

► of cucumbers. There is even a random-text-generating word-frame called the Engine, reminiscent of Gottfried Leibniz's late-seventeenth-century calculating machine, the step reckoner.

Collectively, these experiments and inventions urge a sceptical view of the utopian claims made for science by some of Swift's near-contemporaries, such as the apologist Joseph Glanvill. Indeed, scholars have identified real-life parallels for nearly all of these projects — yet another indicator that Swift was well-informed about goings-on at the Royal Society. An experiment in which Hooke artificially ventilated a live dog's lungs, for instance, is scatologically parodied.

Yet the Lagadan projects do more than serve as distorting mirrors of real ones. They are imbued with Swift's singular imagination and informed convictions. The latter are perhaps clearer in the king of Brobdingnag's outright endorsement of scientific research: that “whoever could make two ears of corn” grow “where only one grew before; would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together”. Swift is not just distinguishing between the merits of pure and applied science, but also arguing that the kinds of science pursued are the results of political, social and moral choices.

Gulliver's final meeting is with the Houyhnhnms, rational horses with the power of speech. Their land is plagued by feral animals known as the Yahoos — which, Gulliver is shocked to learn, have human physical form beneath their fur. The Yahoos amplify all of humanity's worst traits, and through them Swift challenges the anthropocentric view of the world in a way that seems very modern. However, the Yahoos also show us what humanity is not: something Gulliver fails to recognize. When the traumatized voyager finally returns home, he prefers the inhabitants of his stables to his own family.

Ultimately, Gulliver is an embodiment of blinkered reductionism — an error Swift believed he saw in the science of his time. It is testament to Swift's genius that many of the questions raised in his work continue to resonate today. ■

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## PUBLIC HEALTH

# Design for living

Judith Glynn takes in a show that probes the nexus of graphic art, behaviour and public health.

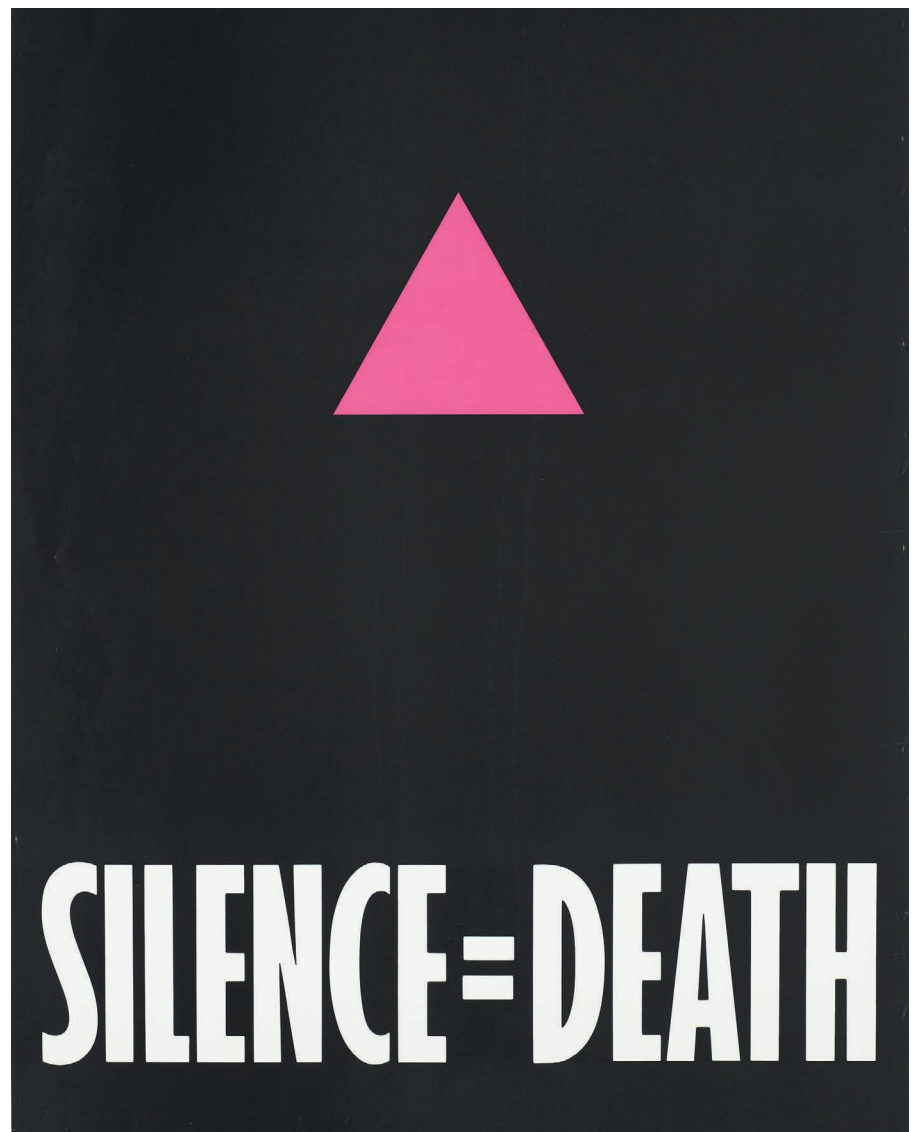
In 1987, with AIDS raging in New York City, six gay activists created a poster to break the silence over the epidemic. It featured a pink triangle — the badge forced on homosexual people in Nazi concentration camps, but inverted and appropriated by the gay community as a symbol of solidarity. Underneath were the words SILENCE = DEATH. Adopted by protest group ACT UP, the poster helped to galvanize action on HIV and AIDS. Equally unforgettable was Britain's

## Can Graphic Design Save Your Life?

The Wellcome Collection, London.  
Until 14 January 2018.

contemporaneous “Don't die of ignorance” campaign: its AIDS tombstone appeared on leaflets, billboards and television advertisements.

These iconic images — along with the AIDS tombstone itself — are on display in the Wellcome Collection's exhibition *Can Graphic Design Save Your Life?* in London. The show gathers some 200 objects



This poster was used to raise awareness of AIDS in New York City in the 1980s.



Anti-smoking postage stamps have been issued by a number of countries.

from around the world, ranging from the historical (seventeenth-century plague notices) to the modern (a technological billboard from Brazil, designed to attract and trap the mosquitoes that carry Zika and other viruses). The curators — design professionals Lucienne Roberts and Rebecca Wright, with the Wellcome's Shamita Sharmacharja — aim to show how graphic design can inform, persuade and stimulate in the context of health.

For a show about saving lives, its opening is surprising: tobacco advertising, from the 1940s onwards. The display illustrates how the tobacco industry and its designers subverted attempts to restrict branding and add health warnings through sophisticated shock tactics. Hence, the development of the Death brand of cigarettes, and the highly successful wordless, sexualized and increasingly surreal images of purple silk used by Saatchi & Saatchi to advertise Silk Cut. At the same time, government-commissioned graphic designers tackled the risks, from pictures on postage stamps to the design of plain cigarette packaging using Pantone's 'ugliest' colour (the green-brown 448 C, 'opaque couche'). As Wright points out, "Where there is apparently no design, there is design."

Good design can also aid and add nuance to understanding. In the Victorian era, pioneering epidemiologist John Snow and nurse and social reformer Florence Nightingale deployed striking imagery to explore data rigorously and persuade others of their findings. On show are Snow's map of cholera deaths during an 1854 outbreak in London's Soho, and Nightingale's 1858 'rose diagram'

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— which showed that disease was the main cause of death among British soldiers during the Crimean War (D. Cressley *Nature* 507, 304–305; 2014). Graphic design in the pharmaceuticals industry is not just for branding and logos — it can also help patients to understand instructions. For example, Israeli firm Teva Pharmaceuticals used a labelling system with colours and shapes that distinguish between medicine types as well as providing corporate identity.

*"Good design can aid and add nuance to understanding."*

Anatomical illustrations, from sixteenth-century pop-up books to apps, help to explain how the body works. Comic books have been used for sex education.

In the centre of the exhibition, we enter a hospital. Blue disposable curtains form a backdrop for bright interactive images designed to engage children (such as animal hide-and-seek in Barcelona, Spain), and signs designed to make hospitals more welcoming. In 2012, the UK Design Council and the Department of Health called for schemes to reduce violence in hospital accident and emergency (A&E) departments, where waits can last many hours. Research revealed lack of information as a key source of frustration. That led to a winning design including strategically placed boards describing each stage of a patient's journey through A&E, and displays showing waiting times. After a year, violent incidents in departments where the system was trialled fell by 50%.

Another example of the impact of graphic design is Scotland's 2009 Kill Jill campaign. This deliberately provocative video invited the public to save or (by omission) kill a child in need of an organ transplant. The

Scottish government received complaints but withstood them. The number of registered donors tripled over the course of the campaign.

As an epidemiologist, however, I couldn't help questioning some of these reported results. The exhibition does not attempt to evaluate whether the designs actually caused the changes reported, or, if so, which aspects of the campaigns were responsible. The numbers are simply before-and-after comparisons. More-rigorous evaluation would include adjusting for other factors, taking into account longer-term trends and even conducting randomized controlled trials.

As befits a design exhibition, the structure and detail are well matched. Different sections cover different themes. Cases in the Persuasion section take the shape of a cigarette; those in Education make a question mark; the hospital curtains form an H; Medication is a green cross; Contagion a warning triangle; Provocation an exclamation mark. The font is based on the Rail Alphabet typeface designed in 1965 by Margaret Calvert, and used by Britain's National Health Service.

Perhaps surprisingly, it's the text accompanying the images that really stood out for me. It offers clear, succinct explanations of why the exhibits matter. In an age in which graphic design can be synonymous with minimalist infographics, this potent combination of words and images is as refreshing as it is fascinating. ■

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