



THE CITY IN TIME

Hybrid Barriers Enforce Differences

Mechanical and behavioural strategies to immunize communities of things or bodies with hybrid barriers produces differences, protects privileges and reinforces hierarchies. Quotidian technologies of separation like trafficlighs and facemasks express solidarity and inequality, they immunize from unwanted contact and consolidate the social fabric.

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Abstract

Hybrid barriers separate bodies and things according to social or physical measures. They thereby produce differences, conformity and hierarchy.

Strategies to immunize against Covid-19 include numerous barriers, be it face-masks, plexiglass-screens, lockdowns, or vaccinations. These barriers are built out of solidarity and self-interest; they are hybrid in as much as they prevent hybridization, the unintended mixture of unequal things or bodies.

They thereby not only separate in order to protect, but to produce and proliferate difference. Hybrid barriers maintain privileges, granting access to spaces, goods, and rights for some and blocking them for others. They not only function as protective shields but as disciplinary measures that reward conformity with access.

The techniques of hybrid barriers include mechanical, genetic, behavioral strategies and infrastructures that inhibit contagion, contact, communication, and in consequence mobility and translation.

This poster restricts to examples describing the permeability of hybrid barriers that only affect particular bodies, that limit social and physical mobility.



Preventing Hybridity in the Animal Kingdom

The concept of hybridity derives its meaning from the Latin "hybrida" (i.e. "bastard" or "mixed breed") that refers to deviations from a purity or a norm.

In zoology, the term "hybrid barrier" is used to describe the limits that prevent or at least reduce the (re-)production of hybrid, mutated life forms in the animal kingdom.

Different species of frogs can live in the same pond without mixing if they spawn at different times. Lions and tigers prevent themselves from mixing by marking and defending their territories. For snails, sexual organs that move into different directions prevent the pairing of different species mechanically.



Three examples for the intersectional discrimination of hybrid barriers

1) Traffic lights

Traffic lights indicate the time during which defined body should cross an intersection. They are hybrid barriers since they inhibit the contact between different kinds of bodies (cars, cyclists, pedestrians, etc.) as much as possible. Traffic lights are symbolic barriers that function not through physical boundaries but symbols. Citizens act in conformity with these separations and thereby reproduce a certain physical organization of public space. While the separation might seem arbitrarily, it is in fact based on productivity and functionality: cars and working people have a higher priority than pedestrians, children, disabled and elderly people.

2) International borders

Only individuals that hold the required documents are allowed to cross international borders. Regardless growing global connectivity, we live in a century of increasing foreclosure policy. However, societies are dependent on the occasional permeability of borders, since much of the wealth in the global north is based on the exploitation of precarious workers from the global south.

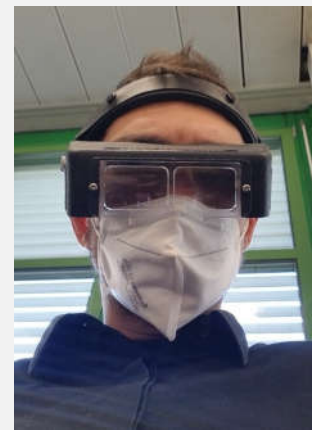
2) Face-masks

Clothing not only protects but performs identity and social status. Presenting the belonging to a social group, the right clothing decides about the access or denial to physical and social spaces. During the Covid-19 pandemic, face-masks became an item of clothing that presented solidarity with vulnerable persons. Yet, legal definitions about who must wear masks also indicate difference.

Conclusion

Hybrid barriers function through a variety of media to prevent information or bodies from contact or communication with another side. Time can be a barrier, light, sound, noise, concrete, clothing or behavior; barriers can be visible or invisible, physical or verbal, like the exclamation "Stop!".

These barriers are not an absolute blockage between unequal groups, rather, they separate categories of objects and bodies from one another through a regulated permeability that produces differences and assigns standardized roles. This is why they are the subject of political negotiation.



REFERENCES

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