

*The Limits of Emergencies and the Time of Event: The Pre-Event Configuration of Biological Threats*

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**AN- Abstract** ([download a full text pdf. copy](#))

An examination of the State of Israel's discourses and practices regarding the preparedness against biological threats reveals the emergence of a pre-event configuration. The pre-event configuration does not present a unified rationale of preparedness for biological threats but rather a multiplicity of diagnostics of problems and comparable solutions.

Three elements – science, security and public health – combine to form a new complexity that I refer to as the pre-event configuration. In the scientific element, the differentiation between natural agents and their intentional uses accomplished outside the laboratory is noticeable. Based on this distinction, scientists do not view the biological agent itself as threatening, and therefore believe they can manage both natural and unnatural events, in the same way they manage “routine” natural events. Security officials raise the concept of dual use and object to the scientists' differentiation between bio and terror, between a natural agent and its violent use. They claim that all biological material holds the potential for violent use, and therefore suggest that supervision of, and preparedness for bioterrorism, begin in the laboratory. They emphasize the importance of the employment of bio-security practices concurrent with bio-safety practices that scientists employ when dealing with accidents and unintentional events. The third group of public health officials also argues against the differentiation between a natural and an intentional event, and creates a new category of exceptional biological events for responding to a wide-ranging category of biological threats. The changes resulting from this category are part of the processes of separating and combining elements within this configuration and demonstrate the dynamics of this assemblage.

Despite its complexity, this configuration is not formatted to deal with all types of hazards. I believe that the pre-event configuration, notwithstanding the profusion and heterogeneity of the discourses and practices it presents, is not responsible for the treatment of all events. In other words, not every event is considered a disaster within this framework and certain events remain outside the pre-event configuration.

Consequently, many biological events are managed under this broad category, and other biological events are left outside this framework in a type of category of failure that I choose to call the natural category, or the category of events that have become natural: “natural” events or “naturalized” events.

Furthermore, the pre-event configuration of biological threats is not merely a set of practices preliminary to the occurrence of the event, or something that takes place in its aftermath. This configuration also determines what will be perceived as an event (or a disaster) that needs to be prepared for in advance.

The analysis maintains that the perception of a disaster takes place beyond the actual time when the event occurs, and is determined by the pre-event configuration in the time of event. In this instance I refer to Deleuze’s concept “time of event.” The time of event is in contrast to ordinary time, that presents the event in the actual form it takes. I suggest viewing the formation of the event without the demarcation of the time of occurrence, or as Deleuze would describe it, before the actualization of an event.

I therefore suggest that an initial understanding of the event should begin in the pre-event configuration. Additionally, I do not intend to examine only the actual preparedness prior to the event, but to also observe the way in which the pre-event configuration, in this sense, establishes events; only what remains in the realm of becoming can then turn into being.

The pre-event configuration determines what will be understood in “the real future” as a disaster; what actual present could occur at some point in the future, and in particular, how various disasters will be understood. This formation that works as an event, determines what eventually will become the event. Therefore, the distinction between the time of occurrence, when the event takes place (the ordinary time), and the time of event, affords the possibility of broadening the analysis of the event beyond the boundaries of its actual occurrence. Moreover, one can claim that the actual event will take place and will be viewed as an actual event only in relation to the pre-event configuration. In this sense, the disaster is in becoming, wherein what is attributed to it, and what transforms it into the event over time, can be located in the temporality ascribed to the work of preparedness.