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### Final Paper: The Issue of Hostile Architecture

Over half a million individuals suffer from homelessness across the United States, yet this pressing matter lacks the proper attention in public discourse and policymaking in order to combat this issue. While people may recognize that homelessness is a problem, many people choose to ignore these issues and even ignore homeless people altogether. Homelessness mainly affects large cities such as San Francisco, New York City, and Los Angeles. Homelessness has become so entrenched and embedded in our culture that many individuals and communities are unaware of their presence, let alone the severity of the problem.

City and local government leaders in these densely homeless-populated cities have tackled the problem with a range of approaches, with differing degrees of success. The narrative and perspective around homelessness have shifted over time, yet despite many attempts to mitigate homelessness, there is still a negative stigma associated with homeless people. Housing initiatives, such as the implementation of shelters, have been a major city approach. For example, Houston, a city with a long-standing issue of homelessness, implemented a new system called "housing first," which is an effort to get people into homes faster, and resulted in homelessness being cut in half in the city of Houston (Two Cities tried to fix homelessness, only one succeeded, Howard Center

for Investigative Journalism). This effort focuses on providing homeless individuals with homes as soon as possible before addressing whatever concerns they may have, hence reducing the number one cause of the problem, which is people without stable living situations. Another common approach to fighting homelessness is seen in cities implementing mental health services and initiatives. Many homeless people throughout the country suffer from varying forms of mental health issues, and they often lack the means or financial ability to obtain help. These services provide many homeless individuals with the opportunity to better themselves and put them down the right path to recovery and stability.

Some of the measures used to combat homelessness, though, have had direct negative implications for homeless individuals, not only making life more difficult for them but also demeaning and degrading them. Studies have found that many modern cities have enacted strategies to shed images of poverty, crime, and decay. This is evident in hostile architecture, also known as anti-homeless architecture. This type of architecture is evident mainly in cities in areas where homeless people seek shelter or protection from the outside climates, and in other various public spaces. Urban developers install these architectural designs in these specific locations in order to deter homeless people from residing or sleeping in the vicinity of areas with high consumerism appeals, such as storefronts, restaurants, parks, and main walkways. Designers and city governments believe that the removal of homeless people by these architectural structures will allow for the promotion of commercialization, the attraction of tourists, increased urban investments, and, overall a more ideal, utopian environment. In this paper, I will discuss the consequences of hostile architecture on

homeless people, the motivations for its adoption, the diverse visual and social repercussions of different types of hostile architecture, and how this does not adequately alleviate the problem of homelessness.

The use of unfriendly or anti-homeless architecture is not a new phenomenon; it has been prevalent in large cities for far longer than society may realize. Anti-urination architecture, for example, is one of the first kinds of hostile architecture, dating back to 19th Century England. However, from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, these designs became more prominent, slowly but steadily infiltrating more and more public settings. The broken window hypothesis, which is the idea that many common habits like sitting, sleeping, and standing may be criminalized, emerged around this period in the United States. Architects began to utilize urban designs to resist these behaviors within the homeless community, launching hostile architectural designs (*the City that will never let you sleep*, Michelle Legro). Many of these implementations were so subtle that the purpose of the design may easily be overlooked by the general public without a second thought.

A comfortable and productive urban community requires public access to seating. Public seating gives individuals the opportunity to find comfort in the public sphere and find moments of peace in the movement of everyday life. Although this seems to be a general consensus, anti-homeless and hostile benches have slowly become the dominant form of public seating, preventing a targeted group of people from the accessibility of comfort. Architects have implemented a range of different designs in benches that deter the homeless from public spaces. As you can see, putting benches at a tilt or angle, or adding intricate designs, or an increased amount of armrests that

don't seem to serve many purposes, are features that are used to make sleeping on benches more uncomfortable.

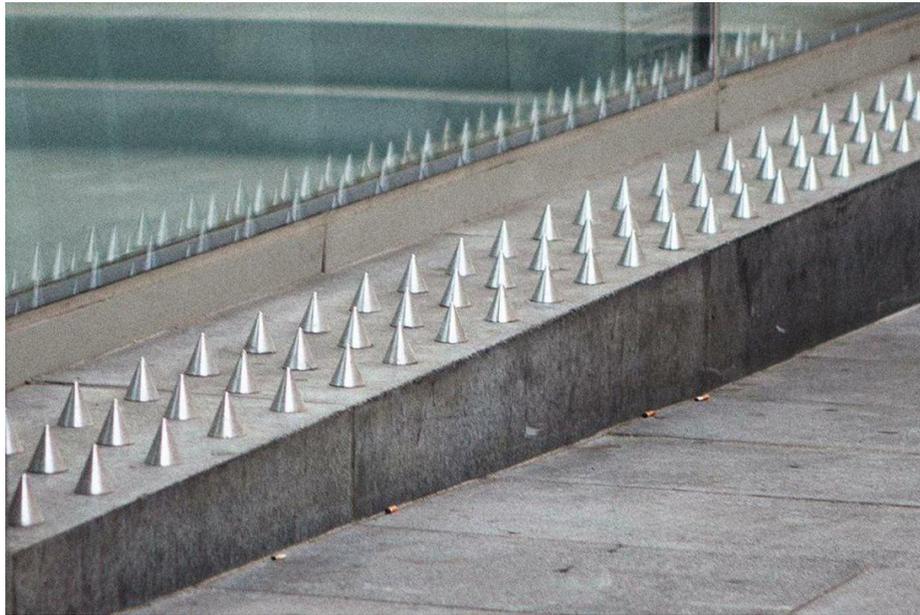


One of the most notable hostile seating designs was seen in the production of the Camden Bench. Pictured above, The Camden Bench was manufactured by Factory Furniture, and was first released in the U.K. in 2012. At first glance, it may seem to be an overtly plain, and featureless bench. However, it is specifically designed with architectural features that make it unusable and uncomfortable for certain purposes. It is designed with a ridged top and slanted edges, with the innate purpose of being uncomfortable to lie on. It is layered with a special coating that repels forms of graffiti, and it is supposedly made to prevent crime, as it is designed without nooks or indents in which criminals could potentially stash drugs. Rain, litter, and skateboarders are deterred by the angular sides of the bench as well. Furthermore, its design and function are fundamentally designed to discourage any social purposes other than merely sitting on a bench. This fact makes this such an interesting object, as it becomes defined more by what it is not than what it actually is, making it a concerted effort to become a

non-object (*Designing the Perfect Anti-Object*, Frank Swain). It is, by definition, an object within the public sphere that is created to have extremely limited interactions with its environment. The Camden Bench demonstrates how local interests are prioritized over aesthetic appeal and the well-being of inhabitants of all socioeconomic backgrounds. The design clearly only appeals to certain socioeconomic groups, and individuals who look to public spaces for shelter do not fall under this category.

Although the Camden Bench is a rather extreme instance, it is only one example of hostile architecture in the form of public seating. A wide range of designs are being used in many major cities, especially more subtle designs that may not draw as much attention and public outcry. Another example related to public seating where cities are using architectural designs to control the public sphere and organize public spaces is notably seen in San Francisco. San Francisco is a city that has seen an upward trend in its use of hostile architecture. Opposed to the city's already existing use of altering architectural designs, its recent approach is the complete removal of public seating in many densely populated areas. The populated Civic Center Plaza in Downtown San Francisco saw a near-complete removal of public benches in the 1990s, quickly followed by the removal of benches in the nearby United Nations plaza. Over the years, San Francisco has seen the removal of nearly all public seating throughout the city (*San Francisco's anti-homeless design is also anti-human, says NYT op-ed, Sf Curbed*). Years later the city still greatly lacks public seating, and the amount of homeless people who congregate in these areas has still not subsided. The removal of benches from public spaces is a direct attempt in controlling a visual narrative, by reducing the number of homeless people in populated areas to the public eye. This also creates

limitations around who can interact with certain parts of the city. When objects in public spaces that are frequently used for "undesirables" comfort and shelter are altered or completely removed, they are encouraged to cease to exist in these spaces, rendering them invisible to the majority of the public.



Surfaces where homeless people reside, such as street corners, window sills, and sheltered areas, are also locations where large quantities of hostile architecture are placed to target homeless people. Although surfaces in this context function in a similar way to benches, in the concept of them being used for seating and comfort, for the purpose of this paper, I will address these two features that exist separately. In terms of surface designs of all hostile architecture, one of the most degrading and targeted designs is metal spikes, as seen above. These spikes are often located in places where homeless people commonly reside and sleep. Places like near doorways, street corners, under bridges, and other sheltered areas. The usage of hostile surface designs or metal spikes comes in different forms. What is commonly seen, is a sharp metal

protrusion a couple of inches high, assorted roughly six to 18 inches apart from each other. There is a major derogatory connotation that coincides with the designs of metal spikes. Spikes similar to these are often also placed in areas such as ledges and window sills, in an attempt to ward off birds, rodents, and other undesirable pests. When the same spike design is observed in regions where rats and pests are not commonly found, but where homeless people are, rodents and pests become handled and classed in the same way as homeless human beings, which symbolically reinforces homeless people's second-class and inferior status.



When viewing the spikes, the visual elements give off a frightening and medieval appearance and aesthetic, with its intense layout that is reminiscent of spiked barricades, which are pictured above. As seen by the similarities, there are some striking parallels between the metal spikes used to dissuade homeless people and the spiked barricades, known as cheval de frise, which were utilized for military and defensive objectives since medieval times. The spikes, to the touch, evoke a cold, and painful sensation and produce a very brutalist overall feeling based on their physical and visual characteristics. They visually stand out, are not necessarily well disguised,

and seem overtly placed and with a distinct purpose. Based on their appearance, they could even be associated with a dagger, seemingly with harmful capabilities and the ability to cause catastrophic harm with a single false stride. In fact, a homeless man by the name of Pawel Koseda was found dead in 2015, bleeding out after being impaled by metal spikes of a fence that surrounded St. Marry Abbots in Keningston, London. The man who found Koseda's body stated that multiple people passed by with no reaction, and stated, "It upset me that someone like that spends their life not being noticed, and even in their last moment people still walk past (*Anti-homeless Spikes: Sleeping rough opened my eyes to the cities barbed cruelty*, The Guardian)." Although this is an extreme circumstance, we see from this instance the harmful implications and outcomes these physical designs have on the targeted group. This is also representative of what is visible and invisible in a city, and how architectural designs play a role in determining what is hyper-visible, and what, or who is not noticed.

The purpose of these spikes seems pretty clear with their intense designs that almost seem brutalist or dangerous, as to keep homeless people from sleeping there or being there, and is even more obvious when they are in locations that seem out of place or random, like in front of an office building or local storefront. The installation of metal spikes in public spaces, typically where homeless people commonly reside, represents an unjust and unaccepting society. Metal spikes send a clear, direct, and aggressive message, telling the homeless they are not wanted here. The visual impacts of metal spikes have significantly more cons than pros in their purpose. The spikes are a visual representation of socio-economic power. The logic behind the spike's usage is somewhat counterintuitive, as their purpose is to deter homeless people from loitering

and sleeping in these spaces for the purpose of keeping up with the visual appeal for consumers and city residents, but as one might assume, a random assortment of big metal spikes sticking out of the ground in front of a restaurant or storefront, for example, is arguably equally as visually displeasing. Metal spikes also “represented the first time hostile design transcended the invisible sphere, within the built environment it thrives in, to be critiqued by the public at large who found the devices aesthetically unpleasing and inhumane (Carr, p. 18).” Local governments swear by the fact that designs such as these spikes are to improve the quality of life for the local residents, but in actuality, all this does is create an aesthetically unpleasant and uncomfortable setting for not just the homeless but for the residents, and at the same time send an aggressive message directed against homeless people.

Hostile architecture does not solve the issue of homelessness. Instead, these architectural approaches just address the symptoms and do not address the underlying problem. These designs push homeless people away from the public eye, therefore diluting the conversation around the issue of homelessness. As homeless people continue to be pushed out of public areas that provide comfort and shelter, they are being isolated further, symbolically, and literally being pushed to the side. Instead of working to solve homelessness through productive and encouraging programs and policies, hostile architecture functions as a means to push and hide homelessness, and decrease the visual quality of the area. The spatial implications of hostile architecture focus on the idea of access control, and class-based spatial ordering. The techniques implemented in these types of architectural designs concentrate on spatial organization with the goal of reducing the number of spatial variables by regulating free mobility.

They create a divide, displaying the spaces in which certain groups of people are welcome and altering the existing environment to be able to regulate the movement of targeted groups.

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