Design Against Crime

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Design Against Crime

Crime Proofing Everyday Products

edited by
Paul Ekblom

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Foreword

Ken Pease

THE MIASMA THEORY OF DISEASES SUCH AS MALARIA AND cholera held that the diseases were caused by bad air. Malaria was named, accordingly, from the Italian *mala aria* (bad air). Filippo Pacini performed autopsies on the victims of the Asiatic cholera pandemic of 1846–1863. He discovered a comma-shaped bacterium that he called a Vibrio. He published a paper in 1854 entitled "Microscopical Observations and Pathological Deductions on Cholera" in which he described the organism and its relation to the disease (Bentivoglio and Pacini 1995). In England, John Snow showed that cholera was waterborne (see Snow 1955). Yet, at a major international conference some 20 years after the observations of Pacini and Snow, and 16 years after Snow's death, representatives of 21 governments concluded unanimously that ambient air was the principal vehicle of the generative agent of cholera. Only with Robert Koch's rediscovery in 1884 (a year after Pacini's death) of the bacterium observed by Pacini did professional opinion change, culminating in Koch's Nobel Prize in 1905 (Howard-Jones 1984).

What is the relevance of medical science of a century and a half ago to the book you have in your hand? It is the power of confirmation bias, whereby extant beliefs are resistant to change in the face of evidence. It is now over three decades since the UK Home Office report *Crime as Opportunity* (Mayhew et al. 1976) appeared, five years longer than the lapse between Pacini's discovery and its acceptance via the work of Koch. The discipline of criminology has not yet begun to behave collectively as if the design of goods and services to reduce opportunities for crime is central to its control. Indeed, the approach continues to invite ridicule from some sectors (see, e.g., Hayward 2007). This is so

despite the fact that sensible individuals (and companies) do act to protect themselves and despite recent evidence that the general decline in crime in Western Europe and North America is in no small measure a consequence of improved product security (see, e.g., Farrell et al. 2011). So what has been missing? There has been a plethora of demonstrations that reducing opportunity reduces crime. It is clear that the reduction of crime is seldom if ever total, and the opposite (diffusion of benefits) a frequent by-product of place-limited crime reduction initiatives (Bowers et al. 2011).

Paul Ekblom and his colleagues have long recognized that the evidence must be made to fit its context—a context including the design process and the mindset of designers and users. Their concern is how to describe both the rationale that underlies the activity of design against crime and the immediate output of that process in the shape of the working prototypes and production models of design. Their goal is the integration of design research and practice and crime science into an interdiscipline.

While all other chapters of this book strive toward such an integration, a remarkable exception is that Graeme Newman's contribution in Chapter 5 takes a step further back toward the incentivization of design against crime. He uses cap-and-trade systems for emissions control as a model for crime reduction efforts. While a victim-blaming criticism of this approach can be foreseen (cheaters are to blame so why should credit card companies be seen as culpable, the argument will go), the chapter is at worst heuristic and at best a workable model necessary for the realization of the crime science design hybrid that Ekblom envisages. Newman's view is particularly important in that many of the other chapters clarify the implementation problems that accompany crime reduction in the absence of an overarching system of incentives to reduce it.

Even with every incentive in place and with government committed to consistent rather than spasmodic support, without the growing expertise and increasing synthesis of the ideas and disciplines recorded in this book, we risk being left with the ineffectual, the unimaginative, the unsightly, the expensive, the inconvenient, and possibly the fear inducing as product-based solutions to crime problems.

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—P. E.

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