

 **DESIGN**

AND

VIOLENCE

Science Gallery Dublin is an explorer of boundaries, the sometimes hidden and often rich, interstitial spaces that fall between academic disciplines and regular pursuits. Our aim in this exploration is to find concordant and discordant views, objects, people and ideas and manifest them as a compelling experience for our visitors to engage and converse with.

Critical to this pursuit is that what we do connects with our audience, that it offers people an opportunity to participate and, perhaps most importantly, that it surprises them! DESIGN AND VIOLENCE may strike some as an unusual exhibition for an art-science space like Science Gallery Dublin to produce. Surely it belongs more in the realm of a design museum or contemporary art space? And yes, it was conceived of by the brilliant duo of Paola Antonelli of The Museum of Modern Art, (MoMA), New York and Jamer Hunt of Parsons School of Design New York. But why realise it in its first exhibition form in Science Gallery Dublin — what compelled us to this theme?

On one hand, we live in a world where research suggests we have never had it so good, yet on the other, we observe violent acts occurring across our globe with minute-by-minute accounts and updates. The evolution of warfare and technology in the post 9/11 world is at times intangible and unseeable with hidden complexities, networks and depths beyond our understanding. Do we switch off and log out? How can we engage in conversations around the objects and systems that, with intent or bad judgement, have violent consequences?

This exhibition occurs in particularly turbulent times where many systems — political, health, social and economic — have demonstrated great weaknesses and flaws. In particular, in 2016, our political systems have enabled ideas and individuals to reach levels of acceptance and power unimaginable given the many falsehoods on which they are based. DESIGN AND VIOLENCE does not purport to offer opinions on the systems and designs it exhibits but rather aims to propel people to conversations that engage with design and its impact on our lives. This publication comes about at the midpoint of the exhibition, to reignite the conversation begun in the first edition, both Dan Lockton and Lisa Godsen's essays eloquently respond to critical themes explored through various works in the show. Also featured are two 'design fiction' proposals by the MFA Design students at the National College of Art and Design, as part of a project responding to the exhibition.

Our curatorial team for DESIGN AND VIOLENCE brings a heavyweight of experience and deep thought on this theme. They have assembled a range of objects and ideas that will surprise as much as they might disturb. Ultimately, our aim with this show is not to set out a bleak reflection of humankind and its propensity to violence, but to offer Science Gallery Dublin as a platform — a space to try on some potential futures that are emerging, to reflect, to discuss and, finally, to become more aware by adding an additional lens and viewpoint to our visitors' arsenal.

An address is the key required to receive a PPS number, secure a job and open a bank account. For people experiencing homelessness, providing hostel addresses automatically identifies their circumstance. Wise to the disadvantages posed by this, enterprising individuals have resorted to a system hack known as ‘post phishing’.

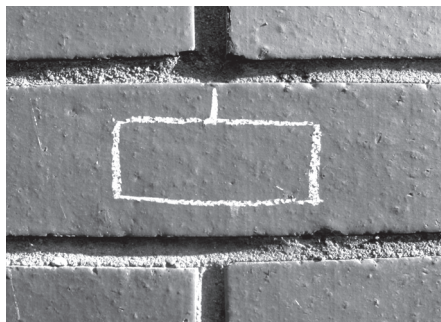
Created from scavenged detritus, ‘phishing nets’ [a] are surreptitiously hooked inside postboxes and letter-plates. Invisible to both the postman and passerby, these nets catch letters that may then be retrieved externally. Some phishers observe homes, identifying a window of opportunity, while others prefer to target abandoned buildings.

In response to this post phishing phenomenon, a unique form of post sharing has emerged. Taking their cue from America’s hobo code, sympathetic homeowners have started chalking symbols on their homes indicating that, rather than phishing, the homeless are invited to collect their post in person. Initially indicated by a simple rectangle announcing postboxes as open for use, [b], these symbols have become increasingly widespread and sophisticated. Homeless individuals now stake their claim by drawing a horizontal intersection [c] while homeowners use dashes to indicate that there is post to collect. [d]

However, while some homeowners cooperate in this way, illicit post phishing remains rife. A number of disgruntled homeowners have started expressing their indignation by attaching “No Junkie Mail” stickers to their postboxes. Handmade at first, the stickers are now available in discount stores [e]. Condemned by many, these stickers fuel the stigma marking the homeless and drug addicts as one and the same.



[a]



[b]



[c]



[d]

[e]



POST PHISHING

A-VOID

Operation A-VOID is a series of earring designs inspired by the identification ear tags given to livestock. They are hypothetically created by different groups throughout the next 100 years who attempt to alter the mindset of society towards other species. In this fictional future, these campaigners, vigilante rebels and undercover infiltrators wear their relevant tags as a symbol of solidarity as they try to stop the exploitation of animals for the benefit of humans.

The project is presented as a warning from the future, asking us to question the violent effects our everyday systems have on our planet and the millions of animals we share it with. A post-apocalyptic future is ultimately portrayed — which is the result of neglecting to rectify climate change largely caused by animal agriculture.



2025

A group known as Solidarity campaign for the equal rights of animals but is met with much subversion. Their cuffs are designed with a unique ID number that counts advocates of the cause. Government organisations silence the group before they become too influential.



2050

Solidarity members grow frustrated so they decide to take the law into their own hands. The ear tag is updated to reflect this new aggressive approach. Acting like soldiers on a mission, they target anyone that opposes their values. Nicknamed 'Vigilantes' they use any means necessary to bombard the general public with their message so it cannot be ignored. However, their intent is distorted as global media portray them as malicious terrorists against human advancement.



2100

Earth becomes inhospitable due to climate change. The wealthy 1% escape to an Earth-like planet. Humanity's ability to manipulate, control and exploit all other beings to aid technological development is encouraged. A small number of Solidarity members secretly travel to the new planet. As showing animals compassion can be seen as an act of terrorism, they hide their true beliefs. They call themselves the Secret Solidarity Society (SSS) and wear high-tech ear tags inserted under the skin. They pulse when other SSS member are near and open secret doors. They calculate that the only chance for a bright future is for our next 100 years to be avoided, and that is why they contact us.

“Sims IVF Clinic is a sanctuary — a place where respect, confidentiality and medical excellence reside,” — so says the blurb on the website of ‘Ireland’s most advanced’ fertility business. It is named after the famed American surgeon J. Marion Sims (1813-1883), who is fêted in his home country with that most nineteenth-century of posthumous rewards, a big bronze statue of his likeness standing on a stone plinth in Central Park, New York, and the moniker ‘Father of American Gynaecology’.

However, to an increasing number of historians and activists, Sims is not a hero but a violent racial vivisectionist who owed his ‘achievement’ to incessant experimentation on female slaves in pre-Emancipation Alabama. Anarcha, Lucy and Betsey are the only ones whose names we know. Kept in a little hospital in Sims’ backyard for up to four years at a time, the surgeon’s name lives on not only in fertility clinics or brass plaques, but in a particular type of vaginal speculum and the inspection technique he invented.

While the Sims speculum is typically made of steel and is a symmetrical u-shape, an intriguing element of speculum design is the variety of forms the instrument has taken, ranging from the perhaps most typical ‘duck-billed’ bivalve to simple cylindrical ones with mirrored interiors.

The use of the speculum on those experimentees is an early example of its centrality to tales of gynaecological violence. Starting in the 1860s, specula were wielded in a war against ‘contagious diseases’, a euphemism for the venereal illnesses carried by over a third of all British soldiers and sailors.

The responsibility for compromising the health of those agents of empire was located in the bodies of women, in particular prostitutes. A law “for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases at Certain Naval and Military Stations” was passed in 1864, governing particular garrison and port towns including Portsmouth, the Curragh and Cobh, and later extended to include other locations

including Quebec, Dublin and Liverpool. This empowered plain-clothes policemen to apprehend any woman suspected of prostitution and detain them to be forcibly examined by speculum.

The implicit threat of what one campaigner described as “steel rape” was a curtailment to women’s freedom to be out in public space and for those who were detained under the Contagious Diseases Acts, the use of the speculum was a violence and a violation.

One woman described her experiences in a letter in 1868: “It is awful work; the attitude they push us into first is so disgusting and so painful, and then these monstrous instruments — often they use several. They seem to tear open the passage first with their hands, and examine us, and then they thrust in instruments, and they pull them out and push them in, and they turn and twist them about; and if you cry out they stifle you with towels.”

Those laws were finally repealed in 1886 in a campaign seen as the forerunner of the votes for women movement — and we should note that the assailability of orifices by the enforcement of the Contagious Diseases Acts had dark echoes in the force-feeding enacted against suffragettes.

The speculum is still deployed as a weapon on occasion. For example, in 2013, members of the Russian feminist group Pussy Riot reported almost daily forced gynaecological examinations when they were in prison. And there is disquiet in many quarters about what is seen as the overuse of the speculum — Chinese civil servants are forced to undergo annual gynaecological exams; in some states, incarcerated American women are routinely examined by speculum, and it is used in immigration procedures in other countries.

Many speculum manufacturers describe their design approach as ‘user-centered’, a tag attached to so many contemporary products. But who, exactly, is the user the instrument is centered on? A close examination of the marketing reveals a focus on comfort and ease for the one who holds the speculum and peers through it — not the

feeling, sensing one who experiences it from the other end.

The implied user, then, is the active medical professional, the prone woman being merely a passive recipient.

A scant few projects have started to challenge this configuration, but a wholesale reckoning with the nature of gynaecological examinations in general is needed for a deeper re-design and re-conceptualisation of this instrument to which a nefarious past still clings.

Research originally commissioned by In the Shadow of the State, a co-commission of artists Jesse Jones and Sarah Browne by Artangel and Create; also supported by ART: 2016, the Arts Council’s programme as part of Ireland 2016, the centenary of the Easter Rising, and Dublin City Council.



Collateral damage ¹ Friendly fire ²
 Externalities ³ Light of God ⁴ Faded Giant ⁵
 Involuntary conversions ⁶ Bent Spear ⁷
 Broken Arrow ⁸ Little Boy ⁹
 Empty Quiver ¹⁰ Enhanced interrogation ¹¹
 Neutralise ¹² Extraordinary rendition ¹³
 Negative profit ¹⁴ Bugsplat ¹⁵
 # ¹⁶ ((())) ¹⁷ Frape ¹⁸ Take care of ¹⁹
 Deadly ²⁰ Blown away ²¹ Savage ²² Mob ²³
 Boycott ²⁴ Killing it ²⁵ Fierce ²⁶ In bits ²⁷

SEMANTIC VIOLENCE

This installation displays a selection of crowd-sourced words and phrases that conceal violence within euphemistic language, or whose literal violence is overlooked or forgotten in favour of their acquired meanings. In his book *Violence* (2008), the philosopher Slavoj Žižek refers to semantic violence as the “relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms”. Even language itself, he argues, could be considered violent in the way it structures our ability to think and communicate.

1. **Collateral Damage:** Military term for unintended civilian deaths or damage to property.
2. **Friendly fire:** Military term for an attack on one's own side in a conflict due to misidentification or error.
3. **Externalities:** Corporate speak for costs that a business does not have to pay because they can be 'externalised' — air pollution from industry is one example.
4. **Light of God:** A U.S. Marine term for the laser marker emitted by a drone for targetting a military strike, which can only be seen with night-vision goggles.
5. **Faded Giant:** Military term for an event involving a military nuclear reactor or other event not involving nuclear weapons.
6. **Involuntary conversions:** Accounting jargon for a plane crash that results in an insurance payout for the airline.
7. **Bent Spear:** Military term for relatively minor events involving mishandling of nuclear weapons, warheads or components.
8. **Broken Arrow:** Military term for relatively minor events involving mishandling of nuclear weapons, warheads or components.
9. **Little Boy:** The codename for the first atomic bomb ever used in warfare — it was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 and

killed a reported 70,000 people as a direct result of the nuclear blast.

10. **Empty Quiver:** Military term for the seizure, theft or loss of a nuclear weapon, warhead or component.
11. **Enhanced interrogation:** A euphemism for the systematic torture of detainees by the U.S. government during the George W. Bush administration; includes forced sleep deprivation, deprivation of food and drink, waterboarding and confinement.
12. **Neutralise:** To render enemy personnel incapable of interfering with a military operation — colloquially, it has become a common military synonym for killing.
13. **Extraordinary rendition:** Government-sponsored transfer of a person from one country to another outside the bounds of law. The CIA have been accused of using the programme to facilitate the interrogation or even torture of suspected terrorists.
14. **Negative profit:** A corporate synonym for financial loss.
15. **Bugsplat:** Drone-operator slang for a successful drone strike on human targets.
16. **#:** While an apparently neutral marker for collating social media responses, the hashtag can be used for harassment and bullying — for example, #Gamergate, which targeted critics of sexism in gaming.
17. **((O)):** The 'echo' sign is associated with antisemitic online harassment, and has also been reclaimed by activists to defuse this meaning.
18. **Frape:** Slang term for the hacking of a Facebook account or phone by a friend or co-worker — a casual trivialisation of rape.
19. **Take care of:** To treat something with caution or maintain its condition; alternatively, a euphemism for killing or disposing of someone.
20. **Deadly:** Fatal or, in Hiberno-English, absolutely wonderful.
21. **Blown away:** To defeat, or to kill by gunfire; alternatively, to be beyond impressed.
22. **Savage:** Violent, wild or, in certain parts of Ireland, brilliant.
23. **Mob:** Can refer to organised crime, or an unruly crowd, but in Australian Aboriginal

English, it is commonly used to refer to a cohesive group: 'my mob' can mean my people, or my extended family.

24. **Boycott:** Abstaining from or avoiding a company or product, generally as a form of social or political protest. The verb was coined for Charles Cunningham Boycott, a land agent in Co Mayo who was ostracised by the Irish Land League in 1880.
25. **Killing it:** Despite its violent origins, this phrase has become a synonym for doing (or looking) very, very well.
26. **Fierce:** Beautiful or very sexy, also notably excellent or of superior quality. As an Irish colloquial term, it can be used instead of the word 'very'.
27. **In bits:** An Irish slang term with a variety of meanings — technically, it denotes severe upset or exhaustion, so logically the phrase has also come to define a bad hangover.

“An interventionist is a man struggling to make his model of man come true.”

— Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, 1974, p.28.^[1]

Much of what we see in the exhibits curated for DESIGN AND VIOLENCE is a kind of frustration on the part of the designers, or those who brief them — a frustration that the world is not how they want it to be, or more specifically, people do not act how they ‘should’ do. People should not be trying to climb over fences or sit on windowsills! (*Palisade Fencing, Kent Spike Studs*). Homeless people should be somewhere else, not trying to sleep in public places! (*Camden Bench*). Offenders should stay put, not try to escape! (*Ankle Monitor*). Teenagers should be doing something else, not hanging around outside the streets! (*Mosquito*). Overall: people should fit the designers’ model of what they should be like! And if they don’t fit the model, they must be disciplined until they do.

It is about encoding not just rules, not just law, but also retribution, into the environment: an architecture of control, to use Larry Lessig’s term^[2]. Those on the receiving end may experience it as ‘unpleasant design’, as Gordan Savičić and Selena Savić somewhat politely describe it in their wonderful study^[3], but the unpleasantness is a by-product of the process of alignment. Reading intentions into the objects, as co-curator Ralph Borland suggests in his introduction to the exhibition^[4], the designers’ goals seem to be discipline, efficiency, compliance; emotion does not enter into it unless as a useful means for achieving the end.

Of course, all design (and politics) can be seen as an attempt to remake the world, to remedy perceived deficiencies. That is a major part of humanity’s story. But if we define violence as “a manifestation of the power to alter circumstances, against the will of others and to their detriment,” in

co-curators Paola Antonelli and Jamer Hunt’s words^[5], altering circumstances through design becomes a means of making people fit, at least in their actions, the models that are ‘correct’. It is about reducing variety of human behaviour — as Veronica Ranner and I have described it previously, “in drafting a normal, everything else is treated as defective”^[6]. This is the high modernist dream as articulated by James C. Scott^[7], interwoven with Skinnerian conditioning — repeated reinforcement of desired behaviours over others — and it is, ultimately, central to lots of work on design for behaviour change, ‘nudging’ and ‘persuasion’, but only rarely made explicit. There is an overall frustration with people being unpredictable, or predictable-but-unacceptable, but also a belief that this can be solved through designed interventions.

“The ultimate goal of design for behavioural outcomes might be to discover an ‘inverse transform’ between behavioural and design variables; that is to say, given there is a set of behavioural objectives, it is possible to determine what design characteristics are needed to achieve these objectives.”

— Jeremy Watson et al, 2015, p.53^[8]

In much work around behaviour change, there is a longing to be able to model people as components with predictable properties, a frustrated engineering mindset perhaps, which finds a kind of disappointment in the nuances and complexity and interconnectedness of real-life behaviour and practices, and the deep enmeshment of people’s actions with social and cultural contexts, power structures, and other people’s actions. It is perhaps also a frustration with social science as a whole: why hasn’t it yet



produced that lookup table, that spec sheet for humanity? Surely that's the goal? But the examples we see here in DESIGN AND VIOLENCE go beyond this: they don't even try to understand people better. They are only about imposing the correct model, not seeking to create a more accurate model.

Design affects what people do, and what people perceive they can do. Everything around us that has been, or is being, designed, from the layout of our cities to the infrastructure of our governments to the way our doctor's surgery receptionist answers the phone, in some way influences how we engage with and make use of it, how we make decisions, what is easy and what isn't. It also, over time, affects how we think, and how we understand the world that we're part of, both individually and together as a society. And it affects our belief in our own agency, our own ability to change things. Whether we experience something like the Camden Bench (or numerous other such 'interventions': see images) merely as an uncomfortable bench that we perch on for a few moments, or a targeted, violent impediment to our very way of life, we do, perhaps, over time actually come to match the models that the designers have of us or want us to become. As both Jaron Lanier^[9] and Tony Dunne^[10] have expressed in different ways, if things that people use are designed with a caricatured model of a human, they may end up making that caricature real: we may end up behaving in the way the models assumed anyway, because we are configured by the systems and structures in which we live our lives — a curious form of self-fulfilling determinism.

And so, we come to the realization that, very often, these works end up contributing to, co-creating and reinforcing the very phenomena that produced them. Paranoia about teenagers hanging around in public spaces leads to the Mosquito, the Mosquito leads to distrustful teenagers, distrustful teenagers lead to paranoia about teenagers hanging around in public spaces. We get the society we design for. More fundamental than this, though, maybe, is a lesson about

circular causality, drawn straight from the history of second-order cybernetics^[11]: designers trying to control people's behaviour end up themselves being controlled by people's behaviour. Just as much as the designers of the Mosquito believe they are determining the behaviour of teenagers, it is those teenagers who are determining the behaviour of the designers. The things we try to control end up controlling us.

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[1] Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, 1974. *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco

[2] Lawrence Lessig, 1999. *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*. Basic Books, New York

[3] Gordan Savičić and Selena Savić, 2013. *Unpleasant Design*. GLORIA, Belgrade.

[4] dublin.sciencegallery.com/designandviolence/curators/ralph-borland.html

[5] dublin.sciencegallery.com/designandviolence/curators/paola-antonelli-and-jamer-hunt.html

[6] Veronica Ranner, Dan Lockton, Molly Wright Steenson, Györgyi Gálik and Tobie Kerridge, 2016. 'Plans and Speculated Actions'. Design Research Society conference 2016, Brighton, UK.

[7] James C. Scott, 1998. *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press, New Haven.

[8] Jeremy Watson, Chris Clegg, Richard Cowell, Felicity Davies, Claire Hughes, Natasha McCarthy and Philippa Westbury (eds.), 2015. *Built for Living: Understanding behaviour and the built environment through engineering and design*. Royal Academy of Engineering, London.

[9] Jaron Lanier, 1995. 'Agents of Alienation'. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 2, 76–81

[10] Anthony Dunne, 2006. *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience, and Critical Design*. MIT Press, Cambridge MA.

[11] Ranulph Glanville, 1995. 'A Cybernetic Musing: Control 2'. *Cybernetics & Human Knowing* 3(2), 43–46



LEAD PARTNER



SCIENCE CIRCLE

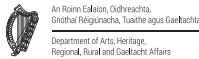
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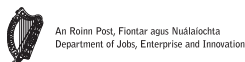


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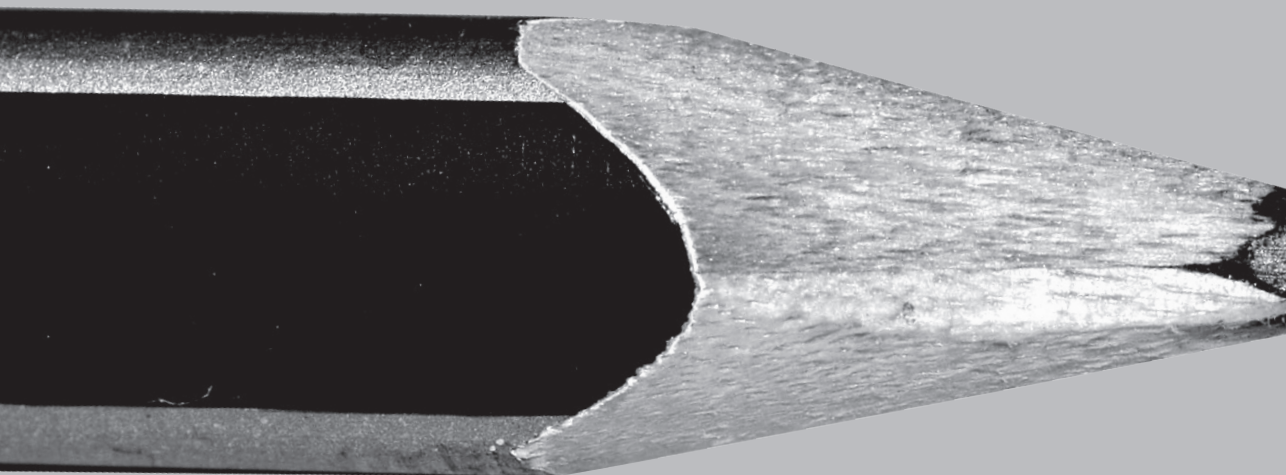
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#2

This is the
second of
three editions
produced as
an alternative
form of
catalogue for
the exhibition
in Dublin.

DESIGN AND VIOLENCE at Science Gallery Dublin has been developed by Ralph Borland, Lynn Scarff and Ian Brunswick and is based on an online curatorial experiment originally hosted by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and led by Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, and Jamer Hunt, Associate Professor, Transdisciplinary Design, School of Design Strategies, Parsons The New School. The project has invited experts from fields as diverse as science, philosophy, literature, music, film, journalism, and politics to respond to selected design objects and spark a conversation about them. Noting the history between the two themes, the exhibition seeks to explore the relationship between design and the manifestations of violence in contemporary society. It features works from the original curatorial selection, the DESIGN AND VIOLENCE book, plus new curatorial additions to the exhibition.





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