What is in an act? Dispersing politics of insecurity

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'I discuss security as a speech act', Ole Wæver writes in 1995 (Wæver, 1995). This idea has been reiterated by many seeking to study security as a practice of rendering insecurities It has played a significant role in rallying research studying insecurity not as an environmental condition upon which one acts but as a particular discursive rendition of that environment through security practice. Wæver and his colleagues at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute were not the only ones working the linguistic turn in philosophy and social theory into security studies (e.g. Campbell, 1992, Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989, Fierke, 1998) but theirs was among the most successful in International Studies in the sense of constituting this philosophical move into a research programme. An increasing number of people have worked with their key concepts, and specifically the notion of security as a speech act, to study a vast range of securitising processes. Their conceptual apparatus, which includes more than simply the notion of security being a speech act, has also invited intense conceptual and theoretical debate that engage the key concepts from within – identifying limitations and developing alternative conceptions that develop the programme rather than criticizing in search of a new alternative research programme.

The reasons for this success are multiple, as usually. Compared to other linguistic conceptions of security (such as language games, writing security, security discourse), which are more intuitively adept to studying intersubjective processes of meaning construction, their notion of 'speech act' more directly and explicitly expresses a political investment. The notion of 'act' carries both a conception of the political and a possibility for a political critique of security practice that resonates with common understandings of politics in international studies. The starting point of this paper is the question: What is this political investment carried by the concept of act? Yet, my reason for asking this question is not to venture into a detailed examination of the concept of act. Instead it is the springboard towards another question, which arises from the observation that particular processes of securitizing, among others the technologically mediated spread of surveillance, take a form in which it is difficult to 'locate' significant speech acts of security, while analysts tend to fall back on some notion of act to interpret the politics in the process. The central question this paper seeks to open up is: What can the politics of insecurity be in a securitising process that effaces acts?

The paper consists of three moves. The first unpacks central aspects of the political investment carried by the 'act' in the conception of 'speech acts of security'. The second examines the limits of this concept of 'act' in highly dispersed and dispersing processes of securitising? The final move introduces a set of concepts that support an analytics of the politics of insecurity when securitising takes place through relations between dispersed often habitual practices which make a recourse to 'acts' as the actualization of a decision with gravity difficult. The central concept is the notion of disputes in which controversies over insecurity are contests of criteria of justification and justice. As a whole the paper is a proposal to move from speech acts of security and the exceptionality of politics that is invested in it to a political sociology of associating in dispute.

Political investment in 'the security act'

Because the move towards understanding security as a practice of making insecurities was strongly embedded in the linguistic turn, much attention went to examining discourse and speech. The ontological status of language, discourse as methodology, speech acts as a particular form of speech, rhetorical structures and grammars of security speech took to the front pages. More specifically in relation to the concept of speech act, discussions opened up, sometimes briefly sometimes sustained and intense, over issues such the meaning of security that was 'activated' in the speech

act, the exclusion of silence as an act, the relevance of images, the conditions of felicity of a speech act. The conception of 'act' itself, however, remained largely untouched. It mainly functioned as a signifier included for expressing the performative nature of language, i.e. marking that language does not mirror the world but acts upon it and creates stuff.

Recently the question of studying the effects of speech acts of security on an audience led to a focus on theorizing communicative relations. Moving the discussion from what is invested in the security speech to how this investment can be carried from the speaker to the audience brings practice more explicitly into the picture. It is not just the speech that matters but the circulation of security speech and its appropriation or refusal by those who are addressed. This interrogation of the speech act, however, does not unpack explicitly what is invested in the notion of 'act', either. It folds the act into conceptions of interaction – pragmatist (Balzacq, 2005) or dramaturgical (Salter, 2008) – and an interest in the effectiveness of speech act, i.e. in its outward orientation. The question of what the notion of 'act' itself carries besides connoting the performativity of speech remains largely untouched.

Sounds like hair-splitting? It is. Yet, I think it is worth splitting these hairs a little. More is going on in the 'act' than it is given credit for. The notion of 'act' is central for understanding the political investment made in moving towards studying security as a speech act. The 'act' expresses a conception of the political and the conditioning of political critique of security practice. Examining more closely the concept of act is thus important for understanding in what way security practice is political.

I would like to start from four short quotes:

> '… a problem would become a *security* issue whenever so defined by the power holders.' (Wæver, 1995:56)

> 'By uttering "security" a state-representative 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)

> 'The point of my argument, however, is not that to speak "security" means simply to talk in a higher-pitched voice. It is slightly more complex than that: "security" is a specific move that entails consequences which involve risking oneself and offering a specific issue as a test case. Doing this may have a price and, in that sense, it could be regarded as a way to "raise the bet".' (Wæver, 1995:75)

> 'Thereby the actor has claimed a right to handle the issue through extraordinary means to break the normal political rules of the game …' (Buzan et al., 1998:24)

A lot is going on in these quotes but the first thing to notice is that the act implies a creative move. It is not simply speaking to make oneself heard; it is a speech that moves issues out of a given setting and creates a new scene. '[A] state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area …' (Wæver, 1995:55) 'The actor has claimed a right to handle the issue through extraordinary means to break the normal political rules of the game …' (Buzan, et al., 1998:24) What I want to propose is that the notion of act implies something quite different than the action of moving the relation between countries, population movement, development or the environment from one policy area to another. The key political quality of the speech act of security is that the move to another area creates a break in the normal political rules of the game. When security becomes an act it is not a routine practice, an acting out of given procedures and institutionalized conditions of

felicity, a habitual practice, but it creates a scene in which actors and things are brought into a relation that challenges a given way of doing things. It sets something in motion by enacting the unexpected, unknown, unpredictable (Isin, 2008:27). Let's use the term 'rupture' to express this central quality of an act. (Isin, 2008) An act creates 'a scene' that ruptures a given order; that is how acts 'raise the bet'. The idea of rupture does not refer to replacing one order with another one or one conception of order challenging another one, however. Rather it refers to practices that create boundary conditions, however infinitesimal and momentary, through enacting limits of a given order. Enacting refers to both expressing limits and bringing the limits into being as an issue of contestation.[1]

The 'act' thus expresses something different then the question if an audience accepts the speech act of security. The issue is not whether the intentionality of securitizing by those speaking security is realised through an audience agreeing with them or not. Neither is it whether security practices and technologies become institutionalised, i.e. accepted by the audience and turned into routines and technologies one encounters at airports etc. The 'realization' of an act is not in creating acceptance or consensus or in its institutionalized consequences but in the creation of a rupturing scene itself, irrespective of its acceptance. 'To act, then, is neither arriving at a scene nor fleeing from it, but actually engaging in its creation.' (Isin, 2008:27) What matters is not consensus, acceptance or implementation but rather that the scene brought into existence as 'an assemblage of acts, actions and actors in a historically and geographically concrete situation' (Isin, 2008:24) by actors remaining at the rupturing scene rather than fleeing from it.

The concept of act implies a sharp distinction between a given order and creation. But this in itself does not make the act political. The political quality derives from actualizing this distinction in *a decision* to create. The concept of decision is central for understanding the political investment in the concept of 'act'. When 'power holders define an issue as a security issue' when 'they offer a specific issue as a test case' they make a decision. But everyone makes decisions all the time, so what? The concept of decision here is not simply an expression of volition – the will to create, to decide – or of choice between given options. As a political category it implies, what Isin following Bakhtin calls, answerability (Isin, 2008:28-35). By acting the power holders do not simply enact a rupture in the given, i.e. they are already moving beyond a choice between mere givens; they also become answerable to others (Isin, 2008:30-31). Answerability has different dimensions. First, an act as decision introduces responsibility towards others. One cannot hide behind necessity, routine, habits in the act of security creation. It is a rupture in the given that one enacts with certain calculable consequences for others. Therefore, 'power holders' can be made responsible and procedures of accountability can be applied. This is the first way in which the concept of act introduces a condition of political critique of securitization. Securitizing is made political by treating it as a contingent – creative rather than habitual – decision to rupture the given ,to break the normal rules of the game, by using security language. On that basis those acting are accountable and responsible for the creation of a rupturing security scene. Individualized responsibility and transparency of how decisions are taken on the basis of what knowledge function as default criteria facilitating political criticism of a process that is often presented as being under the spell of necessity – no choices when survival is at stake – and the imperative of secrecy.(e.g. Wood and Dupont, 2006)

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[1] For examples: Isin and Nielsen (2008); Andrijasevic et al. (2010), Aradau et al. (2010)

Secondly, answerability to others also means the authorization of authority. As a decision that ruptures the given an act opens the question of where the actors get the authority from to break the routine. In the securitization approach this is conceptualized as the question of the legitimacy to move from the normal procedures of democratic politics to exceptional political measures. The act of security is seen as authorizing this exceptional enactment of authority. It answers the question of the authority to rupture precisely by speaking 'existential security'. Speaking security makes it possible 'to claim special rights'. The answerability to others brings the process of securitising to political judgement in public debate around the authorization of transgressive authority moving matters into a terrain of exceptional politics. For example, currently much of this answerability is articulated through a tension between fundamental rights and the necessity of security, and more specifically a revaluation of the relation between security and freedom.

These two aspects of answerability fold the act somehow back into an existing order. The rupture of the given becomes a transgression. They bring into play normative and political orders to evaluate the acceptability of transgressions in terms of calculable consequences of the act – translated back into responsibility of the actors for their decisions – and norms of authorization. Yet, as an act the security speech cannot be folded back into given orders; an act is a rupturing decision, a move into the unexpected and unknown[2]. This implies a third answerability of the decision; an answerability not in terms of calculable consequences and techniques of authorization but to the undecidability, the radical openness and creativity of being. This paradox of the act (Isin, 2008:29), of the act being folded into an order – without reference to an order one cannot say much about an act and the immediate political answerability implied by the decision requires referencing back to an order – and nevertheless retaining a radical distance from it, defines the specific conception of the political in the act. This conception of answerability links the act to the recent revival of conceptions of sovereignty as the expression of a politics that is placed both inside and outside an existing normative order.[3]

The notion of act conceptualises the political as a scene, process or moment of exceptionality. An act creates an exception in the routine of life which functions as a moment of challenging the givenness of the routine by enacting its limits. As exceptionality the act places itself therefore simultaneously inside and outside of an unfolding history or order. The exceptionality of the act does not necessarily mean that an act is exceptionalist. Exceptionalism invests a particular political conception of the exceptionality in the act. As argued elsewhere (Huysmans, 2006, Huysmans, 1998), the speech act *of security,* as conceptualised by Wæver and his colleagues, does indeed invest the act with a Schmittean exceptionalism that authorises transgressive authority and enacts limits of a given order by calling upon existential threats. In other words, when Wæver says that by declaring security the power holders claim special rights he does not simply mean that they rupture but also that rupturing through calling upon security – i.e. existential situations – creates a rupture through the enactment of exceptionalism, i.e. the authorisation of power outside of the existing rules sanctioning, and thus

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[2] In current international studies this aspect is brought out most sharply in Derridean readings of the political: for example (Edkins, 1999)

[3] Often this idea is currently mobilized through a reference to Agamben's work who borrows the idea from Schmitt.((Agamben, 1998)) Conceptions of the political based on the paradox of the act should not be simply reduced to a Schmittean inspired conception of sovereignty, however. Although this paper is not the place to unpack how various traditions of thought have worked conceptions of the political through the question of acts, it is currently worth mentioning that there is more to political philosophy of the act – and of sovereignty – than Agamben and Schmitt. (Isin and Nielsen, 2008, Prokhovnik, 2007, Villa, 1996)

also constraining, authority. This particular rupturing of the given through creating an assemblage around an existential threat and necessity does not exhaust the exceptionality of the notion of act but it is central to how Wæver and his colleagues understand the securitiness of the speech act of security. It is a specific modulation of the act and the conditions of critique the act brings to the scene.[4]

Yet, this exceptionalist filling in brings out more explicitly in particular two more general characteristics of thinking politics through the notion of acts. First, exceptionalist politics draws a sharp distinction between the routine, alienation, reiteration of the everyday and the decisiveness and creativity of the moments of exception – the moments of existential threat. Although exceptionalism modulates this distinction in a particular way, drawing a sharp differentiation between the everyday, routine, habits, ordinary and the special, creative, rupturing, extra-ordinary is a more general characteristic of political acts. From the perspective of the given, of unfolding everyday processes acts constitute politics as exceptions, i.e. what transgresses or cannot be fully folded into unfolding processes. Secondly, exceptionalism brings out sharply the gravitational conception of politics that is invested in the conception of act. The existential condition that exceptionalist politics call up pulls forces towards a decisive scene, an assembly of actions and actors that carry weight both in terms of producing cracks in a given order and making issues into a test case. Decisions need to be taken; survival is at stake. Acts do not necessarily carry this existential weight but they do refer to actions and actors coming together in moments with enough gravitas to create a rupturing scene. I highlight both the break with the everyday and the gravitational notion of practice because the issue which certain processes of securitising pose for reading politics of insecurity through conceptions of acts arise from blurring the distinction between the exceptional and the everyday and from radically diffusing moments of decision thereby losing gravitation.

Unpacking a little the politicality of the notion of act in the 'speech act of security' aimed in the first instance at bringing out that the possibility for a political analytics and critique in the securitisation approach is carried by the concept of act rather than security or speech. Understanding security speech as an actualisation of a decision rupturing a given order and instigating a scene of answerability to others makes it possible to move from a sociology of processes of securitising to an analysis of the politics of insecurity. The concept of act is of course not limited to a securitising act, i.e. an act that ruptures a given time and order by calling upon existential threats. Securitising can also refer to an instituted process whose limits are brought into play by desecuritising acts, for example. In both cases, the move from an unfolding process to politics is conceptualised through the notion of 'act'. Politics is about rupturing and the complex set of answerability to others it creates. This political investment in the speech act of insecurity risks disappearing when one over-sociologises the speech act of security – when one focuses on conditions of success, on the social and historical conditioning of the capacity to speak, etc. In the next section I look at how particular processes of securitising seem to be 'losing the act' when decisions become highly dispersed and lose gravity. The challenge act effacing securitising poses for security studies is not so much sociologically – these processes can be sociologically analysed – than political. What can a political

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[4] A politics of insecurity based on acts places us squarely in a tradition of critical politics, where key political moments are moments of critique, of rupturing the given, which do not have to be progressive as the conservative revolutions in the 1920s and 30s demonstrated but do need to be rupturing and to resist being completely folded back into a given order.

analytic that carries the possibility of political critique be when the notion of act loses its sociological relevance?

Act-effacing securitising?

Securitising in contemporary world politics develops significantly through unspectacular processes of technologically driven surveillance, risk management, and precautionary governance.(Amoore and de Goede, 2008c, Aradau et al., 2008, Aradau and van Munster, 2008, Daase and Kessler, 2007, Ericson, 2007, Ericson and Haggerty, 1997, Tsoukala, 2009) These processes are less about declaring a territorialised enemy and threat of war than about dispersing techniques of administering uncertainty and 'mapping' dangers. I am not talking in the first place about 'the war on terror', which has now become a central references point for many of these discussions, but about the dispersal of risk management techniques, surveillance, data mining and profiling, the rendition of objects like letters into matters of concern over danger (Neyland, 2009) and other processes of rendering and dispersing insecurities. A rich body of work exists that analyses the nature and implications of surveillance, precautionary and pre-emptive security practice, and governing through risk. One of the peculiar elements that is brought out by some of this literature is that this securitising process effaces 'acts'.

> In the dispersed practices of the contemporary security apparatus, we may never know if a decision *is* a decision (…) or if it has been 'controlled by previous knowledge' and 'programmed'. (Amoore & de Goede 2008: 180)

The statement can be read in different ways but I want to bring out two particular characteristics of this securitising process that indicate that 'acts' – i.e. actualisations of decisions – as we defined them above are a problematic category for the analysis as well as political critique of this process.

First, the securitising through risk, precaution and surveillance is a highly dispersed and dispersing practice. It is heavily mediated by surveillance technologies that associate people, sites, things, and time into risk profiles. As a result the process is strongly 'automated', not in the sense of a machine just doing what it is programmed to do, but in the sense of a process that associates largely without single critical moments of decision[5]. Decisions are taken all the time, both in the development and the application but they are dispersed and it is relatively difficult to assign critically significant actions to particular actors or to aggregate sets of actions into a limited group of actors who holds them together so as to constitute an assemblage or association through which a particular security practice can be enacted. Securitising develops through a wide variety of mediators that connect data, people, sites, and times but in connecting also change the material they are connecting (Latour, 2005:39) – programming an algorithm connect data in a way that differentiates travelling into degrees of danger, insurability significantly impacts on sites, action, and data. If mediations are numerous, constantly shifting and dispersed, it becomes very difficult if not impossible to assess which actions are actualising a decision that brings into play the limits of a given order, that has gravity where forces come together rupturing given processes and orders. Gravitas refers to a capacity for producing cracks and can be grounded in institutionalised position, mobilisation of bodies, unexpected public action, etc. As argued in the previous section, the concept of 'act' politicises securitising processes precisely by identifying particular moments – of speech – that

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[5] For example: G.J.D. Smith shows the complexity of assembling surveillance via CCTV looked when looked at from the perspective of the practice of CCTV operators: (Smith, 2009)

concentrate developments into an actualisation of a decision that ruptures normal procedures of practice. If instead of 'moments of decision' we have a myriad of decisions in a process that is continuously made and remade, then what is left of the analytics as well as political critique of securitising that is invested in the notion of act? It invites moving from speech *act*s of security to concepts and methodologies that facilitate studying associating in highly dispersing practices and things. From the perspective of 'acts' this associating will look unspectacular, unexceptional, continuous, and repetitive.

Secondly, these dispersed processes of securitising through risk, surveillance and precaution works easily across multiple areas of policy but it also challenges the boundary between security practice and daily life. They often blur, or at least rework distinctions between private and public (Amoore and de Goede, 2008a, Favarel-Garrigues et al., 2009, e.g. Lund Petersen, 2008, Lyon, 2001), civil and military (e.g. Duffield, 2007, Duffield, 2001), and normal, deviant and criminal (e.g. Ericson, 2007, Ericson and Haggerty, 1997, Tsoukala, 2009). Somehow most surveillance comes across as routine; a routine which is reinforced by the strong technological mediation of data and practice. Writing the logarithms is central to the functioning of data mining. Introducing loyalty cards to track consumption patterns, introducing credit card payments as the obvious form of payment thus making it possible to profile cash payments as suspicious, and developing many other data gathering devices are important. Many of these practices come about in piecemeal fashion and slip into daily life without much ado thus blurring the distinction between the everyday and security practice. Governing sites and lives through risk calculation often operate in diverse areas of life and become embroiled with policing and national security (Amoore, 2006, Ericson and Haggerty, 1997, Lund Petersen, 2008)

The speech *act* of security works with a distinction between the everyday and the exceptionality of security acts. The process I am referring to above challenge this distinction by securitising the everyday. The technological and governmental dispersal of techniques of governing through risk, surveillance and precaution makes the distinction between routine and exception, habit and rupture, difficult to maintain. Much of the associating of objects, subjects, practices and their data doubles take place as common professional developments. The changes in assembling are better understood in terms of innovations and controversies rather than rupture. A rupture draws attention to a fixed frame of reference, a given order that has been able to aggregate a multiplicity of practices, subjects and objects into a whole expressing a particular rationale. The rupture is an event that demonstrates the existence of order and its limits by breaking the 'habitual', however fleetingly. In such a reading power consists in the capacity and practice of aggregating and fixing multiplicity into a 'global' system of practice and in the capacity to disrupt the aggregation so as to make new aggregations possible. Yet, the securitising process I am referring to creates through dispersing, through continuously associating, re-associating, tweaking and experimenting with materials, procedures, regulations, etc. The scene of securitising is not one of expressing a given order but of creating things, meanings, subjects in habitual, everyday innovation and making differences through enacting controversies in meetings, discussions, regulations, programming, etc. Power is then to be understood as infinitesimal mediations not in the sense of transporting a systemic dominance or development into everyday, micro-practices but in the sense of the making of specific, detailed differences through experimental *bricolage* in practices of sketching, trials, meetings, regulations, etc. (Latour, 2005) Exceptionality gives way to innovations and controversies that are worked in dispersed sites through habitual everyday, ordinary practices of associating (see

e.g. Walters, forthcoming on standardisation practices). The latter understanding of agency questions the relevance of thinking change through 'acts' that imply an actualisation of exceptionality.[6]

Daily life as a realm upon which security professionals practice protection is seriously folded into the security practice itself. Risk management, surveillance, and precautionary methods work within daily life, as much as upon it. Credit cards, cctv, filling in forms for a myriad of services, monitoring workers, consumer data, advertising sustaining precautionary dispositions, products carrying risks (e.g. fertilisers) intertwine profiling, control, national security with daily activities. The issue is therefore not simply a securitisation of everyday life, i.e. making daily life an object of security practice and everyday objects and practices becoming carriers of risk and danger (Aas et al., 2009:2) The idea of folding daily and security practice implies that the rendition of insecurity takes place through daily practices, that it is becoming difficult to separate the governmental apparatus, private or public, that work upon daily life from the practices of daily life and the self-constitution of insecure subjects (Furedi, 2002, Huysmans, 2009, Isin, 2004). Many daily activities, meetings, regulations are actively part of the shaping of securitising processes. People use and engage 'securitising' technology and regulations all the time. The idea of folding implies that this engaging is not a routinised acting out of the logic of security practices but creates controversies in the sense that the technology and regulations are negotiated, 'abused', ignored, in short 'innovated'. Ordinary engagement of those who are supposed to apply or ignore the instituted procedures and technologies are active mediators making differences. Katja Aas, Helene Gundhus and Heidi Lomell capture this through the idea of domesticating surveillance technology. (Aas, et al., 2009) Technology does not work always as intended because of the gap between what it can do and the uses that are made of it. They are primarily interested in this gap for understanding the possibility of resistance but it also points to the more general phenomenon of the multiplicity, dispersal and continuous recreation of scenes of innovating securitising and the creation of controversies about it. While Aas and her colleagues emphasise the domestication of technology, similar foldings of securitising into everyday concerns and controversies can be witnessed in the 'implementation' of policies like community safety and community policing. (Hughes, 2007, Noxolo and Huysmans, 2009)

Questioning the adequacy of the concept of 'security act' has implications for the understanding of the politics of insecurity and the possibility of a political critique of securitising. Both security professionals and the political elite often efface 'acts' from the securitising process. They emphasise the necessity and the technological nature of the process. Decisions are presented as calculations of efficiency and effectiveness. Social control and surveillance is introduced for a particular event or in particular sites and then expands to other areas of life without much public discussion.(Amoore and de Goede, 2008b, Tsoukala, 2009) The concept of 'security act' introduces a critical analytics of this process by drawing attention to the decisions that are taken in this process and the moments of gravity when significant choices are made to securitise. It connects technocratic discourse and practice back to political decisions and thus to questions of accountability, legitimacy, and public judgement. The turn in security strategy to risk management and technologically mediated pre-emption and surveillance is often interpreted as reinforcing the technocratic and dispersing

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[6] The difficulty to separate public from private in these processes further reinforces the difficulty to identify the exceptional moments that mostly work through public manifestation.

orientation of securitising. These developments are seen as being particularly successful in effacing acts from the process, circumventing public processes of legitimisation and decision-making.

I have argued that effacing 'acts of security' as a result of the dispersal of decisions and the folding of daily life and security practice expresses the very nature of this securitising process; it is not a symbolic strategy simply hiding the significance of 'speech acts of security'. The effacing is ontological rather than ideological. At first sight such an interpretation 'naturalises' what for political analysis of surveillance and risk management is a key political stake: the de-politicising of security (Amoore and de Goede, 2008c, Ericson, 2007, Lyon, 2001, Lyon, 2007, Lyon, 2006). In other words, does a security knowledge of assembling that I propose above not simply reproduce the de-politicising that sustains the process of technologically mediated securitising? Would such knowledge not lose any criticality towards securitising and thus be seriously implicated in the effacing of politics from securitising processes? In the politics of insecurity, challenging the notion of 'securitising act' can thus become a strategic choice supporting the technocratic and dispersing logic that sustains the securitising process. Effacing 'acts' then seems to come down to effacing the conditions of political critique of securitising, a condition which the concept of 'speech act' of security did so outspokenly reintroduce in security studies.

Retaining the political spectre invested in the notion of 'speech ACT' is thus important for not naively falling into reproductive knowledge – for retaining the possibility of political critique.[7] But, what does one do if the processes demonstrate a radical dispersed associating in which 'acts' are indeed not there, or more adequately, if the action one would normally identify as an act (e.g. a declaration by the president) come across as almost marginal to how the process is intertwining practices, people and things over time and in sites in novel ways. Deploying a binary distinction between reproductive and depoliticising technocratic practice and political acts bringing the technological practice to account in the public sphere is not the answer because the dispersing practices are not just reproductive but also creative. Also, many of the securitising practices continuously work across the public/private boundary therefore challenging the relevance of this distinction for understanding the practices of associating and for bringing a political critique to bear upon them; calling simply for public debate and contestation cannot be an unquestioned default position of political answers to the depoliticising work of securitising practice. The question is then: if change is innovation rather than rupturing and if the everyday and the extra-ordinary are folded together, how can we then understand the politics of insecurity, i.e. the political contestation of the associating that is taking place? In this case, unquestioningly harking back to 'acts' as the key to the politics of insecurity would be equally naive to simply embracing the idea that acts have gone. If the ontology of the process of securitising developed in surveillance, risk management and precautionary practice indeed works in such a way that 'acts' are ontologically marginalised – rather than strategically, calculatively hidden – than the conceptions of act will neither provide the claimed analytical insight into the workings of power nor the possibility for effective political critique. One of the challenges therefore is to explore conceptual instruments – not a universal theory but a toolbox – for a political analytics and critique of associating, assembling, dispersing security practices in which the distinction between ordinary and extra-ordinary, everyday and exceptional are folded into one another and in which ruptures become innovations, struggles controversies, and orders settlements.

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[7] For a classic statement along these lines, see Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem. (Arendt, 1963)*

The difficulty of this task has become very visible in some analyses of US and European counter-terrorist practice. I am referring to analyses that bring out how counter-terrorist practice is involved in the technological dispersal of surveillance, the workings of administrative regulations and quasi-law in camps and detention centres, the tracing and control of mobility, etc. Louise Amoore and Marieke de Goede (2008b) explicitly set out and develop a language for understanding how the securitising of transactions in the war on terror effaces acts, distinctions between public and private, etc. and how it folds security practices into daily life. What makes their work particularly interesting is that they explicitly weave the question of what politics of insecurity is taking place and what a political critique of these processes can be into their sociology of surveillance, bordering and tracing mobilities. Interestingly, while the securitising process is dispersing, folding into daily life and effacing decisions, the political dimension of their work consists in a critique of the exceptionality that security practices create and their search for reintroducing decisions that can be publicly called to account. '[T]ransactions become precisely the basis for designation of exception, for the settling out of finite differentials of normality and deviation.' (Amoore and de Goede, 2008b:174) The data gathering and practices of control become politically important because they aggregate transactions into 'a broader assemblage of "screening" practices that algorithmically designate and classify the population' (Amoore and de Goede, 2008b:179) and in doing so profile populations who are placed outside of the order and can be treated beyond the normal rules of engagement. To get critical leverage on the process they perform the Agambean move of accepting the dispersed often technocratic forms of governance – usually conceptualised in line with Foucault's analytics of biopolitics and governmentality – while continuing to focus politics on sites of exceptionalism where securitising works through displacing the practices of democratic governance most extremely. Political critique becomes possible at this point by breaking a depersonalised logic of assembling down into acts that actualise decisions rupturing the given framework of citizenship, human rights, etc. with consequences. The critique starts from the point of view that securitising ruptures the institution of democratic politics. This rupture is then personalised by assigning 'critical' decision-making to particular people. Butler works this scheme by devolving the sovereign power to decide arbitrarily to the many professionals who implement policies, including immigration officials, border guards, private security personnel, and make these arbitrary decisions in everyday engagements – she refers to them as 'petty sovereigns'[8]. (Butler, 2004:56) It is the judgement and action of the official and quasi-official individuals who 'implement' security for the state that makes them accountable and responsible. In doing so, sovereignty as the way into understanding politics is saved in a security process in which the normal process of aggregation through which sovereignty is supposed to be articulated is difficult to pin down.(Amoore, 2006)

Despite referring to Butler's petty sovereigns (Amoore and de Goede, 2008a:13), Amoore and de Goede cannot simply reintroduce exceptional acts and the mechanisms of accountability, responsibility, and legitimacy through which one can bring these sites to political account. Their study of the practices of surveillance and risk management shows that the process functions in such a way that decisions with gravity, which can be identified as being especially significant for creating the exceptional stratifications and discriminations, are difficult to find, if they exist in the first place. Hence their question: 'How is responsibility to be reintroduced to the decision, such that it confronts

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[8] Labelling them as petty sovereigns overstates the power they often have but also simplifies the complexity of practices that take place and the significance of their place in a much broader practice of assembling. See for example: (Smith, 2009)

the political difficulties of indecision?' (Amoore and de Goede, 2008b:182)The focus on responsibility in this question does not hide the conundrum that surrounds the issue of decision here. Is retaining the decision – an act that actualises a decision that has special weight and thus can be called responsible – as the central issue that allows a political reading and critique possible and valuable when the process of securitising does not work through these kinds of decisions? Their analysis of the securitising practice seems to point to a negative answer, despite the political analysis often harking back to the necessity to find decisions that can be brought to account and to create a context of exception, of breaking with the routine, the habitual, and the ordinary. Their interpretation of surveillance indicates that the issue is not immediately the presence or absence of decision but how to read politically dispersal and processes in which decisions cannot be aggregated into critical moments and sites that rupture a given order. Reinserting 'decision' in a process that effaces it does not solve the problem; it leads to reading politics, and the authorisation of authority in constructing the common, as ethics with its focus on the responsibility of the individual to act on principles of conduct.

What I propose below is one of possible pathways into taking serious the politics of dispersing insecurity, of assembling and associating insecurities, of the folding of the everyday and the exceptional without having to fall back on inscribing (speech) acts of security into it as the vehicle for a political analytics and critique[9]. The pathway I seek to open up starts from the literature on the everyday and the question: how to read the political nature of the everyday in situations where governance folds into daily life?[10] How does the literature on the everyday conceptualise practices that are usually seen as un-political, dispersed, routines as political? What conceptions of the political and political critique have they developed? What can this literature tell us about the political nature of dispersed associating? The reason for consulting this particular research on the everyday is that it tries to understand contestation, conflict and resistance as dispersed and as something that is immanent to what are often seen as systems and techniques of domination that act upon the realm of daily life as if from the outside. If securitising closely intertwines what an analysis driven by the conception of 'acts' usually separates – the exceptional and the everyday – then it makes sense to explore through literature on the everyday what a politics of insecurity can be in the intertwining and dispersing processes of securitising.

Disputing: towards a politics of dispersing insecurities

Programming algorithms, computers profiling, negotiating contracts, cctv operators responding to police calls are the everyday working of insecurity. The work is diffused, mostly unspectacular and habitual, and small in scope. Its study reads more like a sociology of 'little nothings' (*des petits riens* (Bayart et al., 2008:11) than a sociology of exceptionality. Taken together all these little nothings however securitise transactions, subjects and objects. How to develop a *political* sociology of little security nothings?

The idea is to develop a political sociology of associating rather and exceptionality. The starting point is that mediating activity is what matters in these practices and operations. Mediation does not refer to transferring a system of governance to the governed. Neither does it refer to facilitating relations

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[9] There are other pathways that engage this question: see e.g. Walters (forthcoming)
[10] Turning to the literature on the everyday is not the only available pathway. For example, the literature exploring how Hannah Arendt connected action, labour and work more closely than is often assumed might offer another pathway. (Villa, 1996:136-43)

between ruled and rulers or to mediating between domination and resistance. Mediators are simply objects and subjects who actively make connections and transform the nature of connectivity in establishing the connections. Writing an algorithm associates data that without it are not connected. It also connects subjects in terms of the profiling it generates. The key people and processes to look for are therefore not those with gravity in the sense of instituted authority, whether sovereign or petty sovereign, and a capacity to organise a system of governance emanating from a centre by means of a general strategy of security governance. Instead one starts from mediators who bring into play data, people and objects and then describes how they connect what so as to trace actant-networks. Following Latour, who draws on Greimas, I use the concept actant rather than actor to de-anthropomorphise that what is active, that what does things by participating in the process – e.g. computers are active in the sense that they do things in a particular way. (Greimas and Courtés, 1993, Latour, 2005:54-55) Similarly, like Latour I use network not as a thing but as a concept to check the energy, movement and specificity that we can grasp in the tracing. (Latour, 2005:131)

Not the production of a blue print or its implementation matters but *bricoler,* piecing things and people together, which is always diffuse and circumstantial rather than concentrated and systemic. Mediating is therefore a form of appropriating rather than creating – or, more accurately, creating through appropriating. It reworks what exists already, what is already connected, operating somewhere, by making it 'one's own', making it do particular kind of work that it did not do before. Daniel Neyland (2009), for example, shows how letters are transformed into an object of danger.[11] MI5 played an important role in setting out what a letter bomb is, how to recognise a suspicious letter, how to deal with it. MI5 thus appropriates a mundane object into a securitising process. When reading through the information that MI5 posted on its website, it is clear however that the letter bomb is not simply appropriated by MI5 but that it requires a whole set of connections (e.g. postal delivery, postal sorting, explosive or incendiary substances, posting, unusual place of origin, etc.) and appropriations of the letter as a suspicious object by many actors (courier, those receiving it, the place of origin of the sender, police etc.) and postal sorting procedures. Instead of reading this example as MI5 intending to securitise (performing an act of securitising) letters by setting out a set of criteria and guidelines on its website, it would be more interesting to place the narrative on the web as a mediation connecting things and people dispersed over time and place. The securitising then takes the form of a dispersed process in which the letter connects various things and persons in a network of suspicion, including particular branches of MI5 of course. The latter would give us a better understanding of the diffuse connecting work over time that is involved in the process of securitising – and, its failure.[12]

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[11] Several mundane objects are made into carriers of danger nowadays (e.g. bottles of liquids, fertilizers (http://www.secureyourfertiliser.gov.uk/), etc.). Each would lend itself nicely to an analytics of dispersed mediation and tracing of actant networks of insecurity.

[12] At the heart of taking mediating and mediators as the starting point is an attempt to flatten securitising. The topography of securitizing becomes horizontal rather than vertical. The connecting through habitual and dispersed practice is what is central to the securitizing. The analytics of securitizing is mainly a descriptive exercise of the process. Its meaningfulness does not require somehow linking the mediations back to a totality, a system – e.g. neoliberal governance – that is expressed in the securitizing process and that security practice inserts in the everyday. The horizontal reading implies that habitual, ordinary practices can be understood in their own terms and do not need to be interpreted as an articulation of a systemic rationale with its specific structuration of domination. The work of mediating draws attention away from systemic hierarchies to active work that is done in the connecting.

The political elephant in this dispersed China shop is the question: What is political about these mediations once you let go of systemic structuration and/or relations of domination? Drawing on Boltanski and Thévenot (1999) I introduce the beginnings of one possible pathway to think dispersed everyday practices of associating politically without falling back into a variation of decisions actualising exceptionality[13]. More specifically, their conception of dispute facilitates dispersing contestations over justice and insecurity into everyday situations and displacing the critical capacity from the analyst to the actants involved in the dispute.

The starting point of the political analytics is controversies. They refer to shared uncertainty between actants; moments and sites that are not stabilised – or, in Latourian terms 'black-boxed' – situations in which the actants agree on their disagreement. (Venturini, 2010) In controversies the work of mediating takes the form of developing settlements. Emphasising uncertainty takes the fragility of reality as the starting point. (Boltanski, 2009:46 ff) the daily enactments of insecurity through professional requirements, forms, standardisations are not that stable as is often assumed; they shift and change. What is regularly narrated as fixed is actually fragile and uncertain because daily practices appropriate and reconfigure them. Controversies are situations of configuring in shared uncertainty. These situations are a 'normal' aspect of social practice and take place in all kinds of everyday situations – e.g. findings in a lab, the programming of algorithms, the sale of security equipment, …

I want to propose that controversies become political when mediators find themselves in dispute over criteria of justification and injustice requiring an agreement to settle them. Disputes are situations in which justice and injustice are made and remade through conflict and agreement over justifications. For Boltanski and Thévenot (1999) disputes are characterised by an imperative of justification. They are moments in which participants criticise each other, procedures, data, etc. Such criticism needs to be supported through justifications. The connections between persons and things are then partly established through the resolution of the differences by means of an agreement. Agreements are not circumstantial but are justified, i.e. aimed at criticism. In justifications actants enact particular rules and dispositions of acceptability, which of course can be reshaped in the process of justification. Not everything will count as a proper justification, however, and the actants themselves have the competence in both discriminating legitimate from illegitimate justifications and in remaking justifications through agreement.

The politicality of disputes rests partly on the contested nature of the situation and the critical disposition that is enacted by those involved. Yet, for disputes in ordinary risk management and surveillance to express a politics of insecurity, they also must enact a regime of justice. The answerability to others and things is not simply about justification of scientific method or professional legitimacy, for example, but about justifications that involve a sense of injustice. Disputes involve the establishment of equivalences between principles, people, data, objects, procedures that connect one situation with another to explain what is wrong. Establishing equivalences is a basic operation for setting up 'a claim, unveil an injustice and ask for an atonement' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999:363). The dispute and agreement involves connecting the

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[13] Other approaches are developed by de Certeau (1984 [1980])upon whom Boltanski and Thévenot partly draw, Bayart (2004, , 2008), and Lefebvre (2008a, , 2008b, , 2008c). Also Latour and Weibel (2005) developing a focus on 'making public' offers another route to explore what a politics of securitising can mean in diffuse, dispersing daily practices.

singularity of the situation to 'a form of generality transcending persons and situations in which they interrelate' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999:361).

Situations disputing justifications for actions in terms of injustice are common. They are not the special crisis moments that the speech act of security instigates, the moments of a test of will with survival as the stake. Rather they are common situations in which '[p]eople [and things], involved in ordinary relationships, who are doing things together (...) and who have to coordinate their actions, realise that something is going wrong; that they cannot get along anymore; that something has to change' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999:359). In such moments the critical capacity, not of the sociologist or political scientist, but of the actants in the situations becomes visible[14]. In line with the literature on the everyday, critique is displaced from social sciences to people enacting a dispute. Although these situations have a quality of crisis in the sense that the mediation involves a dispute over criteria of justification rather than an undisputed connecting and coordinating, they are often common, multiple and low profile, thus immanent to dispersed processes rather than standing out as being exceptionally demanding requiring that other disputes are set aside to focus on one particular crisis. They are transitory but not in the first place by bringing the limits of a given order into play but rather by being a moment that needs resolution, a moment that connects by moving between uncertainty and agreement. (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999:360) Conceptualised in this way, securitising is a process full of critical moments, moments of dispute in which the actants develop critical activity. Critique becomes a property of the daily, habitual practices rather than of the sociological gaze and the enactment of exceptionality.

The disputes do not explicitly have to be about the constitution of insecurity but can be about working conditions, for example, which nevertheless will bear on how 'security' is practiced. For example, the CCTV operators we referred to above can contest surveillance by trying to negotiate their working conditions. The dispute is then about equity and injustice in working conditions but it may involve controversies over what situations are to be put under surveillance, how data are stored and processed, and the organisation of the communication between police and the CCTV operators. Controversy over criteria of justifying surveillance become then intermingled with, mediated through controversies over working practices and claims of injustice and equity related to the labour of surveillance.

Mediators and the connecting they do thus enact a politics of insecurity, not when they perform a decision that ruptures a given order, but when the mediation takes the form of a dispute over justification implying questions of injustice. When the uncertainty of the connecting and the settlements become invested with framings of justice, we can speak of a political moment. As indicated this reading of the politics of insecurity in a heavily dispersed and dispersing securitising retains the idea of answerability, which was central to the notion of act. So, have I brought 'the act' back through the backdoor? In a sense I did bring back key aspects that make the act political but in another sense I have displaced the conception of act. On the one hand the idea of disputing and agreeing is about moments of connecting that evoke criteria of justice and thus answerability to

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[14] It is a little awkward at first to include 'things' besides persons when speaking of critical ability. Yet, it is important to resist the immediate anthropomorphising of criticality in line with the idea that things are equally important in shaping the securitising process. Understanding criticality as something located in the mediation of relations by things and people allows including a stone being in the way, a computer throwing up a profile, or a CCTV monitors showing a myriad of images to be included as critical actants in the dispute.

others. On the other hand, these disputes are not exceptional in the sense mentioned in relation to the speech act of security. They are common and often not spectacular; from the point of view of speech acts of security they will often look like little security nothings. Neither do they demonstrate a decisional gravity and sovereignty that the speech act of security calls for. They are often technical and habitual rather than exceptional, diffused and small rather than pulling forces to it constructing an exceptionality in an overarching order. The focus is less on someone doing something than on plural diffused work of connecting and therefore on the relationality – the actant network – that is established.[15]

In the context of this paper, I can't do more than indicating a pathway into what the politics of insecurity can be in a dispersing securitising process that constructs insecurities in highly diffused moments and locations through a myriad of mediations and settlements tracing a network that remains changing. I am aware that drawing on Boltanski and Thévenot opens up more questions than it answers. Yet, it introduces some key elements for developing a political reading of associative politics of dispersing insecurity. Looking at disputes over injustice allow to retain some of the core political elements invested in the notion of 'acts' but without reproducing the search for decisions with serious gravity at the expense of the netting work of little nothings and the cleavage between exceptional and daily practice and between crisis and routine. Disputes insert a focus on controversies as part of highly dispersed process of connecting objects, subjects, and practices of insecurity. The politics of insecurity becomes everyday but not in the sense of being something that exists next to the exceptional decisions with political gravity that speech acts of security refer to. The everyday is not introduced as a correction or addition to the speech act of security but as expressing another ontology of the politics of insecurity; one in which dispersal, little nothings, heterogeneity, habitual practice, complex connections, and a myriad of mediations is all there is. The professional elites enacting security in relation to various constituencies are displaced by dispersing, heterogeneous actant networks and the mediations taking place in situations of dispute. Not all practices of connecting are political. Their politicality requires a special quality: to be a dispute in which actants enact criteria of justification bearing upon issues of injustice. Like speech acts of security, disputes imply situations of answerability. Unlike speech acts of security, however, the focus is not on responsibility and accountability of securitising and the legitimacy of authorisation through claiming exceptionality but on negotiating insecurity through enacting justice in situations of shared disagreement over the criteria of justification. From the perspective of speech acts of security these situations often appear as little nothings but from an analytics focused on tracing connections that net dispersing practices, objects and subjects circulating and shaping insecurities they are immense[16].

Conclusion

This paper started from the observation that the political investment in the concept of 'act' has been left largely unexplored in the debates about Wæver and his colleagues' theorisation of security as a speech act. Its lead question has been: What is in the act of the speech act of security? By means of

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[15] William Walters has been arguing for such an approach for a while now. Recently he develops an analysis of zones. His use of zones nicely demonstrates what shifting from a focus on the exceptionality of practices to their ordinariness, but not less powerfulness, can mean. Zones are not seen as exceptional spaces but as sites where practices come together among others around procedures producing homogeneity and uniformity they do not have outside of this site. (Walters, forthcoming)

[16] To paraphrase Gombrowicz quoted in Bayart et al. (2008:11)

conclusion, I will briefly summarise the main points of the paper and the displacement in the understanding of the politics of insecurity I am arguing for.

In the speech act of security, the concept of 'act' draws attention to a dual aspect of securitising: the actualisation of a decision with political gravity and the exceptionality of acts of securitising. Its exceptionality works a sharp distinction between the everyday and the exceptional, the routine and creative, the ordinary and the extra-ordinary. Politics of insecurity takes place through the latter terms in each of the binaries. The decision to securitise enacts the world through a centre of gravity where multiplicity can be brought together around an upping of the bet into a test of the will to survive. At this point a multi-dimensional political critique becomes possible based on assigning political responsibility, demanding political accountability, and the legitimacy of authorisation based on claims of exceptionality.

When looking more closely at analyses of surveillance, risk management and precautionary practice one tends to encounter a highly dispersed process of securitising and its contestation in which decisive acts with gravity are effaced, however. Taking the dispersing nature of this process serious, an important question arises: What can the politics of insecurity be if securitising takes place through relations between dispersed often habitual practices which make a recourse to 'acts' as the actualisation of a decision with gravity difficult? What form can an analysis of this dispersing process of securitising be that retains the critical political investment that has been central to the notion of act in the speech act of security? I proposed that we would take the dispersing nature of the process serious and analyse securitising as a dispersed habitual practice of associating through settling controversies rather than actualising decisions of exceptionality. In focusing on the critical capacity of mediating actants in situations of disagreement over justifications pertaining injustices and in understanding these disputes as being an ordinary, frequent part of a dispersed process of securitising, I have introduced elemental aspects of a pathway to a political sociology of securitising in which the distinction between the normal and exceptional, the everyday and the security elite, the habitual and the extra-ordinary no longer organise the conception of the political. The politicality of decisions no longer depends on their political gravity, their capacity to pull together and stratify various forces and discussions around an existential situation. Instead decisions are a multiplicity of dispersed settlements in which insecurities are mediated through controversies over criteria of justifying justice and injustice. These disputes and their settlements connect things and people in a dispersing network of actants enacting insecurity. They are the building blocks for a political analytics of heterogeneous, dispersing securitising which effaces decisions with exceptional gravity and in which the distinction between normal politics and exceptional – i.e. security – politics is not really relevant.

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