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# **Imagining (In)security: Towards Developing Critical Knowledges of Security in a Mediated Social World**

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**Dissertation submitted to the Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, August 2015, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Media, Communication and Development. Supervised by Dr Sarah Cefai.**

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Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

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# **Imagining In(security): Towards Developing Critical Knowledges of Security in a Mediated Social World**

**Kathryn Higgins**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation makes an argument for integrating analysis of mediation into the critical frameworks used to study (in)security. As such, it might be taken as an attempt to speak *to* critical (in)security research *from* the perspective of mediation scholarship—a conversation which draws its viability and value from two key premises. The first of these is that critical studies of both mediation and (in)security share a crucial tether to the questions of social reality, and an interest in the powerful implications of how we come to speak and think about the social world. The second premise is that threat—as the key 'variable of interest' for (in)security—might be conceived of as an 'imaginative experience', and thus be vulnerable to the mediated knowledges and systems of cultural meaning which help condition and structure our social imaginations.

In order to explore how analysis of mediation might be incorporated into Critical Security Studies frameworks, and with what consequence, this project moves through several distinct yet interdependent stages. Firstly, a review of how the categories of social knowledge, meaning and imagination have been allotted value within existing Critical Security Studies literature has been undertaken in order to help identify the key concerns, questions and motivations of critical (in)security research, and the sites at which incorporating analysis of mediation may be valuable. This review also offers a critique of the epistemological approaches and conclusions of existing critical (in)security scholarship, which largely fails to interrogate processes of mediation by rarely moving beyond text-centric analysis.

With experiences of time, place, difference and manageability identified as crucial 'imaginative elements' in perceptions of threat, the project pushes forward to explore how analysis of mediation might make a meaningful contribution towards helping Critical Security Studies scholars ask more productive questions about the nature of these experiences and their implications in mediated social contexts. Far from reaching any concrete conclusions, this discussion should be taken as an early exploration of the possibilities—a mandate of its own for future critical theoretical and empirical research, both in mediation and (in)security, to pick up and carry forward. Such research is vital if we are to

productively question and critique how it is we arrive to imagine (in)security in a mediated social world, and thus challenge the cultural resonance of the many discursive and institutional systems of structural violence that make up our attempts towards 'security'.

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## INTRODUCTION

The notion of (in)security<sup>1</sup> is born, bound and compelled forward by processes of imagination. To know (in)security, intrinsically, is to mentally locate oneself within the social world and comprehend our own positioning and fate within systems of power and narratives of change, bridging an imaginative gap not only between the subjective 'self' and other social agents, but also between our knowledges of the present and our imaginations of an uncertain future—of that which might, but has not yet, come to pass. In perceiving our own (in)security, we weave together portraits of unknown future realities and our places within them from fibres of social knowledge and meaning—fibres that, increasingly, are spun through the wheels of mediation. If a portrait is never truth, but only interpretation, then developing critical epistemologies of security which recognise the fundamental role that processes of mediation play in sculpting and structuring the terms under which we are able to comprehend our ever-uncertain futures in the social world is mandated by the growing influence of mediation over the production and reproduction of social knowledge. More crucially, peering down at (in)security through the lens of mediation offers an important (and strongly mandated) opportunity for critical researchers to relocate the political in socio-cultural approaches to (in)security and, in doing so, to help de-naturalise and re-problematise (in)security knowledges in contexts of relative material prosperity and safety.

The drive of this project, then, is to explore how an analysis of mediation may be able to contribute to the development of more productive and critical 'ways of knowing' (in)security in highly mediated socio-cultural contexts. In doing so, it is hoped that this project will be able to offer critical insight into the epistemological challenges of knowing and theorising (in)security within the context of mediation, as well as the possible implications of mediation for how, and under what terms, we are able to imagine (in)security in modern mediated societies. Crucially, and by consequence, it must be noted that this project is not an

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<sup>1</sup> The term '(in)security' has been adopted here, and throughout this project, in recognition of the fact that the terms 'security' and 'insecurity' are conceptually interdependent—that is, that the experience of one is broadly defined by the real or perceived lack of the other. This approach has precedent in the works of other authors who have approached the study of (in)security from a sociological or critical cultural perspective—see, for example, Coaffee, O'Hare & Hawkesworth (2009).

interrogation *of* the media, or even of mediation theories. Rather, it is an attempt to speak *to* critical (in)security research *from* the perspective of mediation scholarship. As such, it follows in the tradition of authors like Martin-Barbero (1993) and Couldry (2006) who have implored media scholars to move beyond a preoccupation with 'the media' as embodied in texts, institutions or technologies, and instead adopt a critical cultural approach to the study of mediation and society which recognises (and seeks to explore) media as a powerful component of social and cultural infrastructure—as 'a force field within a complex space of social practice, much of it *not* directly related to media at all' (Couldry, 2006: 31; emphasis in original).

## **RESEARCH QUESTION, APPROACH AND RATIONALE**

This research project is premised upon the view that mediation and in(security) share one crucial characteristic—their placental tether to the ever shifting, and ever unanswerable, questions of social reality. They are each products of how we think and speak about the social world, while also serving as key input stimuli for how we arrive to think or speak about the social world in the first place. In the case of mediation, this cyclical nature is articulated well by Silverstone (2005; 1999) who describes mediation as both the process of representing the world *in* text<sup>2</sup> whilst also constructing the world *through* text, an articulation which becomes more profound in the era of 'new media' wherein the overlap between those who produce media texts and those who consume them is ever thickening. For those attempting to critically examine the concept of (in)security, the indispensable need to interrogate assumptions about the nature of the social is mandated by the close interdependency between knowledges of insecurity and exercises of power. As expressed by Walker (1997), approaching (in)security from a critical standpoint is thus fundamentally an epistemological project, wherein it is the stability of security claims (rather than the claims themselves) that is of most crucial interest to those concerned with (and by) the link between (in)security knowledges and structural violence and oppression:

What are the conditions under which it is now possible to think, speak and make authoritative claims about what is referred to in the language of modern politics as 'security'? This is the crucial question that must be addressed, given the widely shared sense that we hardly know what we're

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'text' here is used broadly to refer to all manner of media, including materials of all kinds which communicate or represent knowledge, information or meaning in some way using textual or visual language. 'Text' will be used in a similar denotive fashion throughout this project, and should not be interpreted as referring to written text only.

talking about when this term rolls so easily off the tongue to circulate among the practices of modern violence. (Walker, 1997: 61)

We may posit then, as Walker has done, that attempting to expose the violent power of dominant (in)security knowledges is less a task of re-thinking what (in)security is, but rather an epistemological project of attempting to change the conditions under which we ask questions about (in)security in order to make those questions more productive (Walker, 1997: 63). It is in answer to this mandate that this dissertation derives its primary motivation, in offering theories of mediation as a valid and valuable contribution to any attempt to ask more productive questions about (in)security knowledges manifested in mediated social contexts.

The following research question has been devised in order to make a case for incorporating mediation into critical epistemologies of (in)security, and to explore how and with what consequence this inclusion might take place:

**RQ: What can analysis of mediation offer to the development of critical (in)security knowledges?**

The question is simple enough in its design, but requires further elaboration. To begin with, it must be spelled out that the treatment of mediation within this question, and in the project that will seek to answer it, is in fact two-fold. Firstly, mediation is understood as an important contextual element for the production and reproduction of (in)security knowledges—that is, if knowledges of (in)security are dependent upon conceptions of the social, and mediation is a key condition of the social, then mediation becomes a key structural component of the social context in which (in)security is experienced and studied. This ontological premise of mediation-as-context, however, is complemented by a second treatment of mediation as an *approach* to the study of social phenomena, (in)security among them. In this regard, analysis of mediation and its implications for the production and reproduction of social 'reality' will be offered as a method for further interrogating the power dynamics at play within dominant knowledges of (in)security, and thus a vital component of any theoretical or empirical methodology within the Critical Security Studies<sup>3</sup> field.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Critical Security Studies' will be used throughout this section not to refer to one specific approach to the study of (in)security, but rather as a catch-all term for those approaches which rely upon a social constructivist or poststructuralist approach to the study of the social world as the context of security phenomena and knowledges (Krause & Williams, 1997). The nature and implications of this approach, as well as the tensions within and between CSS scholars, will be discussed further in sub-question one (SQ1) and sub-question two (SQ2).

Secondly, it is worth briefly outlining how this dissertation will approach attempting to answer this research question—its methodology, if you will. Firstly, the idea of mediation-as-context will be outlined with reference to authors who have approached the study of media from a sociological or critical cultural perspective, in order to clarify the theoretical framework which will be used to place the study of (in)security in relationship with the ever-expanding body of work on mediated society. Complementing this will be a thorough (but by no means exhaustive) review of how other scholars have approached the concepts of social knowledge, meaning and imagination within the critical study of (in)security. The focus here will not be on *what* other authors have concluded about the nature of (in)security, but rather *how* they have approached studying, and thus allocating value, to the social and cultural, in attempting to critically examine the role of imagination in the experience of (in)security. By conducting this literature review, it is hoped that we will uncover not only the key concepts of interest to critical studies of (in)security but also the problematics involved in their epistemological treatment, in order to posit what contribution the inclusion of mediation in the theoretical frameworks used to study (in)security might make. From here, the project will progress towards layering analysis of mediation on top of the questions and concerns raised within the literature review, in order to analyse how an appreciation of mediation, as both a social context and an analytical tool, might advance the epistemological project of Critical Security Studies by helping its scholars, as implored by Walker (1997), to ask more productive questions about the role of socio-cultural knowledge and imagination in relationship between (in)security knowledges and power.

However, in proposing that (in)security be understood and thus studied as an imaginary construct with roots in mediated knowledge, there is a lot to answer for. At best, this project might be accused of privileging Western-centrism, as modern mediation, when understood as a phenomenon of modernity bolstered by technological means, is not evenly experienced nor equally relevant across different geographical, social and economic contexts (Rajagopal, 2000). At worst, the suggestion that we should indulge in conceptualising (in)security as an imaginary construct when writing from a socio-economic standpoint in which material security (in the form of access to resources and protection from institutionalised physical violence) is comparatively far stronger than in most other contexts, might be perceived as an act of wilful disregard for those individuals or groups for whom material security remains oppressively precarious. For a person living in Gaza, listening to the sounds of rocket-fire as they attempt to sleep, struggling to meet the basic needs of survival for themselves and their families under the structural oppression of occupation, worrying about if and when they will encounter the same bodily violence that has befallen so many of their friends and family (or

indeed, encounter it again), is it viable—is it *ethical*—to suggest that their experience of (in)security is the product of their imagination, and ought to be studied as such?

The answer, of course, is no. However, though not *products* of imagination, there is value in recognising that experiences of (in)security, born of material circumstance as they may be, still inevitably *require imagination*. Threat, and the experience of it, is an imaginative reaction to the material—it cannot exist unless we build mental bridges between ourselves and others, and between the present and future, using the meaning-laden stimuli made available to us—be it the sound of rockets in the middle of the night, or a newspaper headline decrying the actions of the Islamic State read leisurely over a Sunday morning fry-up in a South Kensington apartment. And it is here, precisely here, that examining (in)security as an imaginative construct carries ethical, even emancipatory, potential. Because this process—the imaginative construction of threat, and the consequent experience of (in)security (Krause, 1998: 306)—takes place everywhere that such imaginations of threat and the fear they produce carry political currency. That, of course, is everywhere. Moreover, in those contexts where the material factors which might stimulate imaginations of threat are ostensibly absent—in those homes over which the rockets do not fly—the threads we use to weave such imaginations are inevitably more likely to take the form of mediated social knowledge. From here springs forth the plethora of anxieties and fears which appropriate knowledges of the distinction between self and Other and mobilise them in support of (in)security accounts grounded in oppressive social knowledges of difference, manifested in acts of discrimination, exclusion, and structural violence.

Approaching (in)security as mediated imagination, thus, is not about privileging the context of Western modernity. Rather, it is about turning the gaze of critical security research within the Western academy (where such research is predominantly located) back upon itself. It is not about privileging Western imaginations of (in)security, but rather about uncovering what it is that those imaginations might allow us *not to ask* when we study (in)security from Western contexts. It is about recognising that, even within ostensibly 'secure' societies, the construction of (in)security is forever taking place within our minds, and will forever be a source of power for those with the capacity to sculpt the terms of that imaginative process. Most importantly, it stands as an opportunity to help expose the 'intolerable acts of violence' and oppression in which dominant security accounts are complicit (Walker, 1997: 63) by unmasking the hand that mediated knowledges play in granting cultural coherence to Western (in)security imaginations.



## **MEDIATION AS CONTEXT**

Much like (in)security, mediation is a difficult concept to pin down. In its seeming ability to be everything, it runs the risk of being epistemologically atomised into nothing. To move forward into analysis of how mediation might be given consideration within the development of critical security knowledges without first framing exactly what it means to describe certain knowledges as 'mediated'—indeed, to describe the social world as mediated—would thus run the risk of this dissertation slipping into the realm of vague theoretical speculation. It would also be in denial of the fact that, in adopting mediation into a critical theoretical framework, specific and meaningful choices must be made about how to most appropriately apply this heavily contested concept. While these analytical choices and their justifications will become more readily apparent throughout the later discussion section of this dissertation, it is worth briefly addressing this cornerstone question here as a means of both clarifying the theoretical framework of this project, while also locating this project within the ever-expanding body of work on mediated society:

### **SQ1: What does it mean to employ the term mediation within this theoretical project?**

The premise of this project is that the construction of (in)security knowledge is intimately bound up with particular approaches to understanding and studying the social world. The central *question* of this project is how mediation can and should hold sway over such conceptions of the social, and thus how the study of mediation might complicate the ways in which contemporary (in)security knowledges are developed and therefore demand inclusion in the critical theoretical frameworks used to study (in)security. With this in mind, it appears natural to take a step away from building-block approaches to mediation which zoom in on its composite elements (for example, media texts or institutions), and instead to draw inspiration from the work of authors like Silverstone (2005) who have opted to treat media not as a set of processes, nor a collection of texts, nor an institutional power, but rather as a contemporary historical moment in which the social is being constantly shaped and redefined. Mediation, treated in this way, is both a moment in time as well as a social space, and is thus ripe for inclusion in a theoretical framework as a *context* within which the construction of (in)security knowledges takes place. Mediation is therefore understood here neither as a discrete element of the social world nor entirely constitutive of it—rather, it is a condition of the social (Williams, 1974) which, in the contemporary moment, has reached (or at the very least is reaching) 'florid, cannibalistic maturity' (Silverstone, 2005: 190).

Approaching mediation in this way demarcates an important choice about how mediation-as-context can and should be examined in relation to the critical study of (in)security. Unavoidably, it steers consideration of mediation's influence over (in)security knowledges—and consequently of media power—away from questions of coercion or the linear transmission of information and towards the approach of those scholars like Hall (1997), Thompson (1995) and Carey (1989) who have articulated the media's power as a more ritualistic, structural influence over the production and reproduction of symbolic meanings, and by consequence, knowledge and culture. If culture is taken as 'a shared space or map of meaning within which people coexist' (Grossberg et al., 1998: 20), then mediation is adopted here as the means by which the construction of this space takes place.

Were we adopting a transmission-based approach to mediation, the aims of this project might be satisfied by merely investigating *which* accounts of (in)security are circulated through media texts and institutions, or empirically investigating how those accounts are received by audiences. However, in seeking to understand rather *how* the media might influence popular knowledges of (in)security (and thus need to be given critical consideration in the security epistemologies) it is preferable to conceive of the media not as a discrete source of security knowledge, but rather as a key infrastructural component in the complex systems of social meaning from which competing security knowledges draw their cultural resonance. After all, just as a sign only carries meaning if it is able to be read (Thompson, 1995) a particular knowledge of security is only as powerful as it is culturally coherent. Understanding mediation as cultural infrastructure—as the *means* by which media texts and society are able to co-constitute one another—is thus crucial for locating and interrogating power within mediated (in)security knowledges.

To return briefly to the Research Question, 'analysis of mediation' within this project should thus be understood as an appreciation of the implications of mediation-as-context for the production and reproduction of social 'reality' and its associated systems of knowledge and meaning. When it comes to the time to apply analysis of mediation as an approach to helping Critical Security Studies researchers to 'ask more productive questions' about (in)security, it will be understood and applied in this fashion.

### **KNOWING (IN)SECURITY: The role of imagination, knowledge and meaning in critical security epistemologies**

Before this project can advance towards theorising the implications of mediation for the development of security knowledges, there are several important premises that must be

established. First among these is the premise that Critical Security Studies and critical theories of mediation are suited for tangent treatment and integration, in that they share common genealogies within socio-political theory and congruent underpinnings with regards to the nature of social reality, the production of critical knowledge, and the objectives of social research. Secondly, it is important to uncover where and why various critical approaches to security have departed from one another, in order to examine how introducing theories of mediation into critical security debates might help to reconcile (or further problematise) these debates in the current historical moment of mediated society. Finally, critically investigating the ways in which the concepts of knowledge, meaning and imagination have been allotted value within existing critical security research—and thus, under what terms they have been subject to empirical treatment—is essential not only for locating this dissertation within the field of critical security studies, but also for laying a foundation upon which theories of mediated knowledge can later be applied.

With these requirements in mind, the following three sub-questions have been devised in order to help guide this section and position Critical Security Studies within the exoskeleton of critical research on mediated knowledge and society:

### **SQ2: How is 'the social' understood and studied within the field of Critical Security Studies?**

The suggestion that mediation ought to be given critical consideration in the way we theorise and study (in)security is to a significant extent premised on the idea that (in)security might be understood as a socio-cultural phenomenon, rather than a merely material one. It has been argued elsewhere that the rise of the media in contemporary society may significantly affect the capacity for individuals to meet the *material* needs which might bolster or compromise their (in)security, be they access to food and shelter, freedom from the threat of physical violence, or other needs similarly outlined within traditional, realist approaches to (in)security<sup>4</sup>, as well as 'human security' approaches<sup>5</sup>. That line of argument may indeed hold

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<sup>4</sup> Badsey (2000), for example, discusses at length the contingent relationship between media power and military effectiveness. While locating power in the media's capacity to steer public opinion and discourse, Badsey naturally locates 'security' within the military institution and, by association, within the nation-state. The influence of mediation over security within Badsey's approach is thus grounded in the role of mediated public knowledge in either supporting or challenging the military's capacity to ensure the material security of citizens, rather than in the construction of (in)security itself—a dynamic neatly analogised in former United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's comment that United States news broadcaster CNN had become 'the sixteenth member of the UN Security Council' (Badsey, 2000, p. xviii).

<sup>5</sup> 'Human Security' is broadly defined as a conceptual approach to security policy and strategy which focuses on the security of individuals and communities in their everyday lives (Kerr, 2007). While it has parallels with Critical Security Studies in that it rejects the centrality of the state in experiences of (in)security, it is not considered a 'critical' approach as defined within this project in that it does not approach the study of society from

water, but it is insufficient to fully comprehend the relationship between mediation and (in)security or its contemporary implications. Instead, the present argument is premised on acknowledging that knowing (in)security requires both *cultural resources* and *social knowledge* as much (if not more) than any material resource—that (in)security is a social and cultural experience as much as it is a material state of being, in that it is grounded in the communication and interpretation of meaning. Moving towards theorising the ways in which mediation might shape and structure knowledges of (in)security, therefore, draws stability from social constructivist approaches to the study of societal phenomena.

The growing popularity of social constructivism in Critical Security Studies was, in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, a reflection of a shifting socio-political landscape in which state-centric and militaristic conceptions of (in)security were losing their 'real world' currency (Fierke, 1997). Agius (2010) traces the lineage of social constructivism in the security studies discipline to Nicholas Onuf's (1989) *World of Our Making*, a text which bore the crucial suggestion that the way we think (or are able to think) about the world inevitably affects the way we behave and interact, and by consequence, that the 'reality' which underpins realist approaches to International Relations is merely an effect born of overlapping and interacting systems of social knowledge and meaning. Similarly, the work of Alexander Wendt throughout the 1990's—which culminated in the oft-cited and more-often-still critiqued *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999)—took as one of its founding ontological premises that cultural structures and systems (identity most privileged among them) were as fundamental to (in)security policy and knowledge as any material influence, as systems of meaning underpin the logic of all social action. Threat, according to Wendt, was a social perception rather than a material reality:

A gun in the hand of a friend is a different thing to one in the hands of an enemy,  
and enmity is a social, not material, relation. (Wendt, 1996: 50)

From the foundations of Wendtian constructivism have sprung a variety of other approaches to the question of (in)security in a social, rather than material, world. Weldes et al. (1999), for example, join with Wendt in privileging 'cultural processes of identity construction' as the point of emergence for experiences of (in)security, prefacing the work of authors such as Ballinger (1999), who has argued that popular representations and readings of identity in the Italo-Yugoslav 1945-54 'Trieste crisis' served the construction of a specific and resilient 'historical knowledge' (p. 63) of the conflict and its resolution, introducing the term 'memory

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a constructivist or post-structuralist standpoint, and still predominantly focuses on material security and well-being, (albeit more broadly defined).

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politics' (p. 88) to articulate the contemporary socio-political power gifted through control over historical narratives. Similarly, Milliken (1999) adopts the historical construction of collective subjectivities, through a Western-centric discourse of International Relations, as the key variable of interest in understanding the contemporary security relationship between Korea and the West. The implication of both Ballinger and Milliken's studies is that we might approach the study of security phenomena through the framework of 'security cultures' (Weldes et. al., 1999)—that is, systems of meaning through which we 'make sense' of threat and security. However, both of these texts, though drawing strongly on Wendt's theoretical work, hint towards the significant post-structuralist criticisms of Wendtian constructivism—namely, its static and naturalised treatment of 'identity' and 'culture', and its positivist epistemological underpinnings (Mutimer, 2010).

It was from these very critiques that Critical Security Studies, as an admittedly wide and dissonant field, was given a rough semblance of form with Krause and Williams' (1997) *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*. The question of interest in this work was not of what (in)security is, but rather about *how* we go about attempting to know it, and with what consequences. First among the early conclusions of Critical Security Studies was that treating 'culture' and 'identity' as causal variables of (in)security is heavily problematic in that it runs the risk of cultures themselves being identified as threats, and limits the capacity for security theorists to identify opportunities for political intervention and change in the ongoing dialogical process of identity-formation and cultural interaction. Fierke (1997), for example, in her contribution to Krause and Williams' collection, draws attention away from 'culture' itself and instead towards language and discourse as key sites of power in the social and cultural logic of security dilemmas (p. 223). In doing so, Fierke contends that Critical Security Studies must embody a more rigorous epistemological overhaul than is afforded within positivist Wendtian constructivist approaches, recognising that 'the social' itself is always contested and unavoidably contingent upon systems of discursive power, and must be treated as such when used as a 'variable of interest' in (in)security research. The social world, in other words, should not be treated as a source of power, but rather as a 'context' (p. 224) in which myriad and endless struggles for control over collective meaning are played out. Using the analogy of security as a 'language game' (p. 224), Fierke contrasts her epistemological position with its positivist predecessors as follows:

One question one might ask is why a particular move rather than another was made, that is, what were the intentions of the player. This has been the focus of many hermeneutic approaches. My focus, however, is the public nature of the rules themselves and how these rules provide a tool for

mapping moves in a changing game in order to gain knowledge of the nature of the game and its transformation over time. (Fierke, 1997: 225)

The product of these language games, Fierke suggests, are ever-changing and multiple 'grammars of security' (p. 230) which affect not only the *types* of security knowledges we form, but more fundamentally, set parameters around *how* we are able to speak or even think about (in)security in the first place. This point is of crucial importance to the broader theoretical project of this dissertation, and will be revisited later at some length. Its implications for treatment of 'the social' within the Critical Security Studies field, however, are spelled out in Ken Booth's almost (but not quite) poignant contribution to Krause and Williams' collection, titled 'Security and Self: Reflections of a Fallen Realist'. First among these is the mandate for Critical Security Studies to abandon normative conceptions of the social world (Booth, 1997), acknowledging that discourses of security (whichever discourses they may be), when applied to a particular conception of societal 'reality', inevitably serve as sites 'where violence and knowledge can legitimately converge' (p. 71). Secondly, and consequently, it is clear that resisting fixation of the social world in the way we theorise (in)security inevitably demands resisting realist definitions of 'the political' and of power, recognising instead the Western-centrism that lies at the heart of defining power purely in terms of access to those resources which help ensure material well-being or defend state sovereignty (p.104). To borrow again from Fierke's (1997) analogy, it is neither the game nor the players that are of greatest interest—it is the rules which govern how we learn to play.

**SQ3: What types of knowledge can or should be produced within Critical Security Studies, and what objectives should they aim to serve? In other words, what is the form and function of critique?**

Though there is some variation between scholars as to which types of questions a critical approach to (in)security studies is *most* suited to addressing (and thus, *should* be used to address), it is not necessarily accurate to say scholars disagree on this point. Rather, it may be helpful to think about the production of knowledge, and its broader aims, within Critical Security Studies as something of a paradox; between the desire to broaden out the subjects, contexts and variables of (in)security in recognition of structural violence and the artifice of the nation-state, and the simultaneous need to excavate and expose the violence inherent in the frequent and largely unchallenged deployment of 'security' as a conveniently (even intentionally) imprecise concept.

On the one hand, Critical Security Studies research emerged and continues to exist as a counterweight to the rigidity of realist definitions of what security is, who it effects and what it involves—definitions which continue to underwrite (at least in part) the political logic of most contemporary (in)security claims. Walt (1991) provides a representative example of how these elements are defined within the traditional realist approach:

Security studies may be defined as the threat, use, and control of military force. It explores the conditions that make the use of force more likely, the ways in which the use of force affects individuals, states and societies, and the specific policies that states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent, or engage in war. (Walt, 1991: 212)

Thus, under a traditional realist approach to security, the nation-state is the natural referent object or 'subject' of security studies, the military institution (as a preserve of the nation state) serves as the agent through which (in)security is built or challenged, and the threat of physical (specifically, military) violence is the key variable in seeking to 'know' (in)security (Mutimer, 2010: 85-86). It is this narrow, misleading, and arguably dangerous conceptualisation of (in)security against which Critical Security Studies scholars attempt to push. As articulated by Booth (1997), expanding out the framework used to define (in)security is crucial to ensuring that the study of (in)security does not result in the naturalisation of violent erasures and exclusions from conversations about (in)security, and the only way to incorporate the myriad violence and aggressions which fall outside the realist paradigm. However, as Walker (1997) reminds us, it is also the 'slovenly imprecision' (p.63) with which the term 'security' is deployed which allows it to serve within political rhetoric as justification for all manner of sins. In the act of broadening, there is potentially a highly-exploitable loss of meaning.

The critical objective of Critical Security Studies is thus paradoxical in that sees value both in making (in)security more conceptually apparent (and thus less susceptible to appropriation), but also in making it harder to grasp. Thus, rather than attempting to rework or redefine knowledges of (in) security, the mission of Critical Security Studies is instead to unearth how it is we come to know (in)security, and the power struggles at play below the surface of such knowledges. The battle to pin down the character of (in)security is a battle for power, and it is the *battle itself* that draws the focus of Critical Security Studies research.



**SQ4: What treatment has been given to the categories of knowledge, meaning and imagination in existing Critical Security Studies research?**

What has been outlined thus far is a brief overview of how the field of Critical Security Studies orientates itself to the study of security as a phenomenon of the social world, both epistemologically and ontologically. This orientation might be broadly categorised as a conceptualisation of (in)security as an individual or collective cultural experience fed by various systems of social knowledge, imagination and meaning, which in turn have roots in language and communication. What must proceed from here in order to position this dissertation within the field, then, is a quick (and by no means exhaustive) overview of just how various scholars have adopted and applied this orientation to (in)security research through theoretical and empirical treatment of these three categories: social knowledge, meaning, and imagination.

One approach, increasingly popular in the post-9/11 period, has been to operationalise Fierke's (1997) emphasis on language by empirically examining how media discourse is used to construct specific 'threats', and to structure the imagined relationship between the subject (for whom the discourse is designed) and the threat 'object'. Aguirre et al., (2010), for example, have drawn upon an analysis of news media texts in order to examine the ways in which discourses of racialised 'Otherness' are employed to construct a synonymous relationship between Mexican identity and criminality. The result, the authors suggest, is to position Mexican identity itself as a threat to US society, and consequently, to culturally naturalise (and build public support for) the institutionalised criminalisation of Mexican identity via the racial profiling practices of US Boarder Security officials. Similarly, a creative textual content analysis from Toohey and Taylor (2006) has suggested that overlapping discursive devices in news articles on the subjects of sport and terrorism within Australian newspapers may have helped construct a sense of localised cultural relevance in coverage of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks in New York for news audiences in Australia—in other words, to localise the *meaning* of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks within the context of Australian culture by drawing upon the 'centrality of sport to the Australian imagination' as a cultural resource (Toohey & Taylor, 2006: 89). In both instances, the suggestion is that discourse plays a role in helping media consumers imagine threat by delineating what is 'threatening' or 'irrelevant' to their own social context. However, this approach offers an incomplete portrait of mediation by focusing exclusively on the content of media texts, at the expense of considering the implications of both the form of texts and the processes by which they are circulated.



Another approach has been to precede case-specific analysis of just *which* (in)security knowledges and imaginations are constructed through discourse by focusing instead on the structural parameters around *how* we are able to speak or think about (in)security in the first place. Broadly speaking, these parameters might be understood in terms of *inclusions* and *exclusions*—that is, the propulsion towards certain ways of speaking about (in)security, the ostensible impossibility of other ways, and the implications of both for the development of certain patterns of (in)security knowledge and imagination. Amoores (2007a) frames this process as the construction of 'lines of sight', arguing that the imaginations (articulated as 'visualisations') of unknowable future threat, upon which both security scholarship and policy rely, are contingent upon a selective attentiveness to some stimuli over others. This selective attentiveness, Amoores suggests, is facilitated by a cultural delineation of what is 'normal' and what is 'deviant', endlessly reproduced within media texts and deployed through the act of 'looking' as a form of meaningful social action (Amoores, 2007a: 19-20). On the other side of the coin, scholars such as Masco (2006), Edkins (2003) and Cohn (1989) have focused instead upon the ways in which communicative processes can perform the 'cultural work' (Masco, 2006) of rendering certain forms of security imagination as 'unthinkable' or 'unspeakable', and as such, maintaining their exclusion from the production of (in)security knowledges. For Cohn (1989), the use of techno-strategic discourse among defence professionals in late-Cold War America served to render 'unspeakable' the human impact of nuclear warfare, thus excluding affectual experiences (such as suffering and fear) from the 'logic' of nuclear deterrence strategies. Edkins (2003), on the other hand, has examined the way in which collective memories and memorials of past conflict inform the political and social logic of contemporary security decisions, thus suggesting that the selective construction of the way we *reimagine* past experiences of (in)security (as memories) can structure what we deem to be 'relevant' and 'irrelevant' in the production of contemporary security knowledge.

For those scholars who articulate threat as 'risk' (in the tradition of Ulrich Beck's *World Risk Society*), the suggestion that imagination may be implicated in contemporary (in)security logics is one of obvious and immediate saliency. Krahmann (2011), for example, has examined the risk-management services industry through the lens of cultural political economy to suggest that the popular framing of threat and insecurity as 'risk' creates 'hyper-sensitised societies' in which 'the big business of unknown and unknown-unknown risks' is able to prosper and profit (Krahmann, 2011: 349-350; de Goede, 2008: 161). The key process of imagination within Krahmann's contention is in fact one of inhibition—in risk-orientated societies, imaginations of specific risks are unnecessary, as the ever-present perceived reality of 'unknown-unknown risks' is sufficient to logically mandate the commodification of

'security' as a form of imaginary risk management. Contemporary risks (at least within modern industrialised societies) are thus both created and managed exclusively within the realm of the imagination, and imagination can thus become an economic resource for risk management industries.

This imaginative dynamic, and the power it can grant those individuals or collectives who position themselves as the managers of omnipresent unease (Bigo, 2002), has been described by authors such as de Goede (2008) as a powerful 'fantasy of manageability' (p. 168) or performative preparedness (p. 160) supported by processes of 'premediation' (de Goede, 2008; Grusin, 2004). Grusin's (2004) thesis of premediation, coupled with de Goede's (2008) analysis of premediation's political implications, provide an ideal point for rounding out this brief analysis of how social knowledge, meaning and imagination have been treated within Critical Security Studies research, in that their arguments and approach closely mirror those of the current project while also highlighting some significant gaps in thinking which this dissertation, through its tangent examination of mediation and (in)security, will attempt to help fill.

First among the contentions put forward by both Grusin and de Goede that requires closer scrutiny is the suggestion that 'premediation' differs strongly from the action of 'prediction' in that its focus is not on predicting and pre-empting *likely* future threats, but rather on premediating as many different future threat scenarios as possible. In this sense, de Goede (2008) suggests that premediation as a security practice moves 'beyond risk' by expanding the politics of pre-emption to apply to any and every possible catastrophe (p.171), thus paradoxically 'preventing the future by premediating it—to make sure, in some sense, that the future never happens' by making every possible future happen, through performative and imaginative mediation, within the present (Grusin, 2004: 36; cited in de Goede, 2008: 171).

However, while this analysis acknowledges the role that mediation may play in creating an omnipresent culture of unease, it fails to acknowledge that there may in fact be a pattern to the types of threats which are mediated to us. Some threats—for example, the 'terrorist' threat to the West, which is taken as de Goede's primary example— are premediated with greater frequency than others, and it is social knowledge of the relationship between the Other and ourselves which helps govern the cultural relevancy of any given threat (Aguirre et al., 2010), and thus its subjection to premediation. Framed in this way, premediation does in fact require an element of prediction in that it requires determining *what* or *who* is threatening, and thus its relevance to our own (in)security. While Grusin's thesis of

premediation nods towards the function of social knowledge in the imagination of future threat, it fails to acknowledge the structured and strongly political form of that knowledge.

Secondly, the theory of premediation steers us towards an appreciation of how imaginations of both time and space may in turn have influence over our perception and experience of threat, and how mediation may have a play a role in such imaginations. With regards to time, de Goede posits that by drawing future scenarios into present imaginations, premediation facilitates the logic of pre-emption by seeking to, through the production of 'actionable intelligence' about possible threats (Amoore, 2007a), use imaginations of the future to govern security logics in the present (de Goede, 2008: 169). As for space, de Goede's focus is primarily on the question of gaze, suggesting that in casting disaster scenarios upon familiar locales, premediation invites us to view the familiar through the eyes of the threatening Other (p. 170). The link between mediation and both time and space is thus framed by de Goede in terms of how the two concepts (physical spaces, and locations in time) are represented and communicated. However, this analysis stops short of examining the specifications of media as 'imaginative technologies' themselves (p. 162). That the process of mediation *itself* abstracts the experience of time and space is not explored by de Goede, and will warrant further consideration here.

Finally, de Goede's analysis hints at an emerging opportunity to re-locate and critique power in contemporary security knowledges by introducing analysis of the relationship between processes of mediation and the 'fantasy of manageability' (p. 168). Premediated threat, as conceived of by de Goede, takes the form of a narrative; the bridge between the present and the future is 'conjured' in the form of a story (Tsing, 2001). And when compared to the sensory chaos of everyday experience, a story is inevitably more susceptible to manipulation and control. In telling stories about the future, de Goede suggests that risk management industries are able to effectively (and profitably) position themselves as the 'managers of unease' (Bigo, 2002; in de Goede, 2007: 158) not only by rendering the unknowable knowable through performance, but by positioning themselves within threat narratives as an interventionist remedy to the known, yet unknowable, disaster to come. These insights are incredibly valuable, but are hindered by the fact that de Goede fails to frame the 'manager of unease' in any form other than the institution, or the power of the 'fantasy of manageability' as anything more than commercial promise. After all, when pondering the threat of the unknown, knowing itself is a form of management. Mediation, as the means of such knowing, may itself be the locale of power in imagining (in)security.

## **(IN)SECURITY IN THE MEDIATED WORLD: DRAWING CONNECTIONS**

What has emerged from the above exploration of how the categories of social knowledge, meaning and imagination have been understood and examined within critical approaches to (in)security is a consensus that the experience of threat, and the social actions which make up our attempts towards security, are anchored in our capacity to interact with systems of social meaning and to imaginatively position ourselves as social agents. The underlying contention of this dissertation is that processes of mediation, in their fundamental influence over the ways we interact with the social world and make meaning within it, also fundamentally structure not only the types of (in)security knowledges we are able to build, but more fundamentally, the ways in which we are able to construct them at all. Moreover, mediation has a hand in how we *reproduce* security knowledges through meaningful social action (Hall, 1997), and thus carries significant implications for the politics of (in)security in the mediated world.

Having uncovered the key concerns and dominant approaches of Critical Security Studies scholars in the preceding section, it's time now to return to the Research Question:

### **RQ: What can analysis of mediation offer to the development of critical (in)security knowledges?**

If we return also to Walker's (1997) mandate that critical (in)security research ought to be motivated by a desire to develop approaches under which we are able to ask more productive questions about the social context of (in)security, then the task now is to argue for the value of incorporating mediation into the analytical framework used to ask such questions. Framing such a contribution broadly as an increased awareness of how processes of mediation shape the very systems of knowledge and meaning upon which imaginations of (in)security rely, the most logical step forward is to apply what has been written by scholars of the media about the influence of mediation over those imaginative elements which are of greatest interest to the imaginative experience of threat, and by consequence, the study of (in)security.

### **Mediation and Time**

That the notion of time is crucially important to imaginations of threat, and thus knowledges of (in)security, is now readily apparent. It is through our perceptions of time that we are able

to bridge the mental gap between our present realities and our future possibilities in order to make an imaginary future immediately relevant to the politics of the now (de Goede, 2008; Amoores, 2007a). As articulated by Edkins' thesis of political memory (2003), the mental tangent between the present and the past is also of great relevance, as reimagining the past through the act of remembering is fundamental to informing how we perceive present (in)security realities, and thus the validity of present (in)security knowledges. Perceiving threat requires us to locate ourselves on a linear temporal plane, drawing upon systems of knowledge and meaning within our past, to project ourselves imaginatively into the unknown future. Knowing (in)security requires a meaningful experience of time.

Analysis of mediation, however, uncovers just how disrupted and disorderly the experience of time has become. The events of the past and their associated meanings no longer sit complacently on the chronological rung to which they were assigned—rather, they are fixated in text and image, circulated, and reproduced endlessly (Thompson, 1995). Something that happens once can, through mediation, happen over and over again, with its cultural relevancy renewed and reimagined with each mediation, and thus unhooked from its original temporal context. The act of remembering, it might be said, is reconceived as re-experiencing; memories in text serve as mediated performances of an impossibly simultaneous past-future (Lagerkvist, 2013) and the notion of a threat being historically either 'familiar' or 'unprecedented' becomes less a question of history and more of mere aesthetic (Friis, 2015). As articulated by Ekström (2012), the chronology of history is disjointed by mediation as an omnipresent form of performative re-enactment. By consequence, the historicity of culture—and its implications for making meaning of threat—meets a similarly confusing fate.

Meanwhile, the task of positioning ourselves within time becomes ever more complicated as the processes, technologies and texts of mediation abstract our sense of temporal distance. Our proximity to threats both past and future is ever shortened as the media relay them from their distant locales into the immediacy of the present (Schulz, 2004). With regard to future threat, the implications of this temporal distortion have already been explored and discussed by de Goede (2008) in her analysis of both financial stress testing and mediated performances of unknown terrorist futures as powerful forms of imaginative risk management. The conclusion reached by de Goede is that by performing the future within the present, we feed the illusion that the unknowable can somehow be known, and once known, controlled. But the implications of mediation for our temporal imaginations go beyond the simple ability to performatively construct the future within the present. What also demands acknowledgement is the *potential for anxiety* in the vacuum between our modern perceptions of human-made time (as manipulated by mediation) and the continued, plodding

rhythm of natural time to which we, despite our technological cleverness, are still subject (Bear, 2014). In the flimsy respite of feeling that we can know the future, there is residual unease in the temporal reality that we cannot, ever, know it. And the strength of this unease—and by consequence, its potential power—grows only stronger as the media's capacity for imaginative performance edges our fingers closer to that which we will never actually be able to grasp.

Given the fundamentality of temporal experience to the social construction of threat, there is much here that mandates further investigation through collaborative work between critical scholars of both (in)security and mediation. Such research may uncover the emancipatory potential of a world where the past is constantly and collectively reimaged, thus allowing for constant reinterpretation of previously rigid historical meanings. However, approaching the study of time through the lens of mediation may too uncover troubling new possibilities for the development of dominant security knowledges which will mandate further interrogation. One question that may beg answering, for example, is how the opportunities for *forgetting* are inhibited in a social world which constantly re-mediate its own past. Perhaps too, the worrying potential for de-politicisation of (in)security knowledges which need not lay roots in their chronological sequence from events of the past. Moreover, in a mediated social world which constructs performative visions of the future using present systems of knowledge of meaning, 'crystalising' certain modes of representation (i.e. the dirty, the sick, the poor) around that which we perceive as threatening (Campbell, 2008: 2), what risk may we run of transforming such performances into self-fulfilling prophecies of a kind, given the power of the way we *imagine* security to affect the way we *act* in pursuit of it? These questions, among many others, will require careful analysis of the structural sway of mediation over the social experience of time if such questioning is to produce answers of relevance to mediated social contexts.

### **Mediation, Place and the Subject**

In the simplest sense, the importance of interrogating place to the critical investigation of (in)security is mandated by the overwhelming and highly normative emphasis on the nation-state within traditional security studies research and the resulting epistemological tendency to study security phenomena within bounded geographical contexts (Walker, 1997; Booth, 1997). Moreover, the review of Critical Security Studies literature which has already taken place leads to the conclusion that place, within the paradigm of (in)security, ought to be approached as a socio-cultural construct rather than a physical entity, as it is our social

location which holds greatest sway over how we are able to perceive threat and imagine (in)security. Such an approach does not dismiss the idea that physical location (for example, within the geographically bounded nation-state) may have influence over social place—rather, it simply challenges the normative assumption that the nation-state is *definitive* of place and our experience of it. As an epistemological project, the challenge for Critical Security Studies is thus to explore possible alternatives to the nation-state as the referent object of (in)security (Walker, 1997) in recognition of the fact that group subjectivities, understood as social and cultural products, can be stratified and discordant *within* nations (Campbell, 1998) as well as meaningfully constructed *across* national contexts.

That analysis of mediation, particularly in the era of internet-based 'new media', may have something to offer this project should be unsurprising, given the existing work of scholars like Anderson (1989) and McLuhan (1964) on the role that the advent of the print press—and by extension, the newspaper—played in granting social and cultural coherence to the idea of the nation in the first place. Of principal interest to both scholars was the capacity for print materials, as a technology of mediation, to extend the physical limits of human communication across space (Schulz, 2004: 88) whilst generating an imaginative sense of simultaneity across different spatial contexts (Anderson, 1989), thus unhooking our sense of place from our experience of linear time (Thompson, 1995: 32). However, as the production, circulation and consumption of media texts become ever-more emancipated from national contexts, so too are the systems of meaning and shared subjectivities which media texts and processes are able to foster. For this reason, analysis of mediation has much to offer Critical Security Studies scholars in understanding the implications of globalisation as a 'mediated cultural force' (Silverstone, 1999: 108), as well as the mediated reconfiguration of our relationship to place, for our subjective imaginations of (in)security.

There are several approaches which such an incorporation of mediation theory into the critical study of place and subjectivity in the construction of (in)security might take, and each will carry with it its own opportunities and limitations. One approach might be to follow in the footsteps of authors like Meyrowitz (1985) who have proposed that the media themselves ought to be understood, and thus epistemologically treated, as cultural environments. Though Meyrowitz and his 'medium theory' predecessors (p.16-23) focus specifically on the influence of individual mediation technologies (in Meyrowitz's case, television) over our physical and cultural sense of place, it can follow that the more complex and multi-faceted environment of 'new media' might too be adopted as a cultural context of (in)security which, like any geographical context, carries its own structural topography of strengths and vulnerabilities. Most fundamental among the characteristics of the mediated environment,



Meyrowitz suggests, is a sense of de-contextualisation—that is, that symbolic meanings embedded within media texts are de-contextualised from the place of their production upon the instance of their reception and interpretation elsewhere. The experience of the social, as facilitated by mediated knowledge, thus becomes unhinged from the experience of physical place (Meyrowitz, 1985: 115), an effect which authors like Turkle (2011) suggest is only amplified through the advent of mobile communicative technologies. New media technologies, in their near-constant capacity to drag the far-flung 'there' into the proximity of the 'here', leave us with the paradoxical capacity to be everywhere, and by consequence, 'nowhere in particular' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 125). Our social subjectivity, it might be optimistically (and perhaps misleadingly) argued, no longer knows the physical bounds of place.

The implications of this mediated reconfiguration on the relationship between place and social experience warrant further investigation by Critical Security Studies scholars, particularly in rethinking the nature and function of subjectivity in dominant Western (in)security knowledges. Indeed, there may be cause for optimism, as authors like Robertson (2010), who have explored the relationship between mediation and the advent of 'cosmopolitan imagination' (p. 14-15), have alluded to; the capacity of mediated communication to subvert the remoteness of distant suffering, and by consequence, facilitate the cultural relevance of distant (in)security contexts within the Western imagination.

Through fostering a globalised sense of affiliation, the technologies, texts and processes of new media might thus be seen as a potential answer to Hannah Arendt's mandate that we bridge remoteness 'until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair' (Arendt, 1994: 323; quoted in Robertson, 2010: 14-15). However, in treating the environment of mediation as a context of (in)security, it must also be asked how this environment, like any other, may be securitised in accordance with dominant systems of knowledge and meaning which, though no longer bounded within physical place or the cultural context of the nation-state, maintain roots in the material world and the experience of locality. Cultural and material experience do not operate in isolation of one another, and to premise that mediation has removed any and all sense of locality from our imaginations of (in)security, would be to place a false epistemological barrier between physical and social place (Meyrowitz, 1985: 308).

Instead, there may be value in Critical Security Studies scholars approaching the study of mediated globality not as a cultural reality, but rather as a *powerful illusion*—as itself a mediated social construct with implications for the development of (in)security knowledges



which warrant close and careful critique. Not least among these implications may be the potential for mediation, in its capacity to facilitate a *selective* experience of distant place, to obscure and depoliticise the continued influence of Western economic, political and cultural contexts over our imaginations of (in)security through the illusion of 'knowing' the Other.

This possibility has already been explored to some extent by those scholars who have approached the critical study of (in)security through the examination of discursively constructed 'Otherness' within media texts—the work of Aguirre et al., (2010), already discussed earlier in this project, might be taken as an example of such an approach. However, there is a pressing need for Critical Security Studies scholars to also consider the implications of mediation *processes* for structuring the conditions under which we experience distant place. Beyond the potential for ever-mediated (and thus ever-present) threats to foster the development of a highly-exploitable 'neurotic citizen' (Isin, 2004), as has already been discussed, it also begs asking whether a certain amount of affectual resonance may be lost in the act of mediating a threat rather than experiencing it via 'first-hand' stimuli, thus limiting our capacity to integrate mediated threats into our own positioning as subjects of (in)security knowledge as we are 'disembodied' from social space (Deuze, 2012).

The possible implications of the mediated reconfiguration of our experience of place, then, may be a neurotic sense that all threats are relevant to us through mediated proximity, or the inability to view almost any threat as truly relevant due to the sanitised distance implicated in the act of mediation—or, inevitably, both and neither. Regardless, in attempting to rethink and critique the role that our sense of place and our collective subjectivities play in our imaginations of (in)security, and thus to denaturalise the nation-state as the context of (in)security, Critical Security Studies research must integrate mediation into its epistemological frameworks if it is to methodologically and theoretically reflect the shifting experiences of these phenomena in mediated cultures, and as such, their implications for socially constructed (in)security knowledges in mediated societies.

### **Mediation, Difference and Visual Culture**

In terms of interrogating *how* knowledges of security are constructed using social and cultural resources, two things have become evidently clear throughout reviewing the literature of Critical Security Studies. The first of these is that not all resources are created nor adopted equally for the task. As articulated in Amoores's (2007a) thesis of 'lines of sight', the imaginative construction of threat is dependent upon not only which types of stimuli are

made available to us, but also by a selective attentiveness to some stimuli over others. As argued by Krause (1998), no object is threatening in and of itself, but rather *becomes* threatening through the construction of meaning around it. Our selective attentiveness, Amoore suggests, is thus a cultural product grounded in the capacity to recognise and differentiate between what is 'normal' and what is 'deviant'. The cyclical counterpart of this reproductive process, Fierke (1997) has suggested, are the 'grammars of security' (p. 230) which govern how we are able to speak and think—and crucially, how we might *not* be able to speak and think—about (in)security and threat. Selective reception and interpretation of representations of threat in turn shape how we are able to speak and thus think about (in)security, and vice versa. This cycle of knowledge production, Krause contends is '*the issue to be researched*' in critical approaches to the study of (in)security (Krause, 1998: 306-307; emphasis in original).

Unveiling and analysing the part that mediation plays in this cycle, is of vital importance if Critical Security Studies scholars are to gauge an accurate reading of its dynamics and implications in highly-mediated socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, it is insufficient to focus only on the discursive construction of threat within media texts, as many of the works discussed within this dissertation have already done. While such an approach offers invaluable insight into the types of symbolic meanings which are in circulation within the media, it pays insufficient attention to the implications of process, format and cultural context for the *reception* of those meanings and their *reproduction* as social knowledge (and later, possibly, as social action). As argued by O'Loughlin (2011), analysing the symbolic meanings present within a mediated image of war (for example) is insufficient for understanding the *knowledges* of war that such an image might help foster in the mind of the viewer, as the process of decoding media texts inevitably involves an interaction between the text itself and the various historical, political and cultural narratives and meanings present within the mind of the viewer before the text can be appropriated to the task of knowledge production (Hall, 1980). To return again to 'lines of sight' (Amoore, 2007a), a text-based approach may help survey the availability of threat stimuli in mediated societies, but it does little to address the question of attentiveness.

What might serve as a useful complementary approach, however, is turning the critical gaze towards the implications of media processes for the dominant *form* of threat stimuli as embodied in media text. In the era of new media, such an approach might involve consideration of mediation's hand in the proliferation of what some have called 'visual' or 'image' culture as a constitutive element of the social world (Jansson, 2001; Evans & Hall, 1999; Rusted, 1997). While there has been significant critique of attempts to theorise modern

cultures as 'visual', not least in the disregard such theories often carry towards the continued function of other sensory and communicative modes (Duncum, 2004), what endures such critique is the suggestion that the saturation of visual cultural forms within society breeds a certain 'visual competency' among audiences in the reception and interpretation of meaning (Jansson, 2001: 78-81; Prior, 2014). Moreover, in partnership with research that suggests a stronger visual competency among audiences is another body of research which argues that, through proliferation of the visual, *seeing* has become something of a 'sovereign sense' (Amoore, 2007b; Mitchell, 2005; Bal, 2003). The reason that both of these contentions are able to weather allegations of 'visual essentialism' is precisely because, far from suggesting that sight actually *is* the sovereign sense of cultural and political knowledge production, they suggest instead that sight is *represented as such* with significant cultural and material implications for the politics of (in)security (Amoore, 2007b: 217).

In attempting to examine how certain knowledges of (in)security gain cultural salience over others, it is therefore crucial that Critical Security Studies scholars turn their attention to how mediation helps grant authority not only to visual text, but also more fundamentally to 'everyday practices of seeing and showing' (Mitchell, 2002: 170; in Amoore, 2007b: 217) in our perceptions, and thus imaginations, of threat. Not least among the questions which must be asked is, what are the political implications for the production of (in)security knowledges of a mediated society wherein 1) a growing proportion of threat stimuli are presented in visual form; 2) our competency for deducting knowledge from visual stimuli is enhanced, and; 3) visual stimuli are represented as authoritative in cultural systems of knowledge production, and thus (in)security knowledge claims?

Given what has already been said about the relationship between imaginations of threat and perceptions of difference between 'self' and 'Other', the potential for the intense politicisation of visual difference in a 'watchful' mediated society, and the institutionalisation of such watchfulness in practices of media stereotyping and racial profiling (Amoore, 2007b: 216), is not least among those implications which demand further empirical exploration and theorisation by scholars of both mediation and (in)security. Furthermore, it may warrant further investigation of how the omnipresence of visual media practices (such as photography and video production), when coupled with an authority of the visual and the logic of pre-emption (Simon, 2012), may feed a sense of cultural banality and thus permissiveness around oppressive Western security practices such as surveillance (Goold, Loader & Thumala, 2013; Caluya, 2015) or the securitisation of photography through legislative systems which govern not only where and by whom photographic technologies may be used, but also to whom photographic texts belong (Simon, 2012).

All of this is, of course, only speculative until Critical Security Studies scholars take up the task of incorporating an analysis of the relationship between mediation and visual culture into the theoretical frameworks used to explore the production and reproduction of (in)security knowledges. The arguments made here are intended only as hints towards the importance of taking up such a task. Beyond this epistemological mandate, there is also a methodological directive that Critical Security Studies must heed. For if our imaginations and knowledges of the political are increasingly visual in nature—as has been empirically investigated and argued by Prior (2014)—then empirical attempts to investigate and critique dominant (in)security knowledges may fail to unearth the influence of mediated visual culture if they do not incorporate an element of visual stimuli into their methodological design.

### **Mediation and the 'Fantasy of Manageability': Securitisation by Culture?**

The claim to be made here is perhaps the most difficult, in that it requires synthesising much of what has already been said about the opportunities for integrating analysis of mediation into the critical study of (in)security. It is also, perhaps, at greatest risk of being redundantly vague, as it could validly be construed as a speculation based on other speculations. That said, it might be best to conceive of what is being put forward here not as a developed claim, but rather, as a brief proposal. The proposal, put plainly, is that the 'fantasy of manageability' (de Goede, 2008: 168) may be much easier to perform in highly-mediated societies. Moreover, it is suggested that tangent examination of both mediation and (in)security through a critical cultural lens has lent itself to the possibility that mediation (as defined earlier in this project) may not only bolster the power of individuals and institutions to position themselves as the 'managers of unease' (Bigo, 2002), but may also *itself* serve as the manager of unease through what we might call 'securitisation by culture'.

The simplest form of this proposal might be to suggest, as Martin (2006) has done, that cultural constructions of threat can and should be examined as mediated cultural narratives. Threat, of course, is fundamentally different from mere fear, in that the experience of threat traverses the imaginative territory between the present and the unknown future, while the experience of fear requires no such journey. And as de Goede (2008) and Grusin (2007) have already warned, telling the imaginative story of threat through performative or narrative mediation leaves the journey highly susceptible to ambush. When compared to the relative anarchy of lived sensory experience, narratives are vulnerable. In constructing mediated

narratives of threat—and thus experiencing threat *as* narrative—there may be an enhanced capacity for the producers of media texts to position themselves or others as the necessary intervention to prevent unknown (yet, as always, ostensibly knowable) future catastrophes from coming to pass. Simply, they can tell the story on their own terms and in service of their own interests. By consequence, mediation processes, texts and technologies take on a 'new political significance' in their capacity to facilitate specific imaginations of the future (de Goede, 2007: 155) in neurotic, threat-saturated mediated societies. Those with control and influence over such acts of mediation, by association, take on new political power.

However, such an appraisal of the power of threat as embodied in mediated *cultural* narratives does not go far enough, nor does it necessarily go in quite the right direction. It draws a misleading dichotomy between the producers and consumers of media texts and, more importantly, it falls into the trap of seeking to unmask power in processes of mediation by merely identifying who or what might be responsible for them, ignoring the largely symbolic nature of cultural power in mediated society (Hall, 1998). Crucially, it sidesteps the possibility that if it is the very 'unknowability' of the future which is most threatening, then *the very sense of knowing* may itself be a form of imaginative management. Mediation, in its structural influence over the circulation of symbolic cultural forms, may then embody a mode of securitisation through its capacity to feed powerful yet illusive forms of pre-emptive cultural knowledge—to fuel the illusion, figuratively speaking, that 'the individual already resembles his crime before he has committed it' (Foucault, 1975/2003: 19-20; in Amoore, 2007b: 221).

What is meant, then, by 'securitisation by culture', is the notion that by gifting a certain regularity to the circulation and nature of symbolic forms and social knowledge, and by facilitating their movement, the media may in fact be performing the imaginative work of managing the 'threat of the unknown' by making it appear knowable in the form of pre-emptive (and often oppressive) cultural knowledge—by 'carving up social reality' (Altheide, 2014: 155) into digestible slices of meaning. The implications of this suggestion for the study of mediated (in)security are clear enough; they beckon questioning of whether, for example, racialised stereotypes of the 'terrorist threat' (Alsultany, 2012) or fearful nationalistic discourses of the 'asylum-seeker Other' (Gale, 2004) may in fact do more than nurture fear of the 'Other'—that they may, almost counterintuitively, provide *reassurance* to our individual and collective anxieties about unknown and unknowable threat by making the imaginative terrain between the present and the future, through the mediated illusion of 'knowing' what threatens us, somehow predictable.

Thus, while the proposal that mediated (in)security may encompass 'securitisation by culture' is arguably the most abstract suggestion being made within this project, it is also arguably the most important. For if, as has been suggested, the key object of fear in mediated society is not any specific socially or culturally constructed threat, but rather the 'unknown-unknown' itself (Krahmann, 2011: 349), then it is the mediated dynamic of knowing-in-not-knowing which fuels the very social and cultural anxiety which gives specific constructions of threat, and specific knowledges of (in)security, their power. Mediation itself may be the guise behind which the structural violences inherent in dominant (in)security knowledges are able to lurk and flourish. And thus if, as Walker (1997) suggests, re-approaching (in)security from a critical standpoint requires rethinking the character and nature of the political (p. 69), then merely incorporating mediation into the theoretical framework used to interrogate dominant (in)security knowledges is insufficient. In a society afraid of the unknown-unknown, mediation processes are more than a means for exercising power—they are a source of power themselves. Mediation, therefore, may find itself the illusive 'referent object' of Critical Security Studies research.

## CONCLUSION

In setting the mandate for Critical Security Studies research to challenge and creatively reimagine the conditions under which we ask questions about (in)security as a contemporary social phenomenon, Walker (1997) warned that questions about the nature and implications of the relationship between (in)security, knowledge and power were 'not susceptible to easy answers' (p. 63). He was not wrong. The scope of the attempt contained here has been as broad as its conclusions have been elusive. However, this attempt to think through the ways in which analysis of mediation might be able to expand and develop the critical theoretical frameworks used to study (in)security in mediated societies has covered some important ground.

Firstly, through an analysis of the ways in which social knowledge, meaning and imagination have been allotted value within existing Critical Security Studies research, it has been established that integrating analysis of mediation into critical (in)security epistemologies is a viable suggestion. The two disciplines—critical study of mediation and (in)security respectively—share congruent underpinnings in their approach to the study of social 'realities', and share a similar interest in developing a more complex understanding of the

workings of power behind the way we speak and thus know about societal phenomenon. Secondly, through attempting to 'speak' to the key questions of Critical Security Studies research from the perspective of mediation scholarship—namely, by examining perceptions of time, place, difference and manageability as key 'imaginative elements' in the construction and experience of threat—it has been argued that beyond viability, there is value in such an endeavour. The discussion of the implications of integrating critical studies of both mediation and (in)security at these particular junctures is of course by no means conclusive. Rather, it should be taken as an early exploration of the possibilities—a mandate of its own for future theoretical and empirical research to pick up and carry forward.

What must finally be articulated, then, is the vital importance of such research. For this, we need only return to the founding premise of Critical Security Studies research—that knowledge, intangible though it may be, has profoundly tangible effects. Imaginations of threat have consequences in social action (Krause, 1998), and knowledges of (in)security—products of imaginative threat though they may be—have power in feeding the cultural resonance of the many discursive and institutional systems of structural violence make up our attempts towards 'security', particularly in contexts of relative material prosperity and safety. Not least of these violences is the constructed cultural fear of the 'Other', and the paradoxical reassurance of feeling we can 'secure' our unknown futures by knowing the 'Other's' threatening nature. In this powerful dynamic, this grotesque reassurance-by-fear, mediation as both process and socio-cultural condition is heavily implicated. Analysis of mediation is therefore crucial if Critical Security Studies scholars are to productively question and critique how it is we arrive to imagine (in)security in a mediated social world.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Firstly, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Sarah Cefai for her ongoing support and guidance throughout the process of writing this dissertation. In particular, the encouragement she has offered me in tackling the challenge of writing a theoretical project has been invaluable and deeply appreciated. Additionally, I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Shani Orgad of the London School of Economics and Political Science Department of Media and Communications, and Dr. Marsha Henry of the LSE Gender Institute, for the insights and advice they offered me in the preliminary thinking behind this dissertation, and in the development of my research question and approach. Finally, I would like thank Dr. Damian Grenfell of RMIT University for his ongoing support of my academic and professional endeavors, and for pushing me to always think critically about the relationship between (in)security, power and knowledge.



Sincere gratitude is also due to my friends and family for their ongoing support in the emotional labour of writing this project, and in particular to Sahra Rae Taylor for her comments, feedback and encouragement throughout the writing process

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