Performing preemption

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Abstract
Nearly 15 years after 9/11, it is time to grapple with the way in which imperatives of preemption have made their way into routine security practice and bureaucratic operations. As a growing literature in security studies and political geography has argued, preparing for catastrophe, expecting the worst, and scripting disasters are central elements of contemporary, speculative security culture. One of the most-discussed findings of the 9/11 Commission Report was that US security services had insufficiently deployed their imagination to foresee and preempt the attacks. This article introduces a special issue that offers a range of in-depth empirical studies that analyse how the imperative of 'routinizing the imagination' plays out in practice across different policy domains. It deploys the lens of performativity in order to conceptualize and explain the materialization of preemption and its situated entanglements with pre-existing security bureaucracies. We detail the idealized traits of a 'security of the interstice', which include interoperability, emergence, flexibility and analytical foresight that are meant to bridge the perceived gaps of security spaces and the temporal bridges between present and possible futures. The lofty rhetoric of preparing for the worst and bridging the gaps encounters numerous obstacles, challenges and reversals *in practice*. As becomes clear through the notion of performativity, such obstacles and challenges do not just 'stand in the way' of implementation, but actively shape the materialization of preemption in different sectors.

Introduction

Dutch artist Aernout Mik's 2005 video installation *Refraction* shows the busy scene of a bus accident on a rural road. At first glance, the scene depicts a modern catastrophe: a bus has broken in two and blocks a two-lane road, causing a large traffic jam. One part of the bus is overturned, and

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security and health officials crowd around the wreckage and cart victims off on stretchers. An orange makeshift tent has been erected beside the wreck, presumably for forensic work of some kind. However, as the video loop continues – and as the viewer maintains her gaze – the scene arguably morphs into something else. The urgency of disaster dissipates: victims walk around dazed; emergency personnel look busy but largely ineffective; car drivers look resigned in the growing traffic jam and start to wander around. A herd of goats crosses the road in the middle of the scene, moving in between the victims, cars and ambulances. Neither animal nor human seems disturbed by this absurd co-presence. If at first glance there is a seeming business-like effectiveness to the disaster scene, a longer viewing renders a slow-moving, meandering and alienating non-spectacle. The urgency of disaster dissipates into a banal interplay of diverse actors, affects and routines.[1]

As a growing literature in security studies and political geography has argued, preparing for catastrophe, expecting the worst and scripting disasters are central elements of contemporary, speculative security culture.[2] One of the most-discussed findings of the 9/11 Commission Report was that US security services had insufficiently deployed their imagination to foresee and preempt the attacks (Salter, 2008; Bougen and O'Malley, 2009). More precisely, the Commission criticized security bureaucracies for failing to turn threat speculations 'into constructive actions'. It noted that imaginative threat scenarios were 'slow to work their way into the thinking of aviation security experts' and criticized the Counter-Terrorism Committee for failing to develop analytical tools, indicators and protocols for expecting the unexpected and acting preemptively (9/11 Commission, 2004: 344, 348). Following the 9/11 Commission's (2004: 344) call that it is 'crucial to find a way of routinizing, even bureaucratizing, the exercise of imagination', institutions and sectors across the security landscape have embraced the drive to incorporate uncertain futures and preemptive protocols into their everyday bureaucratic practice. This call has not just led to an increased appetite for disruptive security action against potential terrorist cells (see e.g. Aradau and Van Munster, 2011; De Goede and De Graaf, 2013), but been taken up in many policy domains and across multiple levels of government: from city officials rehearsing chemical attack scenarios (Anderson and, Adey, 2012; Aradau and Van Munster, 2012), to transnational security strategies built on notions of a 'less visible and less predictable' international threat landscape (European Union, 2003: 3); from the UK's Blackett review seeking protocol for managing high-impact/low-probability risk, to international worst-case-scenario modelling of terrorist-initiated smallpox contagions (Uncertain Commons, 2013: 62–63).

Nearly 15 years after 9/11, the contributions to this special issue seek to grapple with how preemptive imperatives have made their way into routine security practice and bureaucratic operations. The special issue offers a range of in-depth empirical and conceptual studies across different practical domains in a European context – including health policy, civil security and local counter-terrorism – to interrogate how routinizing the imagination plays out across different domains. The issue shows how low-probability/high-impact threats – including, for example, pandemics, natural disasters and terrorist attacks – have been imagined and incorporated into everyday security practice. It analyses how data analytics, commercial practices and policing protocol embrace, contest and incorporate anticipatory, preemptive logics.

With the notion of preemption, we refer to security practices that aim to act on threats that are unknown and recognized to be unknowable, yet deemed potentially catastrophic, requiring security intervention at the earliest possible stage (Aradau and Van Munster, 2007, 2011). Preemption is oriented toward the incertitude of the fundamentally unknown – not just because of missing data or incomplete calculations, but because there is a recognized lack of human knowledge and reliable parameters in a certain domain (Hildebrandt, 2010: 8, drawing on Stirling, 2003). The notion of radicalization, for example, is understood as such an unknown but potentially catastrophic and dispersed societal phenomenon. Despite the fact that the 'process' of radicalization is recognized

to be non-linear and fundamentally unpredictable (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk, 2012), and despite a widely admitted lack of parameters to render it measurable, radicalization is now subject to EU-wide policy efforts that aim to achieve early, preemptive intervention (De Goede and Simon, 2012). As European Union (EU) Home Affairs Commissioner Cecilia Malström (2014) put it in a recent speech,

> We are currently facing a growing extremist threat which has mutated and evolved in the last few years, spreading across our continent. Terrorism is now being driven by a wide range of sources…. It is … time to focus Europe's efforts on a truly preemptive response.

There is no space here to engage the debate concerning the differences between precaution, preemption and preparedness (see e.g. Collier and Lakoff, 2008; De Goede and Randalls, 2009; Anderson, 2010). Our focus here is on the notion of preemption as an anticipatory security practice that anchors itself 'unabashedly' in uncertainty. For Massumi (2007: §13), this is not 'due to a simple lack of knowledge … [but because] the nature of the threat cannot be specified…. [T]hreat has become proteiform and it tends to proliferate unpredictably'. Here, important parallels can be drawn with the notion of speculation. We regard preemption to be *speculative*, not because it is imaginative or unreal, but because it deploys notions of futurity that parallel the technologies of financial speculation. Like financial speculation, security preemption is not so much about *predicting* the future, but acts on multiple potential futures that are rendered actionable (or liquid) in the present (Cooper, 2010; De Goede, 2012; Amoore, 2013). Akin to speculation, the affective and anxious atmospheres of preemption (Simon, 2012) generate commercial and political investments in the face of a future that is recognized to be unknown. Speculative instruments like derivatives have been understood as turning the '*contestability* of fundamental value into a tradable commodity … [thus] provid[ing] a market benchmark for an unknowable value' (Martin, 2013: 91, drawing on Bryan and Rafferty, 2006; emphasis in original). Following this logic, we may say that security preemption similarly turns the contestability of uncertain futures into commodities – in the form of action plans and government expenditure – while generating its own benchmarks of success. To return to the example of radicalization, a preemptive response here mobilizes local governments and civil society actors to intervene with 'problem youth'; it seeks to broaden the space for law enforcement intervention; and it generates substantial expenditure toward knowledge networks (Malström, 2014). It fosters its own benchmarks for success: including measures of money spent and civil society cooperation enacted (but not necessarily evidence of radical paths rerouted or attacks prevented). Reading preemption in conjunction with speculation, then, generates attention to its productivity and commercial viability.

This introduction draws on the notion of *performativity* in order to conceptualize preemption as a productive force. Performativity transcends the juxtaposition of the 'ideal' versus the 'material', instead arguing for the iterative constitution of objects and subjects through discursive practice (Butler, 1993; Bialasiewicz et al., 2007). Put differently, performativity moves beyond a social constructivist agenda because it dispenses with 'the separation … between the symbolic order and the particular situations within which that order is realised' (Anderson and Harrison, 2010: 5). Not all of the articles in this special issue theorize their contribution through this lens. Still, we propose that this is a useful theoretical starting point because it draws attention to the fact that 'preemption' does not pre-exist its practice. Performativity highlights the situated materializations of preemption and underscores their *processual* entanglements with pre-existing security bureaucracies. Mik's video installations are thought-provoking in this sense, because they invite the viewer to consider how the threshold between the surprising and the routine, the messy and the ordered, and the exceptional and the everyday are negotiated as events emerge and security is practiced in situ. Performativity is also a *profoundly political* lens: its focus on 'recitation and repetition' draws

attention to the situated challenges, obstacles and stumbling blocks that shape preemption in practice (Bialasiewicz et al., 2007: 407). It recognizes that it is precisely through such situated iterations and negotiations that preemption takes shape.

In this vein, contributions to the special issue address questions that include: What are the historical relationships between imagination, intuition and calculative rationalities? How are existing security agendas shaped and realigned toward objectives of preemption and early intervention in the case of, for example, possible pandemics and potential terrorist plots? How does the expectation of low-probability/high-impact events evolve with bureaucratic and industry practice? How are local goals and existing technologies rephrased or reoriented to serve these novel ambitions?

Taken together, this issue seeks to take forward the ongoing work on the politics of preemption in three ways. First, it builds a richer picture of the situated practices of preemptive security and their entanglements with pre-existing routines. This is more than an empirical contribution: it builds on recent literature in security studies that has called for attention to the significance of, and the politics involved in, 'the continuous process of assembling objects, subjects and practices' in securitization (Huysmans, 2011: 377; see also Huysmans, 2006; Bellanova and González-Fuster, 2013). By drawing on the notion of performativity, such focus on continuous process and mundane practice is given analytical depth, as well as a specific capacity for political critique. Second, and building on insights from speculation literatures, the issue analyses the complex relation between commerce and preemptive security practice. Third, we seek to broaden the range of political questions that can be brought to bear on preemption. As will be explained, the framework of performativity is important precisely because of its attention to failings and misperformances. Through studying the politics of preemption 'in the middle of events' (Barry, 2006: 244), novel sites for anchoring critique of preemptive practice can be opened up. Before elaborating the notion of performativity, we discuss what we call the idealized traits of a security practice poised to confront the unknowable. The conclusion to this short piece draws out how the special issue takes the debate on the politics of preemption forward.

A security of the interstice

In critical security literatures, it is now a commonplace notion that the threat framing of an irruptive, unpredictable enemy that could emerge from anywhere at any time has decisively shaped post-9/11 security practice and evolved with other, pre-existing threat frames (see e.g. Campbell, 1992). A wealth of critical work has outlined how utterly crucial the 'everywhere war' imagination has been to contemporary political, security and military formations (Gregory, 2011), and to preemptive interventions where disastrous futures are understood as imminent and immanent in the spaces of everyday life (Amoore, 2007; Aradau and Van Munster, 2007). While there has been much discussion of threat imaginaries and their speculative futures, less attention has been paid to the idealized traits of *security* in this context. In other words, how is security supposed to function or operate in the face of threats that are at once unknowable and potentially catastrophic?

The articles in this special issue detail a security realm in which the idealized traits of interoperability, seamlessness, emergence, flexibility, relationality, and technological and analytical competency loom large. The security traits that are admired are the ones that might draw connections and 'join up', such as data sharing, cross-boundary scenarios and exercises, systems integration, and novel bureaucratic and public–private relations. A profusion of actors espouse and embody these ideals, and appeal to the value of integrating analytic functions and fostering relations across sectors and sites. We see, for example, programmers and analysts who might draw intuitive connections across loosely connected data (Amoore, this issue), and police and civil society workers who might spot 'signs of radicalization' among their communities that might necessitate security intervention (Bonelli and Ragazzi, this issue). New relations materialize, such as the joining up of romanticized,

'innovative' private-sector traits with civil security markets (Hoijtink, this issue), and the notion that security and economic desires could be seamlessly integrated – for example, that biometric border controls could seamlessly facilitate economically viable travel and trade while filtering bad intentions and the illegitimate.

Across the articles collected here, then, a theme that we call a 'security of the interstice' emerges, which is concerned with governing the 'interspaces', the cracks and crevices between spaces of governance or circulation (Walters and Haahr, 2005: 106). In Europe, this ideal of interoperability pervades institutional and bureaucratic arrangements. We have seen this, for example, in the ambition to foster cross-border security competencies through numerous pan-European security agencies such as the European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA), the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) and the EU Agency for Large-Scale IT Systems (eu-LISA). Further still, techno-political initiatives such as the EUROSUR external border surveillance system, and crisis management programmes like ACRIMAS form part of a broad push for a 'system of systems' approach to security. This approach envisions the integration of many small systems into large, integrated wholes that might be geographically distributed, flexible and open to the emergent relations between their parts. Here, European security space materializes through 'technical practices and devices' (Barry, 2001: 3).

A security of the interstice is meant to meet complex emergencies in a world marked by intensified interconnections through cyber networks, increased mobility and financial interdependencies. Concepts of transboundary crises, with the potential to 'cascade' unpredictably, have influenced European policy agendas to foster informal transboundary coordination mechanisms (Ansell et al., 2010). Thus, everyday transactions (digital, economic, communication and travel) have become fused to notions of criminality, incipient terror and failure. In this issue, Elbe, Roemer-Mahler and Long draw out this relation using Foucault's notion of a 'crisis of circulation'. They argue that the threat of pandemic flu has gained traction recently not merely because it is *a* 'crisis of circulation', but because it is also a threat 'that sits at the nexus and interspaces of so many other systems of circulation'. In this manner, the potential pandemic is 'a threat to the very notion of circulation itself'. By comparison, Amoore writes of the sovereign demand to 'connect the dots' of information that spill forth across interconnections and the security logic that calls for 'inference and intuition across the gaps'.

A security of the interstice is not supposed to produce an ultimate suturing of relations, materials and decisions, however. It is supposed to remain flexible, open to unknowns, and to circulations and unexpected connections. In this issue, we find the knowledge practices of 'non-linear decision trees' (Amoore), flexible antivirals rather than virus-specific vaccinations (Elbe et al.), 'adaptive markets' for security products that might quickly innovate to emergent, unknown threats (Hoijtink), and anticipatory and flexible modes of profiling suspicious travelers (Leese). The ideal here is of a security that could be emergent, that could spring into action, and that is integrated into environments. This is a governmentality, or 'environmentality', that is concerned not so much with norms and normalization, but with threats that are 'indistinguishable from the general environment' (Massumi, 2009: 154, following Foucault, 2008). One theme that emerges here is the desire to integrate and design security into environments, fostering the notion that security materializes and co-evolves within spaces themselves.

This ideal of emergent security, furthermore, does not mean that people and political decisions disappear. Rather, it underscores the importance of denaturalizing such security saturations and making visible the active ways in which they shape security spaces. Ideal renderings of technology depoliticize security techniques, such as the false notion that cutting-edge, surgical technologies can gather, assemble and visualize expanding fields of data without the prejudices, errors and discrimination of human judgement. These ideals, which spill forth from policy documents, public discourses and company brochures, do not write out the human, and they are not enacted exactly

as they are described. So, while we can say that these ideals are performative, this is not a simple mimetic process of replicating the ideal in practice, but an ongoing and messy productivity. This parallels Andrew Barry's discussion of the archive of publicly available documents in the case of a contentious oil pipeline construction project. This archive of documents embodies a set of principles, intentions, performativities, and yet 'remains resonantly silent about some of the key problems that the enactment of these same principles are intended to manage and address' (Barry, 2013: 24). Security ideals are performative and productive, but they also contain a host of silences and absences concerning the tensions of enactment, which is where we turn next.

Performing preemption

The idealized traits of security discussed above should be seen as performative in the sense that they attempt to produce the effects that they name while also spilling out in unexpected ways (Bialasiewicz et al., 2007; Hansen, 2011). Performativity has a close kinship with 'non-representational theory' in human geography, as well as with notions of 'new materialism' that are now making their way into international relations (see e.g. Best and Walters, 2013). While there are many resemblances between these conceptual strands, we have foregrounded performativity because we find its conceptual toolbox to be of enduring value for analysing the politics of security (Campbell, 1992; Bialasiewicz et al., 2007) and because it so aptly captures the co-constitution of speculative futures and situated, preemptive security practice. Through the lens of performativity, meaning is understood not as purely linguistic but through its 'enactment in contingent practical contexts' (Anderson and Harrison, 2010: 7). For Butler, performativity is very much an *embodied* practice – not purely a linguistic one – that is intimately related to her conceptualization of the enactment of gender differences. Writes Butler (1993: 1–2):

> 'Sex' is not a simple fact or a static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is compelled.

Performativity is political precisely because outcomes are uncertain: if the social world is reproduced at the point of articulation, this also opens multiple possibilities for misperforming, misfiring and re-articulation (Butler, 1997: 19). As Butler (2010: 152) has put it, 'the possibility of "misfire" [is] at the basis of performativity itself'. Performativity, in this sense, is not so much about a cultural construction of worlds, but about a material making that is continually ongoing (see also Aradau, 2010). In this vein, Butler (2010: 152) writes,

> we can only ask 'how things are made' or 'how are we to join in the making of what is already underway', [and] then it becomes clear that we accept the ongoing making of economic realities and only seek to intervene in them to redirect or further a certain pattern of making.

Thus, remembering that the call of the 9/11 Commission was not simply for 'imagination' but for its 'routinization', our agenda is to consider how the security ideal materializes, misfires and reorients in practice. Routinizing imagination does not just mean that preemptive intervention materializes in the spaces of everyday life; it also underscores the point that 'the exception is emergent…. [I]t is not a preformed category but a dynamic set of techniques of power' (Belcher et al., 2008: 499). In this sense, security exceptionality materializes within durable *and* mutable relations and routines, which depend upon continual articulation and reiteration. Security must be interrogated at the site of iteration, at the points in which the urgent and the exceptional materialize.

The articles in this issue attend to the political uncertainties, contestations and misfires that come from security performativities. The interrogation of reiterative practice destabilizes the appearance of a fully formed and functional security effect: 'Reiteration is the means through which that effect is established anew time and again' (Butler, 2010: 149). This does not mean that security is 'produced *ex nihilo* at every instant' (Butler, 2010: 149), but that the preemptive imperative encounters obstacles, challenges and reversals that play an important role in the way it takes shape.

Thus we find that there is no complete rewriting of the 'old' with the 'new' technology or technique. Instead, the new and old co-mingle, contest and blend. Consider an example from the EU-financed SECUR-ED research programme that seeks to increase urban transport security in Europe on the basis of creative scenarios about emergent and unknown threats. During the project's mid-term conference, a scenario was entertained in which the threat of mass-transit terrorism becomes intermingled with a historically durable preoccupation of the transport sector – graffiti. In the project's scenario, a terrorist poses as a graffiti artist and boards a train on the outskirts of Milan. Thermal recognition technology and CCTV cameras identify and trace him, and CBRNE (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives) detection sensors send an alarm to the control centre. Caught by the security guards, the graffiti artist is handed over to the police. The next day, the Milanese transport authorities learn that the artist has left behind an 'unknown device'. The train is directed to a designated dead track where train compartments are searched and the explosive device is defused by the fire brigade's CBRNE unit.[3] In this scenario, new demands for preemptive counter-terrorism are 'grafted onto' local transport operators' concerns with operational and everyday challenges such as graffiti (Li, 2007). The enactments of the exercise enroll and interpellate local transport operatives into novel and technologically driven threat detections by connecting to the familiar and enduring concern of graffiti. This reorientation to meet the existing agenda of transport operators produces a rather absurd scenario in which the terrorist is also a graffiti artist, and the graffiti artist may well become a terrorist.

Security enactments, then, actively negotiate the terms and objectives of the 'new' and the 'old'. Existing agendas are recrafted and reoriented to meet the ambitious goals of preempting the unpredictable and preparing for the worst. For example, Bonelli and Ragazzi discuss the enduring importance of 'low-tech intelligence', including paper files and narrative biographies, in French counter-terrorism. They show that what they call 'low-tech' forms of intelligence play an enduring role in policing practice, even if they are oriented toward the anticipatory ends of preemptively disrupting possible terrorist groups. They emphasize that these techniques were not replaced with hi-tech data analytics or fundamentally reoriented in the wake of 9/11, but, instead, become incrementally redeployed in an enduring fight against radicalization and within broadened anti-terrorism law. By comparison, Hoijtink analyses the emergence of a 'new' civil security market that is rooted in longer histories of defence and security capitalization in Europe. Though some of the technology commercialized within civil security is new, the market-shaping power of European institutions has a long and relevant history that is reinvigorated through the contemporary 'economy of emergence'.

Taken together, the articles demonstrate the impressive array of private actors who become enrolled into the daily performativity of security. A security of the interstice involves efforts to foster relations across different sites and sectors, and to draw in private actors and citizens through diverse platforms such as 'risk panels' (Amoore), public–private forums and security research expert groups (Hoijtink) and pharmaceutical companies (Elbe et al.). In all of these cases, the enrolment of different agents is not a passive instrumentalization, but a mode of subjectification and authorization. In this manner, security productivity emerges from a number of less traditional sources, such as scientists, patients and school principals. These agents are interpellated as the 'eyes and ears' of contemporary security and society's 'first line of defence'. Such interpellations

also operate on an 'affective plane' (Massumi, 2007: §19) – they produce an everyday anxiety in which simple anomalies like a student changing his habits or the nightly work of a graffiti artist can be read as signs of radicalism or terrorism. We need to foster critical attention to how, in these contexts, non-traditional security actors may resist enrolment in and responsibility for anticipatory security.

Preemption/politics

The questions and examples explored in this introduction and in this special issue as a whole invite further reflection on our critical, political understandings of preemptive security. If the urgency of catastrophe has partly dissipated within bureaucratic protocol and transnational regulation, what, eventually, can we say about the politics of preemption? When the performance of the security imagination has produced international regulation, stockpiling, commercial integration and local council protocol, as well as 'lowly' intelligence files, to what extent is it still oriented toward urgency and 'surprise' (Anderson, 2010)? How can we conceptualize the tension between catastrophe and the banal and ineffectual, visualized so compellingly in Mik's films? In a related vein, as Joseph Masco (2006: 12) has phrased it in relation to the spectre of nuclear catastrophe, 'what might be the social consequences of living in a world where the everyday has been so thoroughly colonized by the possibility of annihilation that, for most, it has become simply banal?'

Though it is impossible to answer these questions fully or definitively, the articles collected here gesture toward at least the following points. First, as Masco's point suggests, processes of discursive securitization have moved to the background here. This is not to say that the discursive articulations of unprecedented threat or catastrophic imaginaries are no longer important, particularly as they continue to be iterated across news media and policy forums (Wæver, 2011; Methmann and Rothe, 2012); but, it is to draw attention to the ways in which particular understandings of threat become incorporated into procedures and durable arrangements, and to how they spill out in divergent and sometimes unplanned ways. For Huysmans (2011), it is precisely these 'little security nothings' – the many banal daily activities, devices and sites – that actively shape securitizing processes. These practical arrangements last long after their particular threat templates have been overtaken by other, seemingly more urgent threats. They become sedimented in investments, legal requirements and security routines. For example, we continue to take off our shoes and delimit our liquids at airports long after other threat templates have overtaken the particular imaginaries associated with Richard Reid and the so-called liquid-bombing plot.

Second, the issue gestures to the complex relation between security, speculative logics and commerce. As briefly argued, preemptive performativities have parallels with speculation. Akin to speculation, preemption enacts multiple potential futures to render them liquid in the present. The commercial stakes here include not just the hi-tech fantasy of automated threat prints and early sensory detection, but also the more banal commercializations of civil security across everyday sites such as railway platforms and passenger terminals. The commercial practices that aim to produce automated images of future threats through sophisticated data analytics and integration have been documented by Hall and Mendel (2012) and Leese (this issue), among others. But security and commerce also collide in the more traditional security technologies of gates, fences and turnstiles (Pallister-Wilkins, 2011). There is a continuous commercial (re)negotiation of requirements and routines as private actors are drawn into security practices – sometimes against their will, as in the case of banking institutions confronted with far-reaching demands linked to the combating of terrorism financing (Wesseling, 2013), or in relation to the security work imposed on urban transport operators in the SECUR-ED example described above. To say that security is speculative, then, is not meant to suggest that this is simply neoliberal business as usual. Instead, it

draws attention to the precise ways in which uncertain futures are commodified and is attentive to the tensions thus generated within commercial and professional practices.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, preemption can be understood as a political effect. Preemption does not exactly produce the unknowable yet disastrous futures that it names; rather, preemptive performativity reorients and thwarts spaces for politics and critique of contemporary security. Like speculation, preemption has the capacity to generate its own benchmarks. As Anderson (2010: 790) has pointed out, its consequences can be understood neither in terms of failure nor in terms of success, because in a preemptive logic inaction is not an option. Many examples can be given of the ways in which preemption reorients existing standards of evidence and accountability. Calculative frames of cost–benefit policy measures are challenged through the continual iteration of 'what if' and worst-case scenarios. In the face of potentially catastrophic events like a terrorist attack, no investment can be judged as disproportionate or excessive. In this issue, the massive government expenditure invested in vaccine stockpiling discussed by Elbe and colleagues would be hard to justify in more traditional calculative frames of cost–benefit analysis. The prison sentence for the Italian scientists who failed to give advance warning of the L'Aquila earthquake, discussed by Amoore, entails a new articulation of the role of science in society. And, as Leese shows, existing anti-discrimination protections are fundamentally challenged by new, anticipatory modes of profiling. Our own work on the fight against terrorism financing has shown that, in the preemptive drive to action, accountability mechanisms shift *away* from the objective of fighting terrorism, *toward* the objective of demonstrating compliance with a complexity of new rules within banks (De Goede, 2012; Wesseling, 2013). The initial ideal of preempting terrorist attacks and anticipating potential danger is all but forgotten in the performance of complex and costly compliance routines.

Where do we locate politics and accountability when the responsibility to secure emerges from the practices of such dispersed actors as social workers, patients, seismic scientists, software engineers and other private parties? How can we critique security practices when they rewrite the benchmarks of evaluation? How can we question the collection of data if what counts is not the accuracy of the number but the interconnections and associations that analysts may or may not come to infer in practice? Detailed empirical research is needed on the ways in which accountability frameworks like data protection, anti-discrimination or cost-effectiveness are subject to resignification as preemption is performed across different sectors and spatial interstices. The articles collected here, in their various ways, thus offer multiple avenues for critique and for holding preemptive power to account.

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Notes

1. See http://archive.newmuseum.org/index.php/Detail/Occurrence/Show/occurrence_id/426 (accessed 2 June 2014).

2. Including, for example, Anderson (2010), Anderson and Adey (2012), Aradau and Van Munster (2011, 2012), Collier and Lakoff (2008), De Goede (2012) and Lakoff (2007).
3. Observations at the SECUR-ED mid-term conference, Geneva, 30 May 2013.

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