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Citizen n-1

Laura Poitras's *Citizenfour* as a Reparative Reading of a Paranoid World¹

The 4 D's: Deny / Disrupt / Degrade / Deceive [...]

'Blitz' style approach: Creating as much disruption as possible within a short period of time

(GCHQ – Joint Threat Research Intelligence Group (2012) *Cyber Integration: The Art of the Possible*)

It's supposed to be difficult to invade somebody's privacy. Because of how intrusive it is. Because of how disruptive it is. (Ladar Levison, *Citizenfour* 2014; 1:38:27)

1 The art of the possible

As a powerpoint presentation of the British GCHQ's Joint Threat Research Intelligence Group leaked by Edward Snowden states quite bluntly, "Creating disruption" is one of the key elements of current "cyber" intelligence operations (2012). The presentations define "Effects," among them "The 4 D's," in two broad categories: "Information Ops (influence or disruption)" and "Technical Disruption" (GCHQ/JTRIG 2012), meaning cyber attacks and propaganda operations (Cole et al. 2014). These propaganda campaigns use deception, pushing stories via twitter, facebook, or youtube, discrediting targets by changing their photos, "getting another country to believe a 'secret'" (GCHQ/JTRIG 2012), while other cyber attacks entail stopping people from communicating by mass messaging, deleting online presences, blocking fax machines, conducting a "Denial of Service attack to their computer," or infecting a computer with a virus. These methods have been labeled as "dirty tricks" of British spies by the press (Cole et al. 2014), while the intelligence agency gives these operations the promising title *The Art of the Possible*. If disruptions, to take this example, can oscillate between "dirty tricks" and an "art of the possible," it becomes clear, that exactly due to their relative position the concept or principle of disruption proves to be employable for cultural analysis, because it leads us to question *what* is perceived

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as disruption, by *whom*, and with what *effect*. Disruptions hinder, stop or irritate the normal course of things and therefore have analytical potential: they allow an observation and a critique of “references to reality and societal-self-descriptions” (see the article of Koch and Nanz in this volume: 8), and thus generate knowledge on society (Koch and Petersen 2011). Understood in this way, and combined with feminist Science and Technology Studies, using disruption as an analytical figure is very much linked to a *dirty art of the possible*, because it makes visible conflicting perceptions (such as on spying) and can be used to describe the transitions between disruption and order.

Surveillance is indeed viewed as a disruptive invasion of privacy by many, among them Edward Snowden’s former e-mail provider and privacy activist Ladar Levison, and has bred not so much disobedience against intelligence agencies, but rather a certain kind of suspicion towards digital media. This affect has been employed by Laura Poitras in her documentary *Citizenfour* (USA 2014). Viewing the film, it not only becomes clear to spectators that they are inextricably connected to the happenings on screen and its protagonists, via the smart phones and tablets in their pockets, but that they are also simultaneously affected by a deep suspicion towards these media. This is because digital medias are uncanny, even dangerous in *Citizenfour*: telephones turn into potential listening devices, smart phones are bugs and detectors at once. MetroCards, e-mail addresses, or credit cards serve as selectors for almost unlimited tracking and digital communication only functions via complicatedly encrypted channels. With *Citizenfour*, audiences experience a double invasion into their privacy: they are confronted with the biggest whistleblowing event in US history, which gave evidence to the intrusions of the NSA and the GCHQ into the private lives of citizens, and at the same time the film links itself to the digital media in the pockets of its spectators by delivering a detailed description of their function within surveillance systems.

Besides causing these feelings of unease towards digital media, the film has distinct disruptive qualities of its own, such as its situatedness, its reparativeness, and its portrayal of resistant potentialities. We propose that by discourse analytically dissecting the Snowden disclosures as a disruption that can be interpreted as a post-structuralist event, “a nexus of power-knowledge” (Foucault 2007: 61), and focusing on reparative registers, the film engages in a disruptive *art of the possible* that points beyond the realm of the movie, towards discourses on securitization and disruptions yet to come.

This chapter analyzes these disruptive qualities, by first interpreting *Citizenfour* with the help of Donna Haraway’s concept of situated knowledge. In a second step, we introduce Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theories on reparative and paranoid interpretations of the world, and connect them with the current dispositif of

security, hence using them to carve out the film's reparative potential. In a third step we outline how far the film also works as an examination of an eventual disruption (for this concept, see section 2.4). The final section combines aspects of the investigation and points to possibilities that lie within aesthetic experiments, such as the documentary at hand.

2 Situated knowledge, reparative readings, and “événementialisation”

2.1 Citizenfour

Other recent works on Snowden, such as Oliver Stone's biopic *Snowden* (2016), or Geoffroy de Lagasnerie's essay *The Art of Revolt* (2016), focus very much on the power of Snowden's exposures and his status as an exceptional individual. In Stone's film, for example, Snowden is portrayed as a struggling, patriotic all-American hero who pretty much single-handedly tries to save American democracy. In Lagasnerie's text, he is described as one of the poster children of a new kind of subjectivity, one of ultra-libertarian individual heroism, no longer bound by the rule of law, and willing to leave behind the constraints of statehood in order to expose state secrets. *Citizenfour*, though, offers a different interpretation of the events. The documentary is the completion of Poitras's Post-9/11-trilogy, in which the first part portrays an Iraqi doctor and his family during the first election after the war (*My Country, My Country*, USA 2006), and the second Osama Bin Laden's former body guard Abu Jandal and his detained brother-in-law in the Guantanamo Bay prison (*The Oath*, USA 2010). The final piece tells the story of the massive surveillance of digital communications conducted by intelligence agencies that were exposed by whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013, and which was often described as an exceptionally paranoid film in the press (e.g. Burr 2014; Edelstein 2014; Murray 2014). On first sight, *Citizenfour* indeed has almost all key components of a paranoid espionage thriller: a former system administrator with a hardly bearable tend to pathos, a journalist known for his venomous political commentaries, lying politicians, perfidious attorneys arguing for mass surveillance, uniformed national security agents, plenty of nerdy conversations on technology, computer security, and intelligence. Time and again fearful, almost paranoid gazes at computers and telephones, dominate the film. And yet, *Citizenfour* can also be regarded as a feminist negotiation of filmic objectivity, and an attempt to counter the paranoid and desired all-seeing gaze of the intelligence agencies with situated knowledge. The film disrupts narratives of

individual heroism, avoids a primarily paranoid reading in favor of a reparative depiction of the Snowden disclosures and engages in documentary cinema as a medium of critique, as an “art not to be governed quite so much” (Foucault 2007: 45).

2.2 A view from somewhere

When the lights go off in the cinema, viewers are silently confronted with a text-card detailing Poitras’s work and the surveillance she experienced since 2006. Out of the dark, ceiling lights of a tunnel and taillights of a vehicle trailed by the camera emerge, accompanied by an industrial noise. We are guided through the dark by the glimpse of two moving red dots when a female voice (Laura Poitras) reads:

Laura,

at this stage I can offer nothing more than my word. I am a senior government employee in the intelligence community. I hope you understand that contacting you is extremely high risk and you are willing to agree to the following precautions before I share more. This will not be a waste of your time.

The following sounds complex, but should only take minutes to complete for someone technical. I would like to confirm out of email that the keys we exchanged were not intercepted and replaced by your surveillants. Please confirm that no one has ever had a copy of your private key and that it uses a strong passphrase. Assume your adversary is capable of one trillion guesses per second. If the device you store the private key and enter your passphrase on has been hacked, it is trivial to decrypt our communications.

Understand that the above steps are not bullet proof, and are intended only to give us breathing room. In the end, if you publish the source material, I will likely be immediately implicated. This must not deter you from releasing the information I will provide.

Thank you, and be careful.

Citizen Four

The beginning of Poitras’s *Citizenfour* seems like a dystopian science fiction movie, the letter could have just as much come from the future and been addressed to Sarah Connor. What follows, though, is not a dire film of coming disasters and catastrophes that need to be prevented in a race against time. Rather, *Citizenfour* depicts the origin of what has become history, in a calm, informative, and intimate manner. As audiences have learned from the instructions in Citizen Four’s first e-mail, all protagonists try to maintain a high degree of control over their electronic communications. What proceeds is a highly dangerous act of

whistleblowing, patterned in an almost nerve-rackingly calm arrangement that conjoins long conversations about technology and journalistic tactics with visuals of a bathrobe clad whistleblower and his clumsy attempts at hair styling. Poitras's film constitutes an example of sophisticated documentary film-making, which declines the claim of an all-encompassing representation of the event it portrays by placing the person behind the camera as present beholder, and integral part of the story into the film. Spoken in her own voice, "Laura" is the first word we hear, and "Laura" materializes as a mostly invisible presence that guides us and the other protagonists through the unfolding events "speaking nearby" (Minh-ha: 1992). *Citizen Four* denies telling the objective story of the Snowden leaks by delivering a situated perspective, and mostly manages to counter a constant state of alert by being exactly that: alert and precautions. Most importantly, Poitras positions herself within discourses on technology, securitization, and surveillance beyond paranoid modes: as early as the 1980s, feminist scholar Donna Haraway developed a concept of feminist, embodied objectivity with her feminist criticism of science and Techno Sciences – situated knowledges (Haraway 1988). The technologies of the Star-Wars-era had provided vision with "unregulated gluttony," a "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway 1988: 581). Haraway not only demonstrated that the idea of an "unrestricted vision" is an illusion, but insists that every vision is always particular, situated, and embodied – be it organically or technologically or both (Haraway 1988: 581–582). Consequently, feminist objectivity always entails "specific embodiment," faces the generativity of all visual practices and distances itself from a "false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility" (Haraway 1988: 581–582).

What Haraway explained about disembodiment, objectivity, and the production of knowledge in the Star-Wars-paradigm of the 1980s, applies even more for the era of progressing digital connectivity, securitization, and for the framework of the so-called "War on Terror": as Jutta Weber describes, the collection of all imaginable data with the hope to map the world, which is perceived as "unpredictable and full of risks," and to preempt all imaginable risks, plays a key role in the present security dispositif (Weber 2015: 14). For Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson, the "Surveillant Assemblage" produces a surveillance network consisting of interdependent media, people, institutions, practices, signs, and knowledge (Haggerty and Ericson 2000: 608). This fantasy of unregulated "vision" creates Data Doubles, digital doublegangers that are detached from their territorial setting and converted into information flows (Haggerty and Ericson 2000: 606). These doubles are the objects of surveillance by intelligence agencies, firms, institutions, or individuals. They enable the monitoring of organic bodies in border regimes, in police operations, in healthcare systems, or in the

drone wars, where, with the help of tracking operations, people are identified as drone targets, as was conveyed by documents from the Snowden cache (e.g. Scahill and Greenwald 2014). The intelligence agencies' desire for the full take, for the collection, storage, and processing of all tangible data, can be described as "the dream [...] of the perfectly known in high-technology," as "god trick" of the view from nowhere that seeks to transcend all boundaries and responsibilities (such as human- or civil rights) (Haraway 1988: 589–590).

To affiliate herself with an objectivizing view from nowhere or to reproduce it, is what Poitras insistently refuses in *Citizenfour*. Indeed, her camera addresses the viewers not only as objects of secret service surveillance, but likewise puts them in the position of "sousveillance," the surveillance of surveillance, yet even the latter perspective remains distinctly particularistic and embodied. Emerging from the darkness of a traffic tunnel, the camera rises to the happenings on the surface and at the moment of the first contact with the whistleblower, we receive a Bird's-eye view onto Hong Kong buildings – a drone perspective simulating a creepy surveillant gaze onto the hotel where the meeting with Snowden took place. But Poitras disrupts this classic representation of surveillance as panoptic view on many levels, and merely triggers it to show its fallacies.² First, the conversations in the hotel room explain that surveillance and tracking function as a network of a surveillant assemblage and have little to do with a singular all-seeing view of an eye. Second, we only see what Poitras and her cutter and co-producer Mathilde Bonnefoy let us see, what the hand camera draws our attention to, pointing to an embodied and always framed perspective. A fact that the two make very explicit by including a shot of Poitras visible in a mirror for a few seconds whilst setting up her equipment in the Hong Kong hotel room, by journalist Glenn Greenwald and Snowden addressing her directly, and by her strategy of speaking nearby during the film – as the female voice reading Snowden's emails to us, and via text on screen detailing her own involvement in the story.

This is how we learn that she stood on a government watchlist long before her first contact with Snowden, that she herself got into the grid of intelligence agencies, and that her own data shadow is an integral part of the film, and probably one of the reasons for Snowden's attempt to contact her. Hence, against the intelligence agencies' strategy of the view from nowhere, she sets an embodied, partial, and situated view, which defies a solely paranoid reading of the Snowden disclosures and offers reparative moments. This is particularly provided, be-

2 By making a film, Poitras of course cannot avoid panopticism as cinematographic paradigm, but manages to avoid representations of surveillance as always structurally panoptic.

cause she assists in giving insights into resistant subjectivities capable of dealing with surveillance practices, working on or with their own and their others data doubles. The collaboration between the whistleblower, the documentarian, and the two journalists goes beyond the traditional encounter between a member of the press and a source. In this case, what the source has to expose sets new terms for journalistic cooperation and makes necessary a sort of skill and knowledge sharing that could be described as digital care work. Thus, their resistant practices culminate in a dangerous encounter of shared vulnerability, in which the care for each other's data double takes on a vital dimension.

With Poitras's situated perspective on this particular encounter it becomes clear that the precautions against spying must not only be regarded as acts functioning in the paranoid logic of securitization, but also as a form of digital care work for oneself and others. The encryption tools, safe communication methods, the disconnection of phones, etc., are part of creating a safer space for creative cyber-resistance. While *Citizenfour* definitely is a documentary of primarily white, highly educated, and technologically-skilled people, the film also delivers several hints to its viewers on how to deal with technology in an age of surveillance or data monitoring. The letter from Snowden to Poitras at the very beginning of the film sets the terms for communication for everybody wanting to stay somewhat beyond the reach of the NSA or the GCHQ. Even if his instructions are not "bullet proof," and will most likely not be understood by common audiences, the viewers receive some key words with which they can begin to gain knowledge on encrypted ways of communication. The conversations between the protagonists in the hotel also reveal many little things to be aware of, if wanting to stay beyond the reach of spies. Throughout the film, we see people engaging in similar kinds of digital care work. The closing credits show that *Citizenfour* was born out of encryption software. It reads: "This film would not be possible without the Free Software Projects and encryption tools The Tor Project, Tails, Debian GDU/Linux, Off-The-Record Messaging, GNU Privacy Guard, True Crypt, Securedrop" (*Citizenfour* 2014: 1:51:43). Poitras delivers access to situated knowledge on resistance – an initial tool kit to get started and, with her, Snowden, and Greenwald, examples for where one might arrive. The encounters Poitras portrays are ones that make evident that "cyborg is our ontology" (Haraway 1991: 150), that data-shadows are a part of social reality and have to be part of our care work practices. Which is a decidedly reparative perspective, to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's terminology.

2.3 A reparative reading of a paranoid world

The present security dispositif, dominated by a rationality of premediation, meaning to be prepared for and to preempt all thinkable events in the light of a world increasingly perceived as threatening (Krasmann 2013; Grusin 2010), is informed by paranoid postulates of permanent danger and a hermeneutics of suspicion. This interpretation of the world as permanently threatened, and only to be controlled with the aid of technological surveillance apparatuses, can be described in the words of queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as a “paranoid reading” of the world we live in (Sedgwick 1997). Sedgwick suggests to think of paranoia not only as a psychiatric diagnosis, or as a mental condition, but also as an epistemological practice to organize, search and find knowledge (Sedgwick 1997: 7). Paranoid readings are anticipatory, reflexive, and mimetic, and represent a “strong theory” of negative affects with an imperturbable faith in the power or efficacy of knowledge in form of exposures, and thereby preferably attempt to anticipate any surprises (Sedgwick 1997: 8, 15, 22). As an alternative she proposes a “reparative reading” that evades the logic of premediation, remains open to surprises – good and bad – avoids cynicism, and maintains hope for future changes (Sedgwick 1997: 22).

While the Snowden disclosures presented in the press hardly make use of reparative registers – rather, they display a strong belief in the power of exposure, and mainly offer paranoid interpretations – Poitras’s film functions somewhat differently: besides the fact that Snowden’s partner, Lindsey Mills, lives with him in Moscow (an anecdote only of interest to gossip columnists) – practically nothing is exposed. In defining moments, such as when Snowden and Greenwald discuss the existence of a further whistleblower on pieces of scrap paper, Poitras’s camera moves away from what is written. We are largely excluded from the new story that points beyond the film, towards disclosures that have yet to come. Poitras neither attempts to tell a complete, self-contained, or finished story of the surveillance scandal of the twenty-first century, nor does she align herself with paranoid logics of premediation or a predominantly paranoid reading of the unfolding events. While the film puts the spectators in a position of sousveillance, her situatedness forbids them a full insight into what is happening, and they also hardly set eyes on the actual Snowden documents. On the other hand, *Citizenfour* did reveal previously unseen images and happenings of the Hong Kong hotel room, and delivered one of the most authorized back stories of the Snowden leak. The film thereby not only appears as a witness to the unfolding of the Snowden disclosures, it can give audiences the feeling that they are experiencing the famous whistleblow almost in real time from within their cinema seats. Although this is an overstatement, the film can be regarded as an as-

tounding examination and editing of the act of disclosure, because it stretches time, it manages to let viewers take part in what became the Snowden scandal step by step, with all its lunch-breaks, fire alarms, and waiting for the right moment, its banalities like comfortable clothes and proper hairstyle for an interview, its *inter-ruptions*. By emphasizing *what lies between* during the event that causes difference, by analyzing its texture, *Citizenfour* turns the sudden disruption that the disclosures constituted within surveillance discourses into calmly patterned processes. It is exactly here, that *exposure* is not regarded as a good matter per se, but rather aligned with reparative perspectives: while *Citizenfour* delivers a discourse analysis on surveillance and imagery of the Snowden event, our gaze is directed to other, smaller stories. Firstly, to the work that is needed to fulfill acts of whistleblowing, respectively acts of civil disobedience³ (that might entail, but do not necessarily include, exposure). As detailed in the section above, beyond a technologically-informed situated perspective, *Citizenfour* delivers an insight into the work and care it takes to perform cyber resistance, meaning just as much using encryption software, debating on strategies with British journalists and taking showers between interviews. As Sedgwick writes:

What we can best learn from such [reparative, AUTHORS] practices are, perhaps, the many ways in which selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them (Sedgwick 1997: 31).

This means the film not only screens how Greenwald, Poitras, Snowden, and members of the Guardian perform a whistleblow, but also which measures and processes were put into place to actually make it happen with as little harm to the people in play as possible. Governments decidedly take procedure not to sustain disobedient behavior, meaning that any kind of reproductive work to sustain such people and actions has to come from them, as well as whatever support they extract from the given system that tries to prevent or annihilate such behavior. The above-mentioned digital care work, which includes working on or with data doubles, is an example for such reparative practices that extract sustenance from that which strives not to sustain them.

³ Concerning acts of whistleblowing that are understood as civil disobedience, see Kumar 2013.

2.3.1 Snowden and beyond

Another point to stress is that the film draws our attention to the story of “Citizen Four.” The title alludes to the pseudonym that Snowden used in his first e-mail contact with Poitras, allegedly to position himself as the fourth in a row of US-Whistleblowers (Pasternack 2014). The very existence of a person like “Citizen Four,” a disobedient person who takes a massive risk, and – as he says himself – will not let himself be intimidated, is just as much the focus of the film as the people that accompany and participate in the portrayed acts of disclosing. The reparative dynamic of *Citizenfour* also lies in the idea that the world could look differently, and that everything could and maybe will happen in another way, if *CitizenFives*, *Sixes* and *Sevens* materialized, if acts of civil disobedience were more commonplace. The film thus narrates the Snowden event as one with serial potential. By affirming Snowden’s self-description, the film becomes a reflexive analysis of disruptive and reparative interplays of disobedience, with whistleblowing serving as example. The Snowden leak was initially described by the press as an act that shocked the world and hit many governments with its explosive power of disclosed information: *Citizenfour* aptly presents a broadcast of the CNN show *The Situation Room*, where Wolf Blitzer informs his audience that “an explosive new report is reigniting the concerns that your privacy is being violated to protect America’s security” (*Citizenfour* 2014: 00:44:35). If one takes this at face value, then Snowden is simply his pseudonym abbreviated as C4. Retrospectively, this perception has to be classified as an overestimation. Especially concerning ways of governing, the Snowden disclosures have not shattered the logics of governmental power, but have widened the scope of paranoia towards whistleblowers and people working on or with encryption technologies. The disruptive potential of whistleblowers is used to construct them as figures at societies’ margins and as enablers of terrorism, and to put everybody with any kind of access to information or technologies considered relevant to state security, under even more surveillance. This act of exclusion is used to constitute societies’ center with all traits of supposed normalcy and to legitimize the prevailing systems of government.

Correspondingly, the film avoids portraying Edward Snowden as a member of radical deconstructive politics. As he says in the now famous Hong Kong hotel room interview, he was a long-time member of US intelligence agencies and affiliated contractors, a patriot, who believed in the code of law and the necessity to spy on others for the sake of American hegemony, and only changed his mind when the US government started to spy on “its own people.” Snowden’s decision to disclose information can be described as a desire for “the good old times,” for conservative American politics, when the good and the bad were

clearly identified and the world was structured along binary categories. This is exactly the point where *Citizenfour* has to be situated as the third film of a trilogy, because the first two films portray people in places of massive human rights violations by the US military and the effects of the “War on Terror” on their lives. Snowden’s own motivation to disrupt the course of intelligence agencies could be interpreted as aimed for reactionary politics, for a renormalization of highly racialized dichotomies, of surveillance practices with underlying racist anti-Muslim attitudes, and of clear geographical mappings of dangerous and non-dangerous individuals.

Instead of affirming the anxiety-driven association of bombing – which forgets the content of the disclosures, as the documents contain details on lethal US drone targeting practices – , or to portray Snowden as a savior of “good” democracy and American exceptionalism, *Citizenfour* draws attention to disruptions that are linked to seriality and reiterations, and strengthens them as a form of autopoietical means of change. Because Poitras’s film was completed and screened after the first waves following the Snowden disclosures, her film is an interplay between the present events she documents and retrospection, a film that analyzes Snowden’s disruption as an event – an “événementialisation” (Foucault 2007: 59) as the next section examines. The film, though, takes Snowden’s number four to mark a disruptive series, explains what it takes to fulfill an act of civil disobedience, and creates a sense of possibility without idolizing exposure per se. The reparative reading of the Snowden event therefore shall not be thought of as a simple description of normalizations that can follow de-normalizing ruptures in the given system, but rather as a presentation of a sustainable disruptive mode: focusing on the repetition of disruptions, it points to the potential of forthcoming acts of disobedience – which might or might not have a strong effect on societies – and holds the chance of continuous shifts, of disruptions and continuous reparative work. The film points to the potential power of difference and repetition, and delivers some cues to read the title *Citizenfour* somewhat against the grain, by avoiding an additive logic of exceptional subjectivities that the series of *Citizensfive*, *six*, *seven* etc. might imply (n+1): by highlighting the fact that acts of civil disobedience are also joint ventures that hold the chance of affecting large groups of people, these “*citizens*” can be regarded as subtracted (as figures of discourse) from the manifold (n-1) (see Raunig 2012; Deleuze and Guattari 1993). Focusing on digital care, on the collective work that is needed to fulfill acts of whistleblowing and pointing towards possibilities that might lie within acts of civil disobedience in general, a reparative reading can create a sense of the many that withdraws from representational logics of singular subjectivities as *sole* providers of such disruptions. Taking into account that Snowden also lost his citizenship, one can go so far as to erase “citizen”

from the equation. Thus, a reparative reading disrupts paranoid logics of the current security dispositif, draws the attention towards series of disruptions to come, and detaches acts of civil disobedience from dominating discourses on specific subjectivities.

2.4 The Snowden event

Formally, Poitras executes in three acts – Pre-Snowden, the Snowden Event, Post-Snowden – what Michel Foucault calls an “examination of ‘eventualization’ (événementialisation)” (Foucault 2007: 59). For Foucault, an *event* is a “nexus of knowledge-power”; it is an evental disruption or rupture that, in connection to processes of normalization, sustainably changes and coins the order of knowledge (Foucault 2007: 61). As Roberto Nigro and Gerald Raunig carve out, the concept of the event makes it possible to ask questions concerning the difference and singularity of the present, which means to consider an event as a constellation that “constitutes and cuts across us,” and, on the other hand, regard it as an “evental rupture, introducing a difference to the present” (Nigro and Raunig 2011: 58)⁴. For Foucault, the examination of “eventualization” allows us to identify “connections between mechanisms of coercion and contents of knowledge,” to analyze them regarding effects of power and to ask how “a procedure of coercion acquires the very form and justifications of a rational, calculated, technically efficient element, etc.,” whereby this shall not be about legitimacy or illegitimacy of certain predictions, but about their conditions of acceptability (Foucault 2007: 59).

Against this backdrop, the discourse analytical first act of the film can be interpreted as analysis of the constellations before the Snowden event. Here the question evolves to address why and the ways in which the Snowden disclosures were possible and plausible on the level of discourse. The film sketches the state of the US-American debates on surveillance: court rulings on surveillance and telecommunication companies; a short portrait of former NSA-whistleblower William Binney; the construction of the NSA-Utah Data Centre in Bluffdale, in which data on communication will be stored; congressional hearings on surveillance with former director of the NSA Keith Alexander; an anti-surveillance teach-in as part of the Occupy Wall Street movement and the first e-mail contact with Snowden create a collage of the discourses on surveillance. Here Poitras gathers,

⁴ [Translation by the authors]: “uns konstituiert und durchquert”; “ereignishaften Bruch, der in die Gegenwart eine Differenz einführt” (Nigro and Raunig 2011: 158).

on the one hand a configuration of the perspective of the US government and intelligence agencies, and, on the other, of emerging moments of resistance tapering these discursive fragments towards the eventual disruption. In this act, almost all protagonists, from the director of the NSA to the anti-surveillance activists, primarily service paranoid registers and remain in a logic of securitization: security – be it security *by means of* surveillance or security *from* surveillance – is the paradigm and shall be achieved via premediation (Grusin 2010), the anticipation of all probable and improbable uncertainties, and a forward looking readiness for the future via technological measures. What is more, viewers already know the scandal the disclosures initiated in the year before the screening of the film. So, the first act is not only a prelude to the second act examining the unfolding of the Snowden event, it is already an observation of the second order that shows self-descriptions of the US government, cultural conventions and how the common order is installed and deals with smaller incisions, such as charges. The film not only shows what happened before, by contextualizing the setting of the event to come, but also examines how certain monolithic ideas of governing and society persist, and how the Snowden disclosures have meanwhile already molded our perception of past occurrences.

The seemingly claustrophobic second act turns spectators into witnesses of the days in Hong Kong in the summer 2013, as the film maker and journalists Glenn Greenwald and Ewen MacAskill had first contact with their source and made the initial documents available for the public, a moment that can be interpreted as the starting point of the eventual rupture introducing difference into the present. Again, paranoid readings are set apart in favor of reparative and more positive interpretative approaches in the second act: admittedly, the protagonists read their environment of the hotel room, and especially digital media, as suspicious and potentially dangerous, they disconnect phones and assure each other to “never again” leave their laptops unattended, but at the same time, this is also a story of four people that, despite their justifiable suspicion, precisely are not dissuaded to exercise criticism as an “art of not being governed quite so much” (Foucault 2007: 45), and to de-subjugate to the logic of the security dispositif with a highly risky act of civil disobedience.

The described suspicion towards the media in the hotel room gives rise to one of the most comical sequences of the film, which simultaneously delivers a key component or aspect of the concept of disruption: as the protagonists discuss how to proceed with their disclosures via the press, a fire alarm goes off at the hotel. It rings and then stops, then rings again (*Citizenfour* 2014: 39:18–39:20). Snowden says: “That’s a fire alarm” in an insinuating tone. With each ring tone and its intermediate pause, Snowden’s eyes more excitedly travel across the room, staring anxiously at his fellow supporters while his body

freezes. He says “Maybe they got my end and they couldn’t listen to us through the phone anymore” while reconnecting the phone and stating “That’s unusual.” As the alarm goes off a third time, he holds up his computer not really knowing where to put it. He finally calls the lobby to figure out what is happening and learns that it is a “fire alarm testing maintenance” while the others laugh. In this sequence, Snowden is only moderately presented as cyber hero: his suspicion towards the phone does not turn out to be the right assumption of a highly skilled intelligence agent or a genius detective with the power of abduction; he rather seems like a man, who has watched too many spy movies. Glenn Greenwald’s statement minutes before: “You’ve been affected by the paranoia bug!” turns out to be amusingly appropriate. Generally, Snowden, aptly called a “mousy person”⁵ by Dietmar Dath of the German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (2014), does not turn out to be a classic example of heroic masculinity. Most of the time he sits, pale and barefooted, on a white bed wearing a white shirt – as an unlikely poster child for the iconography of innocence and virginity – or is only dressed with a bathrobe, and says praiseworthy, somewhat precocious things about freedom and democracy. And finally one of the main insignia of hegemonic masculinity is lost: his passport is declared invalid by the US government and he is turned from Citizenfour into a refugee without papers in search of asylum.

While the section with the alarm shows that disruptions are usually understood as daily occurrences – a power cut, a flickering TV station, a ringing cell phone in the cinema – it is also the epitome of Sedgwick’s reading “you can never be paranoid enough” (Sedgwick 1997: 6) and leads to laughter. Disturbances considered as minor breaks in the daily course of things thus may evolve to happenings with major symbolic power. A disruption can be decidedly different in quality, and even affect societies as a whole, showing that the principle of disruption provides different features for the analysis of social structures from the absolutely normal, over the upsetting irritation to epistemological shifts (see the article of Koch, Nanz and Pause in this volume). Regarding the film as an examination of eventualization (événementialisation, in Foucault’s term) means that a disruption can be perceived and examined as an event that holds the quality of epistemological shifts. *Citizenfour* investigates the disruptive power of the Snowden disclosures with such an événementialisation, while at the same time itself disrupting paranoid and popular modes of representing the disclosures: beyond portraying what the protagonists of the film regard as irritating or disturbing instances, the plot structure of *Citizenfour* is designed as an intimate story of nerds,

5 [Translation by authors]: “nette graue Maus” (Dath 2014).

proud journalists, and situated filmmakers who gather as a support group for the coming-out of a whistleblower. It thereby declines to reproduce the style of the media coverage that scandalized such an intrusive act and flawed system of government, and depicted Snowden as a dangerous explosive phenomenon. It also does not feed into overall paranoid readings towards life under surveillance, because the film proposes to be technologically secure and simultaneously willing to put oneself into vulnerable or risky positions by shared acts of civil disobedience. The latter can be interpreted as part of an epistemological shift, because the paranoid stance of wanting to be invulnerable within an all-encompassing security dispositif is subverted by a reparative reading of the Snowden event: what was perceived as paranoid is the new normal, and a position of critique or disobedience always entails digital care work *in conjunction with* embodied, situated, and vulnerable positions.

Likewise, in the third act, *Citizenfour* remains faithful to its reparative direction, here the film examines the quality of the Snowden event, and sketches the discourses on surveillance post-Snowden: snippets of news coverage from the USA, Brazil, or China; a scene in which the GCHQ forces journalists from the British Guardian to destroy hard drives on which documents of the Snowden cache are stored; negotiations with human rights advocates; Barack Obama's white-washing of the scandal; the surveillance of Angela Merkel's telephone a.s.o.. The film not only follows up on the news-circus after the first revealing publications, but also documents the political consequences of the disclosure of mass surveillance. An example is the testimony of William Binney at the German parliamentary inquiry into NSA activities that Poitras stages as a signum of a hopeful optimism in political changes initiated by Snowden's civil disobedience.

That political changes are necessary and urgent is again insisted on in the final scene of the film: Greenwald reports months later to Snowden in Moscow – completely analog, via news scribbled on tiny pieces of scrap paper – of *Citizen-Five*, a new intelligence whistleblower, who was motivated by Snowden's act. Among other, he has information on the drone war: the final power of decision lies, writes Greenwald, with "POTUS," the President of the United States. Who is determined as a drone target, is not decided in court, but on the desk of the sovereign – government manifests itself in the form of classical sovereignty. Biopolitics turns to bio-sovereignty, where the sovereign "makes die and lets live" (Foucault 1983: 134).⁶ The final sequence hints towards the disturbing insight,

⁶ On the similarity between the practice of approving targets and sovereign concepts of power, See Weber 2014; on the distinction between biopolitics and bio-sovereignty, see Lorey 2007: 276; on sovereign power, see Foucault 1983: 134.

that the disruption to come might not just be the next whistleblower, but again the lack of democratic oversight in allegedly democratic states. It also shows, that citizens such as Snowden are pushed into precarious positions by becoming stateless persons for criticizing the dissolution of democracy, finally ending up living in countries with even more repressive and authoritarian forms of governance. With this realization of sovereign logics of power, the expulsion of unruly citizens, and the involvement of classic cold war players *Citizenfour* finally does come alarmingly close to the fictional and paranoid realm of spy, war, and science fiction movies.

3 To be continued ...

Citizenfour does not develop a *strong* or comprehensive theory on how to deal with securitization and surveillance, or which political solutions could be installed against intelligence agencies out of control, but rather tells a story of an act of civil disobedience, which – this is already implied by the title – calls upon imitators. The film assures us that things could take a different course, if differences were implemented with continuous disruptions. By narrating the Snowden disclosures as event with serial potential instead of a completed tale, Poitras's "art of the possible" focuses upon the field of "possibles, of openings, indecisions, reversals and possible dislocations which make them fragile, temporary [...]" (Foucault 2007: 66) and shows that the present is contingent, fragile, and not immutable. The filmmaker succeeds in using narrative documentary cinema not only as a media for criticism, but also to transform it into a critique of media, which affects spectators with a – as we know from the Snowden-documents, precisely not so paranoid – suspicion against digital media and the state apparatus. Poitras summarizes in the German *taz* that digital communication has proved itself to be "vulnerable" (Busche 2014). Thus, by presenting situated knowledge on the Snowden disclosures, examining it as an evental disruption, and creating counter- or reparative readings open to the future, which highlight acts of civil disobedience as joint digital care work that show how societies' structure is vulnerable, *Citizenfour* proves itself to be a complex in(ter)vention that resists "simplification in the last instance" (Haraway 1988: 590).

The Snowden event has meanwhile become the "object of desire in the struggles on the classification of the event in different ideological, mostly nationally formed memories and in the battles for the interpretational sovereignty on the

various narratives,”⁷ as Raunig and Nigro characterize the “Mai 1968” event (2011: 159). Indeed discussions on mass surveillance and securitization have become virulent in many places, a promising political handling of the authoritarian tendencies of current exercises of power, or a wider discussion on human rights abuses within the framework of the so-called “War on Terror,” is still not in sight. Instead, struggles on how to interpret the Snowden event are in full swing: cultural and media pessimists, privacy groups, libertarian sceptics of the state, post-privacy supporters, or crypto-evangelicals sometimes conjure the beginning of the end of the internet, sometimes preach radical individualistic self-reliance and data parsimony, or, they crave technological fixes in anonymization tools and cryptographic implementations, the salvation of surveillance via communication security, and thereby do not disrupt, unlike *Citizenfour* proposes, the paranoid premediation-logic of processes of securitization, but rather affirm it. The final shot of the film shows Greenwald picking up snippets of paper he tore apart after using them to communicate with Snowden about CitizenFive. With a paranoid reading, the close-up of his hands can be interpreted as an attempt not to leave any traces behind, because intelligence agencies might reassemble them and uncover the private conversation. With a reparative reading, the sequence insinuates that it is up to us to dirty our hands to create an *actual* art of the possible: “to pick up the pieces” and to rearrange them into something different.

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7 [translation by authors]: “[...] Objekt des Begehrens in den Kämpfen um die Einordnung des Ereignisses in verschiedene ideologische, meist national geformte Gedächtnisse und in den Kämpfen um die Deutungshoheit über die vielfältigen Narrative [...]” (Raunig and Nigro: 2011: 159).

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