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Critical Torsions, Contorting the Critical: Ontological Security Studies and the Epistemological Politics of Self-Critique

Wednesday 3 June 2026 09:00 (1h 30m)

How critical has Ontological Security Studies (OSS) been? After nearly two decades of innovative scholarship examining the intersection of emotions, and the psychosocial dimensions of security, its critical purchase remains underexamined. Much as Critical Security Studies challenged traditional security approaches, OSS scholars claimed to have advanced a conception of security beyond physical threats, proposing instead a 'security of the self'. Yet OSS's theoretical resonances with and epistemological departures from critical security studies more broadly remain scarcely explored, as it is the boundaries of the self, whether in its psychological, ontological, or analytical dimensions.

This panel undertakes a reflexive interrogation of OSS, deploying a double gesture: turning the critical apparatus of OSS upon itself whilst simultaneously examining its epistemological and political relationship with critical security studies in IR. It proposes a 'critical torsion', twisting OSS to reveal its constitutive limits, assumptions, and silences, whilst also 'contorting the critical' by interrogating how critique itself operates within and through OSS frameworks. We welcome papers addressing:

• Has OSS reached theoretical saturation, or do unexplored avenues remain?
• How can the security of the self provide genuinely critical perspectives on international politics?
• How does OSS epistemologically relate to, and diverge from, Critical Security Studies?
• Might OSS offer novel frameworks for theorising the critical role of theory and the theoretical role of practice?

Track Classification: Critical Alternatives for World Politics