derrida 2001 [1988]-b, 19). Speech, then, is understood as a form of writing for the same conditions are attributable to it. What are these conditions? Derrida describes the symbolic order of writing in four termini: absence, iterability, change of context, and spacing (*différance*). This means for utterances to be transmitted via writing, the presence of both a speaker and an addressee is not necessary. The notion of absence is understood by Derrida not as a distant presence, i.e. a modification of presence, but as the possibility of the radical non-presence: Absence is conceived as “a rupture in presence, the ‘death’ or the possibility of the ‘death’ of the addressee” and of the author (Derrida 2001 [1988]-b, 25). This means that the speaker’s intention will never be present in a text. Rather, the sign or the mark must be capable of functioning in the absence of both the speaker and the addressee. The writing must be iterable to fulfil its function as writing. Iterability thus becomes a “necessary feature of linguistic elements for the communication of meaning [...]: a sign or a mark that was not repeatable would not be a sign or a mark, and could not be an element in a language or a code.” (Loxley 2007, 77)

Iterability always includes the possibility of transformation and innovation.<sup>[8]</sup> For a mark or a sign is iterable, it is capable of occurring again but exhibiting difference. This constitutive element of any sign is what Derrida refers to as *différance*: It is “the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing by which elements relate to one another. This spacing is the production, simultaneously active and passive [...], of intervals without which the ‘full’ terms could not signify, could not function.” (Derrida 1981b, 27)

Therefore, no sign ultimately belongs to any particular context; the context of a sign may not be determined absolutely. In Derrida’s words, all contexts are subject to dissemination (Derrida 1981a). This is seconded by the demonstration that a sign must be citable, i.e. can be removed from its previous context and placed into another. Thus, an element of speech must, like an element of writing, allow for its recognition and reiteration by a particular self-identity to be found in this element. Its iterability constitutes its signifying form, while the signified and the intention of the signification need not be present. This implies that meaning is to be found only in the text itself. Consider Derrida’s famous claim that there is no outside-text: “il n’y a pas de hors-texte” (Derrida 1997 [1976], 158). Hence, a text matters more for what it does than what it says.

Building on this understanding of language, Derrida unfolds a critique of Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words*.

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Interestingly, he finds that Austin does not understand illocution and perlocution as a transmission of meaning but of an “original movement, an operation and the production of an effect” (Derrida 2001 [1988]-b, 33). Communication is thus viewed as a force through the impetus of a mark. The performative does not refer to something that is outside of language. Rather, it transforms a situation. However, Derrida maintains that Austin’s understanding of a speech act presupposes an extensively determinable context through the formulation of the felicity conditions, which are organised around the presence of the speaker’s intention. Derrida (2001 [1988]-b, 34) thereby demonstrates that Austin’s model of communication presupposes the conscious “presence of the intention of the speaking subject in the totality of the locutionary act” for a speech act to convey meaning as communication is understood as the intersubjective making present of a particular thought. “Language is thus identified as the primary means of extending meaning as presence” (Loxley 2007, 76). Based on this assessment, Derrida examines the possible failure of a speech act. He claims that while Austin views failure as a structural and indispensable possibility, this possibility is excluded as accidental and exterior (compare Austin 1967 [1962], 18–19, 21–22). This is particularly true for Austin disregards the non-serious use of language, for instance when an actor (re-)cites an utterance on stage. Contrary to Austin, Derrida argues that the risk of failure as expressed by a sign’s citationality or iterability is the inherent “internal and positive condition of possibility” of speech (Derrida 2001 [1988]-b, 38).

While a number of scholars have drawn on Derrida’s writings, he has become especially central to postmodernist scholars. Although the CS’s framing of security cannot be classified as purely postmodernist, they include many Derridean elements in their theory. This is particularly true for their conceptualisation of securitisation as a speech act event,<sup>[9]</sup> as opposed to its conception as an intersubjective process. The two different understandings of securitisation will be discussed in the next section.

## What is Securitization?

Securitisation theory was developed by the Copenhagen School (CS), which formed at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute in the 1980s.[10] The CS originally consisted of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, who co-authored *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. This book was published in 1998 and is widely held to formulate the basic premises of securitisation theory.[11] Overall, it made two essential contributions to Security Studies: first, it broadened the understanding of security beyond the traditional political and military sectors without inflating it beyond recognition; second, it provided a “constructivist operational method” for understanding when issues become security issues (Nyman 2013, 52).

To this aim, the CS formulated a theory of securitisation which “captures the performative power politics of the concept [of security] and traces how issues obtain the status function of security through intersubjective socio-political processes.” (Stritzel and Vuori 2016, 50) This quote illustrates nicely the two-fold way of conceptualising security: as a (subjective) speech act *event* that has performative power, and as an intersubjective securitization *process* through which a threat is socially constructed. The first understanding of securitisation is based on the concept of performativity and theorises the speech act event. From this perspective, the illocutionary act underpins the emergence of security problems. The second understanding concentrates on the process of securitisation based on the idea of intersubjectivity. This position emphasises the role of facilitating conditions and the audience in the construction of a threat. The former reading of securitisation has been termed “internalist”, while the latter has become known as “externalist” (Stritzel 2007). Although it is questionable if both the original theory and the large amount of research on securitisation can be neatly divided into any such categories, the terms serve as a starting point to detect and discuss the ambiguous conceptualisation of securitisation that is already present in Wæver’s early formulation of the theory.

### *Securitization as a speech act event*

Commonly, securitisation is understood as a speech act. This reading of securitisation emphasises the performative nature of a speech act in a Derridean fashion. Compare one of the possibly most quoted passages from Ole Wæver’s work:

What then *is* security? With the help of language theory, we can regard ‘security’ as *speech act*. In this usage,

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security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance *itself* is the act. [...] By uttering 'security', a state-representative [*sic*] moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it. (Wæver 1995, 55)

In other words, a securitising actor makes a securitising move, i.e. presents an issue as posing an existential threat to a particular referent object, thereby justifying extraordinary measures and actions outside of the realm of 'normal' political procedures to handle it.[12] Referent objects are things that are declared to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival.[13] Therefore, "'Security' is a self-referential practice, because it is [only] in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 24). The utterance of security is the primary reality. Securitisation is thus conceptualised as an illocutionary speech act, with an emphasis on the illocutionary force that is viewed as the "pure speech act dimension." (Wæver 1989, 42)

Illocution is presented as dependent upon external conditions, which are defined as codes or conventions. Following Austin, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998, 33) formulate three facilitating conditions for a security speech act to succeed: (1) the speech act is executed according to accepted conventional procedures, i.e. rhetorically structured around the grammar of security (internal, linguistic-grammatical condition); (2) the person executing the speech must hold a position of authority defined as social capital (external, social condition); and (3) the objects/subjects that are securitised are commonly or conventionally held to constitute a threat (external, contextual condition).

Here, we see that the authors reproduce an ambiguity that is already present in Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*: On the one hand, a speech act transforms social reality for it is performative, on the other hand, it depends on external felicity conditions, including the related notions of social capital and context. How do they relate to a speech act? The social capital of a securitising actor is defined as his\*her power to make generally accepted claims about security.[14] This power, however, is never absolute but depends on the structure of the field. If an actor is perceived as being a legitimate actor in a particular field, the move is more likely to succeed: "To study securitization is to study the power politics of a concept." (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 32) A speech act is thus not only to be understood in its linguistic features but also has a social dimension (Bourdieu 1991 [1982]). In other words, "It is their [a social actor's and a speech act's] embeddedness in social relations of meaning and power that constitutes both actors and speech acts." (Stritzel 2007, 367) It is important to note that from a Derridean perspective, meaning may never be fixed to a given context but is produced only in a text. Wæver is fully aware of this assumption. In fact, the premise that there is nothing outside the text has become his fixed point:[15]

some of the most important areas where this general 'philosophy' [Derrida's claim that the original signified is never present but in its differences, i.e. its iterability] was worked out by Derrida was in relation to speech act theory and not least in relation to discourse analysis. It points to the centrality of studying *in* a text, how it produces its own meaning, rather than relating it to a 'context', which is a doubtful concept because it tends to imply the traditional sender-receiver view of communication where an original meaning can be retrieved if only put in the proper context. Therefore, it is better to draw on general semiotics and analyse the valorisations and operations in the text that generates meaning, and especially how it tries to anchor itself in something stable (a transcendental signified), although this very stability has to be produced in and by the text. (Wæver 2004b)

In short, context is never fixed but fluctuates. Hence, a speech act being a self-referential practice accounts for the essentially contested meaning of security. However, this is contradictory to the CS's definition of a successful speech act, which draws an issue into a state of exceptionality (see Williams 2003). Therefore, it zooms in on a particular security rationality (see Huysmans 2002, 2006). Stritzel (2007, 366) points to the problematic consequences of this move:

This reduces, contra Derrida, a securitization to a static event of applying a (fixed) meaning (of security as exceptionality) to an issue rather than seeing it as an always (situated and iterative) process of *generating* meaning, i.e. as a dynamic (social and political) sequence of creating a threat text.

Wæver (2011) has admitted that fixing the form of security served primarily as a tool to solve the widening impasse, i.e. the danger of widening the understanding of security so far that 'anything goes.'[16] The Derridean understanding

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of a fluctuating context is clearer when it comes to the possibility of the failure of a speech act. According to Derrida, this possibility is an essential part of any speech act's meaning. Here, Wæver closely follows Derrida in his securitisation theory, which rests upon the premise that the utterance of security "invokes the image of what would happen if it did not work." (Wæver 1989, 45)

In a footnote, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde most clearly work out their understanding of the concept of performativity, linking social capital and context. Pointing to Butler (1999), who holds that speech acts have a "social magic" and thus have to be "indeterminate, open for surprises" (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 46), they claim that this indetermination is not purely a question of formal authority but of performativity:

There is a performative force to the speech act; to use Bourdieu's own concepts, it has a magical efficiency, it makes what it says. A speech act is interesting because it holds the insurrecting potential to break the ordinary, to establish meaning that is not already within the context—it rewords or produces a context by the performative success of the act. Although it is important to study the social conditions of successful speech acts, it is necessary always to keep open the possibility that an act that had previously succeeded and for which the formal resources and position are in place may fail, and conversely, that new actors can perform a speech act they had previously not been expected to perform (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 46–47)

From that, it logically follows that "the issue of 'who can do security?' and 'was this a case of securitisation?' can ultimately only be judged in hindsight. [...] It can not [*sic*] be closed off by finite criteria for success." (Wæver 2000, 10, quoted in Taureck 2006, 6) Based on this understanding of speech act theory, Wæver (2003, 32) has later clarified that even very important felicity conditions can never exhaustively explain a securitising speech act. Consequently, he has suggested to reformulate the second and third facility condition:

(2) the social capital of the enunciator, the securitising actor, who has to be in a position of authority *although this should neither be defined as official authority nor taken to guarantee success with the speech act*; and

(3) conditions historically associated with a threat: it is the more likely that one can conjure a security threat if there are certain objects to refer to which are generally held to be threatening—be they tanks, hostile sentiments, or polluted waters. *In themselves they never make for necessary securitisation, but they are definitely facilitating conditions*. (Wæver 2003, 14–15, emphasis added)

Contrasting the two sets of facilitating conditions, Wæver addresses the possibility of a failing speech act and has thus allowed for a Derridean understanding of meaning to be introduced with more rigour. In this context, Hansen (2011, 360) has pointed out that the CS, in line with their post-structuralist roots, only fails to accept an extra-discursive context. In other words, security is not grounded upon criteria that are outside of discourse. As such, the facilitating conditions may be held to constitute discursive context and may also be included in a post-structuralist analysis.

Nevertheless, a number of methodological questions remain unanswered: What is the relative importance of performativity and the context, including the social capital of an actor? What are the tools for systematically studying the social capital of actors? Does the performative speech act account for the constitution of the speaker or does the CS assume "a pre-given subject who speaks" (Fierke 2015, 129)? How can we account for the contingent meaning of security over time and space? These problems emerge when taking a close look at how the CS has framed securitisation as a speech act event. More precisely, it seems as if the CS in general and Ole Wæver in particular only partly include a Derridean re-appropriation of Austin's theory. They are most certainly, and quite contrary to what Balzacq (2011b, 2012) assumes, not 'post-structuralist' in the sense that they follow Derrida in all his assumptions. While this already creates tension in securitisation theory, there is also a second, intersubjective reading that seems to be largely inconsistent with the conceptualisation of security as a speech act.

## *Securitization as an intersubjective process*

Despite the relatively clear framing of securitisation as a speech act event, there are a number of elements in the

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CS's securitisation theory that point to a more intersubjective understanding of securitisation. In fact, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998, 25) explicitly state that an "issue is only securitized if and when the audience accepts it as such." In saying security, a securitising actor establishes an existential threat that necessitates emergency action based on the imperative to violate otherwise obeyed rules. This leads the CS to assure that the primary effect of the utterance of a securitisation move is to make an audience tolerate the violation of rules that would otherwise be obeyed (Wæver 2003, 11). Hence, the social construction of threats is an intersubjective process that includes an actor making a securitisation move and an audience that accepts (or rejects) that move.

Despite a few scattered hints at the importance of the audience (see, for example, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 25, 41), its concept remains completely underdeveloped. In fact, the units of analysis proposed by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde completely negate its role. Subsequently, the publication of *Security: A New Framework of Analysis* has triggered a controversial debate on this conceptual weakness (see Balzacq 2005, 2011b, 2012, Stritzel 2007, McDonald 2008, Léonard and Kaunert 2011). Although Wæver (2003, 26) himself has admitted that the concept of the audience needs better differentiation, the CS has spent surprisingly little effort on the development of its role. Therefore, suggestions on how to solve this problem have largely been formulated by other, externalist security scholars. The possibly most dominant critique in this context draws attention to the apparent contradiction between securitisation understood as illocutionary speech act and the role of the audience. Stritzel (2007) and Balzacq (2005, 2011a, 2012) in particular have questioned the fit of a Derridean understanding of speech acts and the model of the audience. They claim that if securitisation is framed as illocution, the audience cannot possibly account for the success of a speech act event or count as a defining factor whatsoever. Therefore, they propose to define securitisation as perlocution: *By saying security, a threat is intersubjectively constructed.* In other words, for a speech act to succeed the audience must accept the relevant securitisation move and thus actively engage in the construction of a common narrative of a particular threat.

Wæver has addressed this critique in a recent article, drawing on a reading of Austin's theory that deviates from the common understanding of his speech act theory. Contra Stritzel and Balzacq, he emphasises that securitisation should be analysed as an illocutionary act. Here, he agrees with Sbisà (2006, 2007, 2009) that the illocutionary effect is co-produced by the audience, allowing for the transformation of the actors' statuses. Quoting Sbisà (2006) and Derrida (2002), Wæver (2015, 123) introduces a new understanding of securitisation:

In the co-produced political illocutionary event, a social situation goes through a 'phase transformation' to become defined and regulated by security (or in other cases, for instance risk). This has taken securitization theory beyond a focus on discourses and rhetoric (which it originally shared with a general trend toward 'constructivism' and 'language' within the new security studies) to a theory of political co-production between multiple actors of social states – 'the mutual shaping of the agents of the interactional event'. Such changes in the participants' 'deontic modal competences' [set of deontic modal attributes, i.e. rights and obligations, possessed by a social actor at a given stage of an interactional sequence] has the character of 'event' in the sense explored by Jacques Derrida, where something happens that is irreducible, and therefore also irreducible to the tempting interpretation in terms of 'performativity'.

To Wæver, illocution and audience do not contradict but rather presuppose each other for security rests on the premise that language allows for the creation of a shared understanding of a particular threat through an intersubjective process. Therefore, he argues against the conceptualisation of the speaker-audience relationship as one of cause and effect, whereby the securitising actor subjectively produces a threat and makes the audience act accordingly. Securitisation should be analysed as illocutionary act "in order to organize the theory around the constitutive, transformative event of actors reconfiguring the relationship of rights and duties." (Wæver 2015, 123, see also Wæver 2011) Security and political co-production are thus conceptualised as ontologically inseparable, whereby this inseparability is enacted through language. Seen from this perspective, the concept of politics underlying the theory is, in an Arendtian sense, one of productivity. Despite a possibility for transformation, this conception prioritises a stable meaning of security (Pram Gad and Lund Petersen 2011, 318) and thus, contra Derrida, formalises securitisation.

While this approach sheds light on how illocution and audience may be simultaneously incorporated in the theory,

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neither does it further explain the concept of audience nor does it clarify the relative importance of context and speech act. So far, the audience has been read to exist prior to the illocution, whereas post-structuralism emphasises the constitution of identities in speech (see Butler 1997). In this vein, externalists point to the importance of a clear and comprehensive inclusion of context in securitisation theory. For the audience to be able to decide whether a securitisation move should be accepted or rejected, it relies on an extensively defined extra-discursive context (Balzacq 2005). In other words, securitisation is a “sustained argumentative practice aimed at convincing a target audience to accept, *based on what it knows about the world*, the claim that a specific development is threatening enough to deserve an immediate policy to curb it.” (Balzacq 2012, 60) Here, the two external conditions referring to the securitising actor’s social capital and the contextual dimension of the construction of a given threat become especially important. Despite the reformulation by Wæver, these conditions may be interpreted to prevent the conceptualisation of a social sphere that shapes and relates the dynamics of security.[17]

Albeit useful for empirical analyses, the emphasis on an external audience contradicts the Derridean understanding of securitisation as a speech act event. While Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde conceptualise the linguistic qualities of a speech act according to Derrida, they add an “element of contextuality as the external side of a successful speech act” (Stritzel 2007, 365) in their emphasis on the speaker-audience relationship. Therefore, and despite the later clarification by Ole Wæver, securitisation theory as conceptualised by the CS remains deeply torn between two poles: the utterance of security in a speech act and the intersubjective construction of a threat. What, then, is to be methodologised? It seems to be necessary to turn to a discussion of the methodology of securitisation theory in a next step.

## The Methodology of the Copenhagen School

In the last two sections, I have demonstrated that the CS conceptualises securitisation in a two-fold, and sometimes contradicting, way: as a speech act event and as an intersubjective process. Ole Wæver has argued that the incorporation of an audience in an illocution is possible. However, it is still unclear what exactly is to be methodologised. Drawing on the last chapter, I will make two interrelated arguments: Following Jackson (2016b), I will argue that a focus on ontology prevents the CS from developing a detailed methodology. Going beyond Jackson’s argument, I will then claim that the incoherent conceptual framework of securitisation is what renders methodological debates difficult to pursue. Before I do so, I will briefly elaborate on two relevant understandings of methodology that will guide my following argumentative practice.

### *The uses of methodology*

Methodology is, just like security, an essentially contested concept. Therefore, it is necessary to remember that there are a variety of uses, of which only two will be presented: methodology understood as a broader reflection of the philosophy underpinning one’s research, and methodology viewed as reconstructive research logic to emphasise that a problematique should not be imposed *a priori* on a research object.

While theory can be defined as “packages of ideas about how the world works [...] Methods [...] are devices that we can use in the research process to collect and analyse data” (Shepherd 2013b, 1). More specifically, theories help to generate research questions and delineate relevant and irrelevant aspects with regards to a particular problematique. Methods, on the other hand, are rules about how to choose and evaluate empirical data. Methodology then refers to the “logical structure and procedure of scientific inquiry” (Neumann in Jackson 2016b, xiv): how do I produce the knowledge I produce? It is thus more than a question of how to select one’s tools of research. Rather, methodology may be understood as what Patomäki and Wight (2000, 215) have called “philosophical ontology”, i.e. how researchers are able to produce knowledge (see also Jackson 2016b, 28–35). Recalling the post-structuralist critique on foregrounding methodology, it remains questionable why one should care about this at all. If methodology, however, is understood as “communicating choices and strategies” (Hansen 2006, xix), it forces the researcher to reflect on what it means to adopt a particular stance on how to produce knowledge but does not provide definite rules. Accordingly, Wæver (2011, 477) has called upon scholars to reflect on the question of “how does it [the theory] structurally condition work done with it in systematically political ways?”, thereby taking a position similar to Jackson’s.



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Alongside methodology, the term research logic has been used to emphasise the different forms of *linking* theory, methodology and method. Herborth (2011, 2016) distinguishes between subsumption and reconstruction as the ideal types of research logic. The former assumes that theory, methodology and method are outside of the research object, meaning that criteria for the evaluation of the quality of a research project are independent of the research object. The latter, however, takes the research object itself as a starting point and tries to develop its problematique from there. Reconstructive research logic has thus been employed particularly in critical research, with the aim to deconstruct the positivist assumptions of causality, coherence and consistency. This does not mean that reconstructive research does not strive to be internally coherent. Rather, it tries to offer a different path of doing research that makes possible the inclusion of a variety of experiences, questions, and perspectives. To this aim, it focuses on the detection of structures of meaning understood as internal differentiation in communication processes. It is this reconstructive research logic that comes closest to the methodology implicitly employed by the numerous empirical securitisation studies and by the CS itself (see Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, Wæver 2011, 2015). This is especially true for Wæver's later work and will be evident in the discussion below.

## *A social constructivist methodology*

Having briefly presented two readings of methodology, I will now link them to a discussion of the CS's 'social constructivist methodology'. There are a number of questions that are yet to be answered: How to complete an analysis of securitisation? How to locate and analyse particular practices as 'security'? How to make visible the linguistic construction of a threat? In this section, I will unfold two separate, yet intertwined arguments: Following Jackson (2016b), I will argue that a focus on ontology prevents the CS from developing a detailed methodology. Here, I will draw on Jackson's definition of methodology as philosophical ontology. Going beyond Jackson's argument, I will then claim that the incoherent framework of analysis renders methodological debates difficult to pursue. In line with the conceptual framework, I will employ the notion of a reconstructive research logic.

### *1. A pre-defined focus on methodology*

Ontology may be broadly defined as how researchers conceptualise what they study (see, for example, Klotz and Lynch 2007). More precisely, this refers to what Patomäki and Wight (2000, 215) have called "scientific ontology", centred on basic categories such as actors, structures, processes and factors that are taken or expected to exist. Jackson (2016b) has rightfully argued that a focus on scientific ontology has led IR to neglect methodology. The same is true for securitisation theory. The brief reconstruction of the framing of securitisation as speech act event or intersubjective process in the last chapter is a case in point, as is the general debate on how to frame security. Very few of the empirical studies that employ securitisation explain their methodology but emphasise ontological concerns. A brief examination of the CS's *Framework for Analysis* will clarify this point. Wæver operates from a background that has been termed post-structuralist realism (Wæver 1989). This ontology includes the realist assumption that security is essentially about survival but allows for the introduction of the ontological importance of language that is posited by post-structuralism. This is particularly evident in the simultaneous emphasis on the potential durability of social constructions and his understanding of security as social practice (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 33-35, 203-207).[18] Looking at later conceptualisations such as Wæver's (2015) conception of securitisation as a co-produced illocutionary event through which a situation becomes regulated and defined by security, we see that he, too, stays within the narrow boundaries of scientific ontology. What follows on the definition of security is the classical sequence of ontology first, epistemology second. While there are different epistemological claims made about the securitisation theory by the CS, it mostly boils down to assuming that studying language is how researchers know what they know. In other words, securitisation means "analysing actual linguistic practices to see what regulates discourse. What do practitioners do *in* talking security?" (Wæver 2003, 9) This is but one example that illustrates how a limited focus on ontology and epistemology causes the CS to skip a further consideration of their modes of knowledge production.

### *2. The ambiguity of the conceptual framework*

Going beyond Jackson, I will now turn to a further discussion of the methodological implications of securitisation theory. Securitisation essentially serves as a conceptual framework (see Guzzini 2011, 331). More precisely, Wæver

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(2011, 470–471) has framed securitisation as an “idea theory [...] that clearly has one distinct concept at its centre, and in which key concepts form a closely integrated constellation”. Drawing on and refining his Waltzian understanding of theory as depicting the organisation of particular realms and the connections among its parts (see Waltz 1979, 8), securitisation is structured by Wæver around the core idea that security is to be conceived as a speech act. Consequently, Wæver (2003, 35) argues that securitisation stretches into other areas and may, therefore, be combined with a number of other theories as it offers criteria for the delineation of security issues (i.e. exceptionalism, securitising move, audience acceptance).

Hence, Wæver avoids the formulation of a single methodology and instead argues for a pluralisation of methods and methodology. This is particularly evident when Wæver (2015, 123) claims that his illocutionary approach integrates three stages of analysis with different methodologies each, organised around securitisation as an illocutionary political event. Elsewhere, he reiterates: “The theory does not point to one particular type of study as the right one. The theory rather operates as a conceptual apparatus [...]”. (Wæver 2003, 21) This plurality is an essential feature of reconstructive research logic. At first sight, it is therefore unproblematic that the CS seeks to include various perspectives and experiences. However, two major difficulties arise, one inherent in their conceptualisation of security, one owed to the latter’s ambiguity. As demonstrated in the last chapter, the CS already knows what securitisation should look like; that is, crudely put, an illocutionary speech act through which a referent object is drawn into a state of exceptionality. They even suggest the concrete research question of “who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions (i.e., what explains when securitization is successful)” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 25, 32) that is to be answered through discourse analysis and the study of political constellations. Reconstructive research logic, however, posits that one should start with its research object and develop one’s problematique from there. The CS thereby contradicts their own premises. Interestingly, scholars less identified with the original CS approach have also called upon researchers to delve into the question of what qualifies an issue as an instance of securitisation (Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka 2016, 520), thereby taking a subsumptive methodological stance. Although the conceptual apparatus does give a rather clear explanation of how securitisation should look like, it is too imprecise to formulate definite criteria. Therefore, it seems as if securitisation theory tries to unsuccessfully take a middle ground between reconstruction and subsumption.

This resonates with the second difficulty. If the CS at least partially formalises securitisation, why are they not clearer in their methodology? Securitisation theory remains deeply torn between securitisation understood as a speech act event and securitisation viewed as an intersubjective process. For it is unclear what is to be methodologised, the concept itself is rather weak. In fact, it is the ambiguity of the conceptual apparatus that leads to an inherent incoherence across the studies done with securitisation theory. The framing of securitisation as a speech act event and as an intersubjective process entails asking very different methodological questions. In the sense of the premises of reconstructive research logic, I agree with Stritzel who has argued for a more comprehensive theory of securitisation where “the main aim would be to provide better guidance for systematic and comparative empirical analysis, yet leaving it to the empirical studies themselves to work out in detail which element of the framework is, when and why, most important.” (Stritzel 2007, 358) To illustrate my argument, it seems to be useful to briefly discuss the methodological problems that result from the framing of securitisation as speech act event and as an intersubjective process. They are loosely structured in three blocs: performativity, audience, and context.

The notion of performativity that is built in the CS’s understanding of securitisation as a speech act raises particular difficulties from a methodological perspective. If securitisation is conceptualised as a speech act event, a specific methodological focus follows logically. From a purely Derridean perspective, Aradau, Coward, et al. (2015, 70) affirm that “performativity entails particular attention to repetitive and iterative practices through which boundaries are established and fixed.” However, as spelt out in more detail in the last section, the CS is far from employing a fully Derridean understanding of securitisation. Speech is viewed as performative in the sense that it entails an “ongoing construction of (social) reality” (Guzzini 2011, 335). The question remains if the speaker, the audience and the context exist prior to the securitising move or are constituted through speech. For both options require very different methodological foci, the notion of performativity in securitisation needs to be clarified.

This is particularly relevant in light of the yet unanswered question of how the relevant audience(s) is/are to be

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determined. In a recent publication, Buzan and Wæver (2009) have suggested that it is almost impossible to identify audiences, particularly at the systemic level. This further complicates the empirical applicability of securitisation theory. Balzacq (2011b, 9) has suggested to define the relevant audience as the one who “a) has a direct causal connection with the issue; and b) has the ability to enable the securitizing actor to adopt measures in order to tackle the threat.”[19] However, one thereby refutes the possibility that the audience may be constituted through the speech act itself (Williams 2011a, b). This resonates with the problem of what audience acceptance entails exactly. While the CS has assured that the purpose of any analysis must be to “understand the processes of constructing a shared understanding of what is to be considered and collectively responded to as a threat” (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998, 26), they have not clarified the role of the audience in this construction. Who decides what a successful securitisation is? As Léonard and Kaunert (2011) have argued, the power of the audience over the social construction of a threat is rather ambiguous. For Wæver (2015) explicitly negates that the audience should be viewed as purely receiving, and a successful securitising move is not only dependant on mere uptake, it appears that the CS grants the audience a significant role in the process (see also the last section on securitisation as an intersubjective process). This becomes especially clear when securitisation is framed as a co-produced illocutionary event. In some cases, however, the audience may be found not to participate in the political co-production, for example in a non-democratic context. In this case, Wæver (2015) has argued for a re-theorising of this form of political interaction. This may be understandable as long as not taking part is seen as an active choice. But what if the audience is silenced and cannot participate in the negotiation of the illocutionary event? (see Hansen 2000)

This problem is connected to the inclusion of context in the framework. More precisely, it should be elucidated how some securitising moves come to resonate with an audience, especially in light of their possible absence or constitution through the speech act itself. How can we study the processes that enable actors to speak on behalf of constituencies? In this vein, it might be particularly interesting to examine the importance of actors' social capital and to firmly ground the Bourdieuan notion in the theory by positing criteria for its analysis.

Wæver (2015) has made an attempt at resolving these questions through his framing of securitisation as a co-produced illocutionary speech act. By linking the two conceptions of securitisation through illocution, methodological attention is drawn to the co-production of the illocutionary event of securitisation. Wæver claims that this theory enables the analysis of a distinct social phenomenon. The *event* of changes in deontic modal competences is understood as political co-production in the relationships among actors. Hence, it is the “moment when the status transformation and the rearrangement of the rights and responsibilities of actors produced through the communication of socially-accepted security speech occurs [*sic*]” (Côté 2015, 75). The *effects* of such changes on society, process, and polity may then be studied in a more causal language. Material, discursive and institutional *conditions* frame and make possible these events of change. A securitisation move may be viewed as successful if a status transformation is achieved, changing an actor's specific modal deontic competences. According to Wæver, this allows for the integration of three distinct stages of analysis: first, the relatedness of societal conditions and the aspirations of multiple actors; second, the complex arrangements in terms of the political codification that constitutes them as particular relationships; third, the effects of securitisation understood as organization (Wæver 2015, 123). Wæver thereby shifts his ontological and epistemological focus away from performativity to political co-production. The speech act event must here be analysed neither as one-sided nor as socially determined.

Again, we see an attempt to relate different ontologies in one approach. While this is certainly possible, it is questionable if this leads to a more consistent framework. If the concept entails numerous ways of knowledge production, can it still be coherent? Let us look at the different stages of analysis in turn. First, the researcher is to relate the aspiration of actors to societal conditions. Here, it is advisable to turn to a sociological analysis of normative patterns that condition political possibilities. Action theory, speech act theory, political theory or an analysis of the relevant actors' expertise also seem in order (Wæver 2011, 477). In a second step, empirical studies are to analyse the complex arrangements in terms of the political codification that constitutes these as particular relationships. Wæver suggests speech act theory to determine these arrangements. The effects of securitisation are, third, to be examined causally as the consequences of a political move. Having analysed the transforming event of securitisation, one must ask what difference securitisation makes (Wæver 2011, 476). Political theory capable of exploring actors' and audiences' choices under different arrangements then serves a cross-cutting task for it helps to interrogate the deontic modal constellations politically and ethically. For securitisation is inherently political, “it puts an ethical

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question at the feet of analysts, decision-makers and activists alike: why do you call this a security issue? What are the implications of doing this – or of not doing it?” (Wæver 1999, 334) This question may be answered with the help of political theory.

While this set-up must certainly be probed further for its internal consistency, I am doubtful if it works in practice. Again, raising methodological concerns will clarify my point. On a general note, I am concerned that these methodologies might not work well together. Jackson (2016b) has argued that a distinct philosophy of science points to a distinct way of knowledge production. In Wæver’s theory, different scientific ontologies are mixed, and it remains questionable if they match well. This is particularly difficult to assess for he does not explain his methodology in detail. Hence, it is unclear to which sociology, speech act theory, causal testing and political theory he refers precisely. One critique may be posited nevertheless. Drawing on Sbisà’s re-reading of Austin, I argue that the causal effects of a speech act should be re-theorised in securitisation theory. Austin (1967 [1962], 115–116) maintains that an illocution entails three distinct effects: securing of uptake, bringing about of conventional effects, and inviting a response. It is the second effect that is of particular interest here. Sbisà (2009, 45) has convincingly argued that the effect of an illocutionary act “consists of a change not in the natural course of events but in norms, that is, in something belonging to the realm of social conventions: a new norm is enacted, as it can be seen from the assessments of people’s relevant behaviour that may stem from the norm.”

Hence, she claims that speech acts do not naturally cause any effect but rather create a norm that must be socially accepted to take effect. In this context, Guzzini (2011) holds that causal mechanisms allow for an introduction of causality to securitisation theory. Drawing on Elster’s definition of social mechanisms as “frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences” (Guzzini 2011, 332), he asserts that contingent and indeterminate causal mechanisms may *ex post* explain why something happened. In other words, securitisation can trigger a certain effect, i.e. serve as a causal mechanism. This is only true under certain conditions: first, the notion of securitisation must be procedural to take into account ‘frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns’. However, if we only study the event of securitisation, its conditions and effects, how can we account for these patterns or gradual constructions of security that happen over time (see Abrahamsen 2005, McDonald 2008)? Second, the contingency of a given speech act’s facilitating conditions must be emphasised. The majority of the conditions are, in their present form, rather structural for they rely on an actor’s social capital and references to issues that are historically connoted as threats. Hence, it must be reiterated that these conditions may be affected by the discourse of securitisation rather than structuring securitisation itself. While the latter aspect may be easily included in the existing framework, it is questionable if Wæver’s (2015) understanding does allow for the analysis of long-term securitisation processes. On a more practical note, we may ask where to locate this causal mechanism temporarily: is it confined to the moment of the triggering itself, to the type of triggered action complexes or does it encompass the whole process (Guzzini 2011, 337)? We clearly see that there are a number of questions to be answered before securitisation theory and its methodology as posited by Wæver (2015) can be checked as internally consistent.

This section has demonstrated how the CS suffers from a two-fold constraint in their efforts to produce a coherent methodology. First, a narrow focus on scientific ontology and epistemology causes the CS to skip a further consideration of their modes of knowledge production. Second, and more importantly, the theoretical weaknesses of the conceptual framework itself prevent methodological rigour. Even after a further clarification by Wæver, there are a number of inconsistencies that need to be addressed further before the development of a consistent methodology is possible.

## Conclusion

In this essay, I have asked why securitisation theory has been unable to develop a coherent methodology. Like Jackson (2016b), I have found that a focus on scientific ontological debates has led the CS to largely ignore methodology. Going beyond Jackson, I have demonstrated how the ambiguous theoretical conceptualisation of security prohibits the development of a consistent methodology. An internalist reading emphasises the conceptualisation of securitisation as a speech act event, while an externalist take concentrates on the intersubjective process of securitisation. Consequently, it remains unclear what aspect is to be methodologised.

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Recently, Wæver (2015) has posited a different understanding of securitisation that accentuates the political co-production of security through a change in actors' deontic modal competences. However, his claim that this approach is able to integrate different methodologies is doubtful and requires more clarification. Hence, I hold that the CS has successfully established a theoretical framework but is unable to specify its methodological implications.

Williams (2015, 114) has suggested that "methodological precision confront crucial limitations because at its core [...] securitization is incapable of being fully captured by empirical social science." This is particularly true in light of the myriad of possibilities that arise from the indeterminacy of the process of securitisation that make the development of a comprehensive framework impossible. While this is certainly true, I have argued that the clear vocalisation of one's philosophical ontology and of a coherent research logic is useful in dealing with the conceptual weaknesses of the approach. In this sense, I hope that this essay contributes to an emerging debate in making a strong case for methodological care and greater coherence in securitisation theory.

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## Notes

[1] Baele and Sterck (2014) make the same argument but then proceed to promote empirical case studies rather than theoretical reflections. On the contrary, I will argue that it is exactly this theoretical framework that is problematic.

[2] In this essay, I will follow the conventional use of the shorthand IR in capital letters to denote the academic discipline and will use ir in lower case to refer to international relations understood as international politics.

[3] It is beyond the scope of this essay to formulate a new methodology for securitisation theory.

[4] The publication of *Security: A New Framework of Analysis* has triggered a controversial debate on both its general approach to security and its conceptual weaknesses. In this essay, I will focus on the second, internal criticism and will leave the external critique to those interested in positivist thinking. See Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2015, 102-104) for an overview of the most prominent critiques.

[5] All emphases are in original unless stated otherwise.

[6] To perform both an illocutionary and a perlocutionary act means to perform a locutionary act. The former two, however, are not a consequence of the latter.

[7] Austin does not clarify how meanings attach to words. As I will show in the next section, Derrida is much clearer on this.

[8] See Krämer (2001, 226) for a discussion.

[9] As we will see in the later sections, it is the concept of iterability that is particularly important for the internalist critique of the CS.

[10] The name "Copenhagen School" was coined by Bill McSweeney in a critical review essay, which turned into an exchange between him and Buzan/Wæver. See McSweeney (1996), Buzan and Wæver (1997), McSweeney (1998).

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[11] While the CS was built around the ideas of securitisation, sectors, and regional security complexes, securitisation defines most distinctly the school (Wæver 2004a, 8). For their conceptualisation of securitisation, the authors draw heavily from Wæver's earlier work, particularly from Wæver (1989, 1995). This will be evident in the following sections.

[12] Hence, security is seen as negative. Desecuritization, i.e. a move to place a particular issue back in the realm of 'normal' political procedures, should be the aim. Due to limited space, I will focus on securitization in this essay.

[13] Note the CS's closeness to traditional Security Studies in their reference to survival as the defining factor of security. Traditionally, it was only the state which could be securitised. The CS holds that any given object may be securitised.

[14] This may also be interpreted to include humanitarian, military, cultural, economic, and scientific capital (Villumsen Berling 2011).

[15] Wæver's understanding of language is primarily Derridean, but he also draws on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in his definition of discourse. See Wæver (2002) for further elaboration.

[16] This blind sport might be partly closed if the emphasis on exceptionality were widened to include security practices that deal with issue that are not framed as requiring exceptional measures. See the extensive literature on risk, on which Kessler (2010) provides a good overview. See also the critique on the absence of everyday practices of security (Bigo and Tsoukala 2008) and the expansion of the concept of exception to a more permanent state (Agamben 2005).

[17] In her post-structuralist reading of the CS, Hansen (2011) shows that the inclusion of a discursive context is fully in order.

[18] While this position might be justified as a methodological choice, it indicates ontological gerrymandering for it places a boundary between problematised and unquestioned assumptions (see Woolgar and Pawluch 1985).

[19] For different suggestions on how to re-conceptualise the audience, see Vuori (2008) and Salter (2008).

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