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Citizenship Revisited—Denizens and Margizens

MARC SCHUILENBURG

We are witnessing an increasing amount of information processes in our daily environment. They connect the physical environment with a virtual landscape. This situation offers creative opportunities, but has also negative consequences. This is illustrated by the use of security techniques such as video surveillance and camera supervision with the intent to reduce risks by identifying “dangerous” individuals likely to offend. Since the early 1990s, cities in the Western world have employed detection and pattern recognition cameras on a large scale in public space. According to the latest studies, Britain has a staggering 4.2 million CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) cameras—one for every 14 people in the country. In London, the use of systems such as CCTV has led to the Underground being equipped with a network of thousands of cameras. The software program Mandrake matches faces with photos of recidivists; within 60 seconds, the faces of 15 million people are compared. It has been calculated that each person in London is caught on camera an average of 400 times daily. A highly advanced system of video surveillance turns the people of Chicago into the most closely observed people in the world. The cameras alert the police when someone is wandering around aimlessly on the streets, or is hanging around supposedly too long at a public building. Simply walking around with your friends is no longer treated as an innocent activity.

To a certain extent, these techniques, in the words of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, “govern” our behavior. In order to elucidate this, technology must be viewed in a much broader context. It is not neutral, but rather, quite the opposite. Technology covers the way in which our social reality is experienced. It not only leads to a different partitioning of the public space, but also contributes to a specific production of understanding the self. This is closely linked to the way our identity is constructed in terms of citizenship. In focusing on both practices (public space and self-government), I will reframe the role to be accorded to the public space in analyses of citizenship. At the heart of the problem is the suggestion that

citizenship still relates to an open public environment, in principle, and is accessible to all.

Before the eighteenth century, the term “citizen” denoted a local citizen of a town or city, and a status carrying political and economic rights and some privileges. The French Revolution symbolized the overthrow of the monarchy and aristocratic society by making the citizen a common term of address. The *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* (1789) defined a set of individual rights and collective rights of all of the estates. The modern idea of citizenship involves individual legal rights that are guaranteed by the state (and that even could be applied against the state), but also refers to the spatial-physical aspects of urban public life. In French, the word *citoyen* points to the life of everyday in the city or *cit *. A *citoyen* is someone who is part of the city and, more specific, a person who has the right to participate in the public space: streets, parks, squares, and so on. This public environment provides an open forum for citizen discussions and brings different lifestyles, groups, and religions together. In other words, a “good” public environment is the result of the interaction between an urban space and the social or cultural use that persons make of it. This is called “public domain.” Although the concept of public domain is also linked to state-owned works of artistic and social significance, it primarily refers to a public area with a social function. It signifies a space in which citizens can share their opinions with others. Instead of a closed forum, it offers access to different communities and lifestyles.

The notion of citizenship has a strong stress on access to public space in the city. According to the philosopher Hannah Arendt, the public domain is one of the most important aspects of the relationships between citizens in cities. In *The Human Condition*, she states, “The reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised.” In view of the importance that Arendt attaches to the public space with reference to the freedom of thinking, speech, opinion-forming, and conviction of others, this environment ought to be available to everyone, in principle. From the late 1960s, however, this modernistic approach of the public domain has become deeply problematic. The public space in Western cities was believed to be an open environment; all spaces of the modern city were to be integrated in democratically accessible and homogeneous infrastructure grids, usually under public ownership or control. Planning was seen as necessary to support a “sense of cohesion.” As privatization, liberalization, globalization, and the application of new information technologies race across the world, the comprehensive ideal in urban planning is collapsing. What are the consequences for the notion of citizenship? What is still public and how are the new “public-nests” functioning?

In order to understand the transformations of the public domain, The Belgium philosopher Lieven de Caeter speaks of a “capsular civilization.” The word capsule comes from the Latin word *capsa*, which means “box” or “container.” A capsule is an artificial environment, writes De Caeter, which shuts out the hostile external environment. It functions as a protection device against influences from the outside. Everything is organized in capsules or isolated entities. This landscape is articulated, in terms of architecture, as a series of heavily protected and isolated spaces: shopping malls, special urban design districts, gated communities, Community Improvement Districts (CIDs), amusement parks, cultural zones, historic districts, and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). To allow the spatial and social segregation to function, they are armed with an architecture that is subject to permanent supervision. City Walk in downtown Los Angeles is one of the most renowned expressions of this trend. The complex has been built around the idea of the American “main street” and reaches back to the era in which cars were only a sporadic occurrence and citizens could participate light-heartedly in public life in the city. A broad shopping street is situated in the midst of an area that is surrounded by buildings where visitor have to park their cars. Not only are all the entrances to the obligatory car parks monitored with surveillance cameras, but the parking charges must also be paid in advance.

Drawing on the Los Angeles experience and the dystopian and noir portrayal of cities in movies like *Blade Runner*, the urban theorist Mike Davis calls this the “fortification” of public space. At present, the perception system of an average office block makes use of panoptical images, changes in smell, temperature and humidity, motion detection, and occasionally, audio signals. For security reasons, as Davis analyzes in *City of Quartz*, the ascribed isolated environments are also guarded by aggression detectors, programs for detection and recognition, and facial recognition systems. These technologies, which are linked to computer networks, are used to monitor the behavior of the residents and the visitors. In order to screen off the outside world, the inside of such complexes are inaccessible to homeless people and beggars who are refused entrance by the security services in attendance. Ultimately, the interaction between architecture and life will lead to the unique point at which the city will transform into a military fort or, as the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben claims in his *Homo Sacer* cycle, into a camp. The corresponding society can be characterized as a culture of control that expresses the fear in our society and the related craving for total safety.

In their insightful book *Splintering Urbanism*, Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin vividly describe how the process of fragmentation of the physical shape of the city is taking place all over the planet. They

consider the *capsular milieu* as the quintessential omen of a loss of public space. According to Graham and Marvin, it is no longer useful or even possible to talk about the city as being an open environment, accessible to every person. Public domain is losing its openness and coherence. Instead of the ordered and cohesive structure of the modern city, we increasingly encounter a fragmented city. The result is an archipelago of economic, social, ethnic, and cultural enclaves. The city, then, becomes one of barriers, (virtual) walls, boundaries, and enclosures. By blocking off areas, on a large scale, from easy access, people are not only excluded from the social facilities in concrete areas, but also from the life that takes place there. In other words, the exclusion of individuals or groups means that a halt is being called to the (informal) gathering of various social groups, cultures, lifestyles, and ideas.

Although the range of pressures behind the collapse of the modern public domain is far from simple or straightforward, this introduction is necessary to understand how the mentioned collapse is bound up with changing perspectives on the notion of citizenship. Are there forms of citizenship that coexist with the fragmentation of the public domain and the new embedding of security? In order to answer this question, I introduce two new categories of citizenship.

In their article “Nodal Governance, Democracy and the New ‘Denizens,’” Clifford Shearing and Jennifer Wood use the term “denizen” to describe a new category of citizenship. In the literature on immigration, a denizen applies to an “alien resident.” He enjoys social and civil rights, but not “full political inclusion,” as in the classic formulation of the citizen by Alfred Marshall in *Citizenship and Social Class*. As Marshall has pointed out, citizenship is constituted first of all by civil rights (that protect the citizen from the state), political rights (that allow for participation in the governing of society), and social rights (rights that ensure a material safety net). Denizenship, however, refers not to the society in general but to an affiliation to any sphere of governance and its associated rights and responsibilities. This opens the door to a different politics, politics more in keeping with the unique ethics of different communities. People of shared spaces—gated communities, schools, shopping malls, universities—can be seen as denizens. Within this conceptualization, each domain would carry with it expectations and obligations that would define the specific nature of the denizen’s status. As a consequence, a denizenship can be more permanent (a resident of a gated community) or more temporary (a university-bound student). This implies that individuals can have multiple denizenships, depending on the number of domains of governance through which their lives are regulated.

Inhabitants of a gated community are a perfect illustration of the category of denizenship. The chaos of urban traffic, crime, and noise pollution may

reign outside. Inside, the residents have every conceivable amenity (also known as “club goods”) at their disposal, such as babysitters, servants, laundry service, newspaper and magazine delivery service, club houses, car parks, car maintenance, shuttlebus transport, and so on. The walls around the community and the guarded entrance mark the transition to other rules and regulations in a very concrete manner. Within the periphery, people are subject to reciprocal rights and obligations enforced by a private governing body. In order to live in the community, residents must sign a private contract. In the contract, a system of fixed agreements is summed up that is closely linked to the way of life and the culture of the community. It seeks to enlist the residents into the values and norms underlying the contractual agreement, what Adam Crawford has termed “contractual governance.” The contract proffers its own concept of normality because it demands of the people who stay in the delineated area of the community that they subject themselves to internal rules and that everyone displays the same behavior. In doing so, it produces its own version of what is considered to be normal. In a reverse movement, the relationship between architecture and life is closed. Refusing to accept the contract means exclusion from the community.

The broad movement in which residents of fragmented spaces sign contracts that specify the terms under which they relate to each other is strengthened by the fact that these environments are subject to permanent supervision. Residents define the exterior world as dangerous. More importantly, they organize their own form of security. In order to screen off the interior of their added-value complex from the outside world, they buy the services of private security offices and install different kinds of security technologies, cameras and other observation networks that restrict access to the “semi-public” space and discipline the behavior of the residents and visitors. Here, security becomes risk-focused. It is not interested in crime per se; it is interested in the risk of crime and in anti-social behavior in general.

In contrast to a “punishment mentality” in which a person is punished because he has committed a wrongful act in the past, this future-oriented approach is based on a “risk mentality.” The risk mentality is associated with the potential for loss, harm, injury or destruction. Therefore, security is increasingly oriented toward risk, anticipation, and prevention. The emphasis of the professional security organizers is on proactive prevention rather than reactive punishment. Their purpose is to make the future more certain. Far in advance of the crime being committed, individuals or groups are identified as potential criminals on the basis of their behavior. With an appeal to the contracts in force in the closed-off areas, the information is used by the private security services in attendance to remove strange elements from the same delineated spaces, for preventive reasons. With an acknowledgement to Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*, we can say: what appears is safe, what is safe appears.

What remains hidden when using this notion of denizen? When we locate the category of denizenship to communal spaces with a lot of social capital, which individuals remain invisible? Although exclusion always takes place on the basis of the rules that are valid at that place, there are two exclusion techniques that are remarkably conspicuous. According to the criminologists Andrew Von Hirsch and Clifford Shearing, the first is based on the profiles of certain people. It is assumed that certain individuals possess specific characteristics that indicate a heightened risk of criminal behavior (for instance “man,” “young,” “black,” “hoodie,” “cap”). Whereas no criminal behavior has actually taken place, the risk that it might occur is estimated as being so high that these people are refused access to the facilities of an urban space. A second form of exclusion can be distinguished, again oriented toward people or groups instead of the crimes committed. In contrast to the first form of exclusion, this form involves the refusal of people who have been found guilty of violating certain rules in the past. Despite this difference in gradation, the similarity between both forms of exclusion is evident. Both are directed toward the identification of “evil” in the form of potential threats or possible security risks in a demarcated space.

As a consequence, citizenship is not primarily realized in a relation with or participation in an open public sphere. It entails active engagement in a dispersed variety of semi-public or private social domains. In this context, we can easily chart the groups that are excluded from these environments: the homeless, junkies, beggars, the unemployed, immigrants without residence papers (*sans papiers*), and so on. Their life is not worth living; it is stripped of its specific form or quality. Are these people—to apply a second category—the “margizens” of the city? It is clear that these people do not have entrance to collective goods, or public services, such as the provision of security. In the classic analysis of Thomas Hobbes, the seventeenth-century philosopher, the provision of security was known as a state-provided service. The social contract was a theoretical agreement made between people looking for security from the barbarities of the “state of nature.” A domain of collective security was to be maintained by the state on behalf of all citizens. The state would protect them from each other, enabling them to live in security.

In the new, fragmented public space, different communities take responsibility for their own security. They are subject to their own forms of governance and observation. In light of this development, the margizens have become their “evil,” as they are beyond the norm and increasingly invisible. This is a political and ethical problem. It takes us back to the question whether the citizenship status still provides a meaningful explanatory category. If we regard society from the standpoint of a culture of control, which no longer operates on a basis of investigating crime but is

oriented to excluding all possible risks instead, we are becoming painfully aware that in many cities, special zones or spaces are constructed, which lie well out of sight of the residents of the ascribed safe and controlled interior spaces. It is no coincidence that these unprotected areas are currently inhabited by the margizens of our society. Here, isolated and alienated people are locked up together. These margizens are left outside of the protected zones, without any rights, at the mercy of authorities they get in touch with: police, private security services, and so on. They are the victims of a “punishment mentality” that is characterized by harsher police practices, quicker judicial procedures and extended penal sanctions. As the French sociologist Loïc Wacquant has put it, the new urban marginality displays a distinct tendency to conglomerate in and coalesce around “hard core” or “no-go” areas where only the outcasts of society would consider living. In this context, we can refer to the special “zones” in Miami, Rotterdam, and São Paulo. These places have been allocated by the city councils to homeless and addicts for eating, sleeping, and washing. These shadow sides of life converge in Manuel Castells’ telling phrase “black holes of marginality,” areas that have no access to collective public goods and services (markets, skills, resources, employment opportunities).

We are now beginning to realize that the splintering of the public domain not only unites, but also divides people. It is obvious that for the “excluded” or margizens, it is a lack of access to public services (security, Internet, banking, shopping) that causes problems. Marginalized spaces have become the “spatial gaps” in our cities. It is against this background that we must examine the way that spaces are related to one another. This issue embraces more than a non-obligatory articulation of architectural principles. It points to a different variation of the relation between politics and life. More specific, it raises a normative discourse on the relation between public space, exclusion, and citizenship.

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