

# Politics

*"Some people assume their position of power when they think that 'I have a good idea, and let's implement my idea'. We need those innovative and clever ideas, but you have to put those through the political process to deliver political value for people."*

Vincent Nadin



## Securitization of Society

Interview with Marc Schuilenburg

**How do we define the politics of urban design and planning? In our conversation with Criminologist and Philosopher Marc Schuilenburg we discuss the practice of "creating entrance". As design and planning decisions are made in favor of one option, its ethics lie in the means by which we include and exclude each other. But to what extent can spatial design be held responsible for the urban constraints of freedom? In his writing on "The Securitization of Society", Marc Schuilenburg builds upon Michel Foucault's concept of "sécurité", which describes the governmental power of controlling a population's life in terms of risk prevention and people regulation. As a consequence, the physical environment we move through merges with a non-physical layer of laws and regulations, which in turn allow or deny entrance.**

*"To my understanding architecture is essentially about creating entrance. But wherever you create entrance, you exclude some group of people, which makes the role of the architect immediately and always an ethical one."*

**You are currently publishing on the "The Securitization of Society", which addresses the social impact of security systems as they shape and constrain our movement in urban space. Which audience do you write for?**

My new book will be out at New York University Press. The translator is now checking the last two chapters. The title of the book is "The Securitization of Society" and the subtitle is: "A Study of Social Order". The book discusses how social order emerges and disappears in public space, in the city and in our lives, but also social walls which are constructed as we make our lives more secure. With regards to public space, there are different fields or layers which come together in all kind of assemblages, in a way that make us move faster or slower through the city. I became aware of this about five years ago when I walked from my house to my favorite soccer club, Sparta, in Rotterdam-West. What is immediately striking – at least, if you pay attention, because it is not absolutely apparent – is that you are consistently moving from one secured territory to the next. You check in with your Public Transport pass; your face is recognized in the local shop. The consequence is that you have passed through five completely different, what I call "security assemblages" within no more than 25 minutes. And even then, I am not speaking about the numerous smaller assemblages between my house and the Sparta stadium where it is prohibited to smoke or let your dog out. These security assemblages are dynamic wholes of different parties who have established their own rules within a specific territory of the city to which they can give, but also deny, access.

We used to think of the city in classic oppositions such as 'city-countryside', 'nature-culture' and 'public-private'. But consider the many security assemblages on my way to the Sparta stadium, which are barely noticeable, as there is no actual sign saying: "Now you are entering a security assemblage". It was interesting to see how many times I was checked: when I entered the metro, when I left it, when I entered the stadium, when I crossed the street (while all the cameras followed me), when I entered a shop. Each security assemblage consists of different parties, different rules, different forms of exclusion and inclusion and their own penalties. In some sense, these assemblages deform the old idea of private and public space as they have merged into some kind of hybrid spaces. The authorities are no longer formed by the police, but are complemented by all kind of authorities who can oppose different forms of sanctions – ranging from denying offenders access to shops, to the application of naming & shaming. If I am a hooligan, I won't be able to enter the stadium; if I steal, I won't be able to enter the shop anymore; and if I don't have money, I can't use the metro.

The idea of the process of securitization is quite new and has evolved since the 1980s. It proposes that the city is characterized by numerous security assemblages which secure their individual territories. One of

the reasons why we are moving towards thinking in terms of secure and non-secure spaces is that all parties take responsibility in giving and denying access and imposing rules or not. The separation into public and private spaces no longer applies, especially since we are influenced by global information technologies. We should be urged to rethink how to define and design public space and how to think about the challenge of constantly being confronted with all kind of security assemblages. As the idea of private vs. public has become obsolete, new (invisible) borders are created within the city. This is in some way exciting because, for example, the medieval way was to see territory in terms of the city vs. nature, where it was safe within the walls of the city and outside was the danger.

**Interestingly, we tend to accept these systems and subconsciously adapt our behavior to such an extent that we no longer question what you call "securitization". Hasn't this distorted what we consider to be allowed and not allowed?**

It comes with a particular view of mankind, because conventionally we would consider everybody to be a citizen and equal. However, with the existence of all these different security assemblages, the focus is now on prevention rather than on punishment. We experience a risk-avoidance mentality by denying someone access if they are viewed as a risk-citizen. Our view of people also changes: not everybody is equal anymore. There are risk-citizens like hooligans and others to whom we deny access to parts of the city in a way which is much more surveyed than we are used to.

**This changes our understanding of freedom. In my opinion, the degree of institutionalized control is higher in the Netherlands than in other European countries. Don't we pacify people through extensive prevention?**

You pacify or colonize. In historical terms, colonization was always oriented towards the outside. I am thinking, for example, of the first European colonization wave that took place in the early 15th century. Now, colonization has become internal, coming from different techniques, powers and created by new parties. I agree people accept it, because we have no tradition in the Netherlands of distrusting the government. In the U.S., there has traditionally been distrust against the government, as can be seen by the example of all the civil rights movements. The question is whether it is the state one should distrust. The issue is that the security assemblages aren't only run by the state, but more and more by private parties.

**Which role does the government have, does it benefit from the privatization of security?**

It's different in every security assemblage. Not only private and public become totally merged, the question is also if we can still talk about the State as we used to, with a capital "S". In my opinion, it is increasingly difficult to talk about the state as being a household

*"With the rise of the security assemblages it is very difficult to talk about banishment, because it is not banishment in the old meaning of the term. I call it the 'selective exclusion', selective because every time we enter a new assemblage there is again the chance of being excluded."*

looking over the Netherlands. With security assemblages, the state nestles itself differently in every one of them, its role and influence can be small or completely withdrawn. In some cases, the State only approves measures which are applied by the assemblages, but is not present. We tend to focus on the state and whether judges are making the right convictions in order for us to evaluate if we can go into appeal. But now that the state transfers a lot of power to new parties, no one asks the fundamental question of what these new parties are doing with the responsibility that used to lie with the state? There is a big gap. The Netherlands are increasingly moving in the direction of private security guards, which are already more common than police surveillance. Private entities are inventing their own sanctions or penalties and are hardly ever controlled. Most security assemblages are invisible and if you fit in, you don't notice them, but they are restructuring the city in a totally different way. These are developments of which we are seldom conscious, although they exert a determining influence on everyday life.

The agenda of the modern times was revolutionary in terms of democratizing institutions. Today, the political agenda is hardly revolutionary anymore, but focuses on creating secure and insecure spaces. That's why the view of the human person changes. It has become very difficult to speak of citizens in a general way. If I constantly need to question whether I am allowed access or not, am I then a citizen by traditional definition? In my book, I distinguish between three categories: the citizen, the denizen and the margizen. The denizen is like you and me, the fortunate citizen who constantly enters a new security assemblage and is confronted every time with new rules and punishments, but behaves according to the rules. The margizen is the opposite, people that aren't allowed access to some parts of the city, especially those areas where goods are bought. They are excluded from the inner city and its corresponding local facilities. In

the Netherlands, you see a rise of restricted communities like specific shopping areas where certain people are excluded. Are they citizens? I don't think so. It's a completely different category. I believe we need to speak of margizens, people that live on the margin, the edge of citizenship. They are temporarily excluded for short periods of time and, in other cases, permanently excluded from participation in the life that goes on in other parts of the city.

As a result, two implications are important. First, citizenship does not coincide exclusively with the primary territory of a national state. In view of the fact that there are also other power forms and authoritative structures, it is better to speak of a patchwork of assemblages within a national state. Sovereignty and territorial association remain important features, but these are perhaps easier to find in places that can no longer be defined as completely public or unequivocally private. Second, citizenship is repeatedly discovered. This means that citizenship is rooted in the factual splintering of the urban space. The national state provides the framework, while social practices provide the options for this development. In contrast to the political space that is normally envisaged in terms of a social contract and civil rights, the forming of rights and responsibilities depends on the specific practices in which a person participates. In this way, citizenship is detached from community and, instead, connected to the notion of the communal. In other words, the essence of the concept is sacrificed in favor of a more dynamic understanding of citizenship. One of the consequences of this is, that a person may have more "denizenships" at his disposal. He can go shopping in a shopping mall, and study on campus and reside in a gated community.

**But am I actually secure, if private entities around me decide upon the spatial restrictions in the city? Is my freedom as a citizen still secure?**

Of course the security assemblage, like that

of the shopping mall or that of the soccer stadium, are in fact the most secure areas, while people that are denied access to them are in somewhat less secure areas. But there is also another issue which is the matter of how we talk about getting entrance or not. If we talk in architectural terms, the inner city is turning more and more into an area of "zero friction environments". As we all know, movement is the fastest when there is no friction. With the rise of zero-friction environments in the city, which all these security assemblages resemble, any kind of public upheaval is essentially prevented, by denying certain people access to the assemblages. Interestingly, the rise of zero-friction environments has the magical promise that we are no longer confronted with insecure situations in our lives. In the introduction to my book, I describe the "Fitness Dilemma". The Fitness Dilemma illustrates how the chance of having a heart attack is extremely high during the one hour that I exercise. However, the increase of my overall healthiness reduces such chances for the rest of the week. This means that I need to confront some kind of risk, in order to be safer as a whole. In these terms, security and insecurity are two sides of the same coin. The problem is that we tend to separate the two and think that we establish secure places by preventing any kind of risk. On the other side, feelings of insecurity increase, because we are no longer confronted with danger. In a way, we can say that insecurity is a part of our lives. The dilemma we face now is, for instance, that the statistics on criminality are going down, while the average feeling of insecurity is extremely high.

**So people are in doubt: "because it's too quiet something must be wrong"?**

Yes. The Fitness Dilemma makes us aware that the two aspects are always connected. Our tendency to disconnect the two is "the securitization of society". We believe in the myth that we can live in a society without insecurity, which of course is total rubbish. At this point, I come back to architecture.

When I teach my students about public space, I always use a very broad definition of architecture. To my understanding, architecture is essentially about creating entrance. But wherever you create entrance, you exclude some group of people, which makes the role of the architect immediately and always an ethical one. Architects tend to forget that. Entrance comes with rules and with penalties. Perhaps we could say that being an architect is the most ethical job there is; more ethical than other jobs, because the primarily function of architecture is to create entrance.

**The dilemma of zero friction environments relates to the urban planning trend of gentrification. But on the macro scale of the city, the approach doesn't work. We will always have negative neighborhoods, if we want areas which are entirely positive.**

In the end, the zero-friction environments will not work, no. This is reflected in the high feelings of insecurity in the Netherlands, despite the low rates of criminality. Of course, we can search for reasons in politics, in media, in culture, but the explanation should be sought in the whole context, which also includes architecture and urban design. An example is public benches, which have armrests placed between the seats, so homeless can no longer sleep on them. Design tries to establish a notion of a space that is totally secure, but in the end such a space will never exist. That is one of the reasons why design, paradoxically, also contributes to the feeling of insecurity.

**To what extent is the research you are doing and the book, linked to a larger discourse in the Netherlands? Is the government aware of or even addressing this process of securitization?**

No, I don't think so. Of course, I get a lot of invitations from media, newspapers, police and public prosecution offices, with whom I do a lot of work. But no, I don't think there is awareness in the Netherlands that we are heading in a direction, which is already common in the United States and Great Britain. For instance, as shopping centers move to the edge of the city, it becomes extremely difficult for people without cars to reach them. There is also an increasing amount of neighborhoods or housing areas that hire private security guards. We experience an encapsulation of society. The walls of these capsules can be raised by different techniques; they can be physical, but also digital, as in the case of the subway, where I am allowed entrance by an anonymous port which scans my metro card.

You could consider this a silent revolution which has been going on since the 1980s, to make public space more secure, essentially by excluding the margizen. We used to consider this as banishment, a medieval technique of banishing people, with leprosy for instance, from their village or town, driving them out into the big wide world. The underlying notion was that the sufferer has turned away from God in one way or another. Symptoms such as swelling, rashes and light-colored patches just under the skin indicate the presence of the disease. A priest determines the leprosy infection by declaring the diseased person 'unclean'.

Although no term is perfect, it seems in advance that the idea of "banishment" is too general and has too little relevance to the security diagram in which this technique is exercised. In fact, the inclusion and exclusion of people always depends on a specific assemblage, each of which has its own rules and punishments. Accordingly, I prefer the term "selective exclusion," due to its more specific meaning. Selective exclusion reaches further than the term "banishment", which is associated with government and which Foucault called "classic power" or "the power of law". In this latter usage, the emphasis is placed on the monopoly of the government to implement rules and sanctions by means of tools of public legislation. In addition, banishment is more related to the removal of people from a community. People are literally sent away from a neighborhood, village, town or country. In contrast, "selective exclusion" is a much more dynamic concept because it refers to the fact that there are all kinds of social divisions in the city that entail their own public and particular rules of behavior – creating fragmented security at the micro-level. In this construction, offenders are no longer welcome in distinct parts of the city, in which separate social regulations apply and which are under supervision of varying assemblages of police, private security firms and related professionals.

**The leper is also related to the image of the mad.**

Yes, today the "mad" is the risk citizen or actually the "as-If citizen". Perhaps you are an "as-if citizen - we might be talking, but you could have a knife with you. The mad and the sick, which used to be banished, are now the as-If citizens who cause risks, criminality or nuisance. So there is a new category. The difference is that they are not banished anymore. They are still inside the city, but denied entrance to different parts of the city. ■

**Emilia Bruck**

---

**Marc Schuilenburg (1971)**

teaches in the department of Criminal Law and Criminology, VU University Amsterdam.

Marc Schuilenburg is an assistant professor at the Department of Criminal Law and Criminology, at the VU University Amsterdam. He studied Philosophy and Law at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, where he also obtained his doctorates. In 2012 he received his PhD in Social Sciences on a Deleuzian thesis into how security is arranged and delivered by security assemblages, and the changes that are being seen in this respect to societal issues of in- and exclusion, as well as to the concept of citizenship. Before he worked at the VU University, Marc Schuilenburg worked for six years for the Dutch Public Prosecution Service. He is the author of the books 'Order in Security. A Dynamic Perspective' (in Dutch, 2012) and, with Alex de Jong, 'Mediapolis. Popular Culture and the City' (2006). He has co-edited several books, including 'Positive Criminology' (2014), 'The New French Philosophy' (in Dutch, 2011), 'Governing Security Under the Rule of Law?' (2010) and 'Deleuze Compendium' (in Dutch 2009). He is co-founder and current co-editor of the academic Journal on Culture & Crime and current co-editor of Judicial Explorations. He is a member of the Dutch Centre of Cultural Criminology and the Centre for Art and Philosophy. Marc Schuilenburg was a Visiting Professor at John Jay College, New York, in the Department of Sociology (2013). You can visit him at: [www.marcschuilenburg.nl](http://www.marcschuilenburg.nl). His email address is [m.b.schuilenburg@vu.nl](mailto:m.b.schuilenburg@vu.nl).

---