Machiavellian Lens

The Machiavellian Lens comprises design patterns which, while diverse, all embody an 'end justifies the means' approach of the kind associated with Niccolò Machiavelli. These will often be considered unethical, but nevertheless are commonly used to control and influence consumers through pricing structures, planned obsolescence, lock-ins and so on, and are central to work by authors such as Vance Packard and Douglas Rushkoff, revealing the 'hidden' structures which shape our everyday behaviour. In technology contexts, Benjamin Mako Hill and Chris Nodder have both done great work exploring this area.

Elements of game theory are present in some of the patterns, and this is worth further investigation.

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3.ly/Mach

Image for Antifeatures & crippleware *is from Orin Zebest's Flickr stream, CC-BY-SA licensed (http://www.flickr.com/photos/orinrobertjohn/68106611)*

Images for First one free, Forced dichotomy *and* Slow/no response *are screenshots of Bill Moggridge's 'Designing Interactions' website (http://www.designinginteractions.com/book), an example survey built using surveymonkey.com, and a registration form on the Univadis website (http://www.univadis.co.uk/medical_and_more/Registration?locale=en_GB) respectively.*

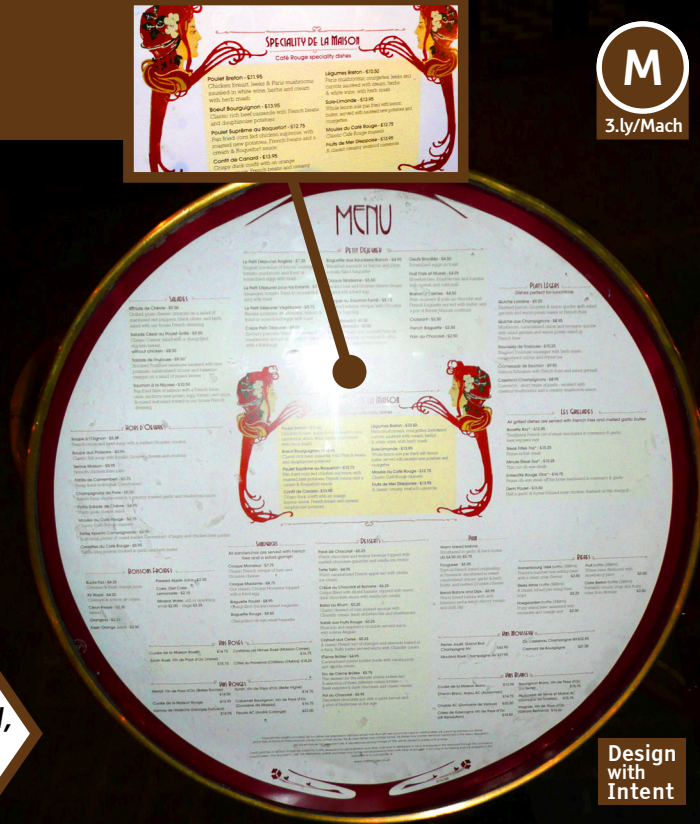
Other photos by Dan Lockton

Design with Intent

Anchoring

Can you affect users' expectations or assumptions by controlling the reference points they have?

Restaurant menus may use 'anchor' items: prominently placed, higher-priced dishes, raising what customers expect to be paying



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Antifeatures & crippleware

Can you deliberately disable some functions even though they're still present, to drive users to upgrade, or to allow price discrimination?

Sony's cheaper 60-minute MiniDiscs were identical to the 74-minute ones except for a pre-written portion of code preventing full use of the space

Bundling

Can you include something *you* want users to do, along with something *they* want to do, so *both* get done?

Crushing up pills or tablets in a spoonful of peanut butter can be a good way to get dogs to take medicines they would otherwise refuse

Degrading performance

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Can you degrade the performance of a product or system until users comply with some behaviour change you want?

Some Nokia phones allegedly sense when a 3rd-party battery is used and switch into a high-power mode so it runs out more quickly

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First one free

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Can you give something away which gets people interested or addicted, so they come back and pay for more?

Offering one chapter (often the introduction) free has become increasingly common as a way of promoting new books more widely

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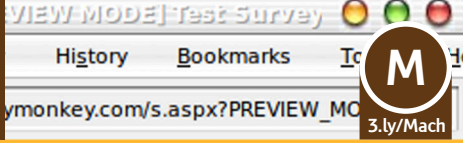
Forced dichotomy



Can you configure a system so there is no 'middle ground' possible, and users must make a choice one way or the other?

Test

Exit this survey

1. Default Section

	Very useful	Quite useful	Almost useless	Completely useless
Are these Design with Intent cards useful?	○	☑	○	○

Done

An even-numbered (e.g. four-point) rating scale does not allow a 'middle' value: it forces respondents into making a 'good or bad?' choice

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Format lock-in/out

Can you design your system so users become committed to a particular format or way of doing things?

Panasonic cameras include a 'battery authentication' system, which prevents using cheaper non-Panasonic replacements

Functional obsolescence

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Can you design things to become technologically superseded (or even wear out) quickly, so people replace them?

While new models do bring real technological advances, Apple has managed to create an 'upgrade treadmill' for iPhone buyers

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I cut, you choose

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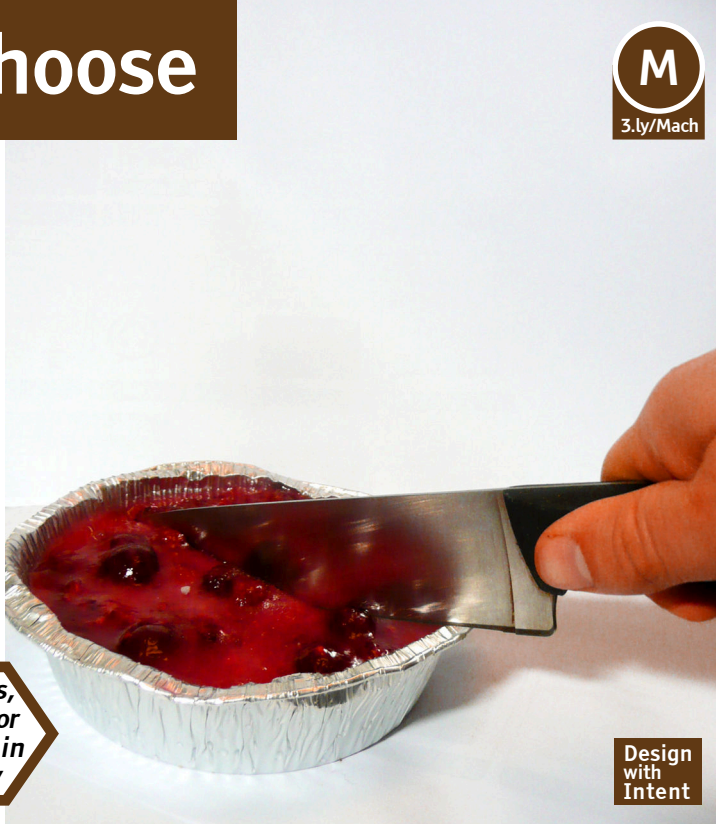
Can you structure a system so that no one user can get an advantage over others simply by being first to act?



If person 1 cuts a cake into halves, and person 2 chooses the half he or she wants, there is no advantage in person 1 cutting the cake unfairly

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Poison pill

Can you arrange things so that an otherwise attractive option has an unpleasant, self-defeating deterrent side-effect?

Security ink tags release indelible ink if removed incorrectly, in an attempt to make it simply not worth stealing the clothes

Serving suggestion

Can you direct users to use a product or system in a particular way through examples or demonstrations?

Alka-Seltzer reputedly introduced the 'two tablets per dose' direction to users as part of a 1960s TV ad; before that, only one was taken

Slow / no response

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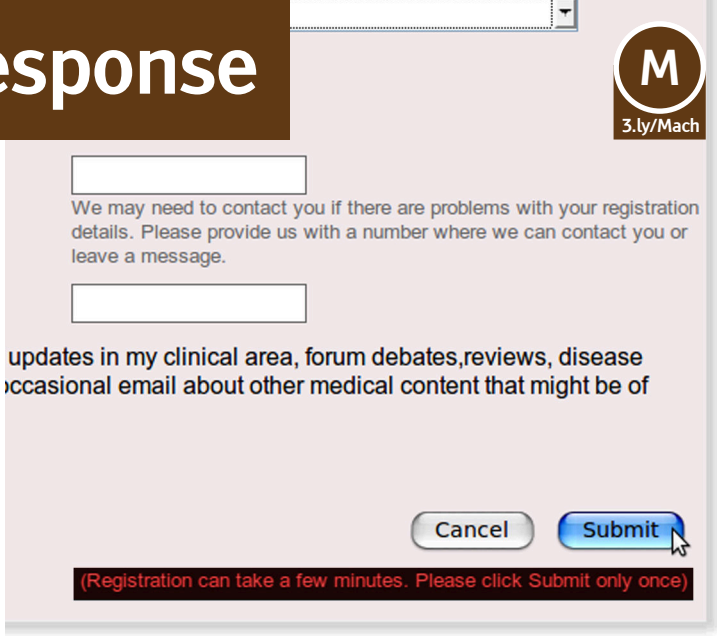
Can you get users to try different actions or repeat a behaviour by making the system respond or give feedback slowly?



Top

Duplicate orders can be a problem where web forms are slow to submit and users click multiple times: this kind of instruction is common

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Style obsolescence

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Can you design things to become unfashionable or undesirable quickly, to spur the desire for replacement or upgrades?

Fashions and trends are obvious in high-street retailing, but are also prevalent (and can be deliberately created) in other fields

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Worry resolution

Can you help users overcome worry about their behaviour (perhaps after having suggested it in the first place)?

The term 'halitosis' was allegedly introduced in a 1921 Listerine ad, part of a series making people worried about bad breath, then offering a solution