

Methods of Contextualising

Written Response

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V&A rapid response collection acts as an active timeline of our history and the present scenario, through objects collected in response to a particular event or time. One such objects, which one might not expect in a museum setting, was the Anti-Homeless Spikes. Placed in a section, which consisted mostly of the tools and products that were supposed to aid in public transportation, housing or living. The juxtaposition of this object, grabbed our group's attention. Initially, noticed by the masses in 2014 after a tweet regarding the placement of these spikes went viral under the #AntiHomelessSpikes. These spikes remained a hot topic for debate across London and other western states for discriminating against the homeless when it came to the usage of public space.

The Spikes garnered slightly different positions from each of the group members. Though all of them sharing a common ground when it came to how, the authorities and the rich were trying to hide the problem rather than coming up with an actual solution. Hiding not passively, but by actively spending on such hostile architectures just to deter a specific class of the public from using the space. Also noticing the kind of gap that sits between the homeless and the non.

To further highlight this gap and garner more attention/awareness towards these spikes, an Anti-Anti Homeless Protest Kit was created. Which makes the public and the authorities aware of how solutions like the spikes don't actually solve a problem but push it back, to be only addressed later and at a much worse state.

FRANCISCO LARANJO

'Critical Graphic Design: Critical of What?'

Modes of Criticism

2014

Available at: <https://modesofcriticism.org/critical-graphic-design/>.

Francisco Laranjo in his article talks about how the term critical is being overused and misused in current design environment. To make sense of the term, he also mentions Mazé's research into the three forms of criticality in design. The first form responding to the designer's own practice, second form relating to the disciplinary discourse of design and the third kind of criticality where the designer addresses pressing social and political issues through design.

Our project, seems to take the route of the third form of criticality, while overlapping initially with the first form as we try to find our position in response to the object we selected. With this project, we are addressing the issue of the Anti-homeless spikes and how it disrupts and discriminates within the public space. Thus stepping into the social and political issues regarding public and private space.

Although these forms of criticality do offer a vague definition of what is means to be critical in design, it still leaves room for further discussion.

CARL DISALVO

'Adversarial Design as Inquiry and Practice'

Adversarial Design, Cambridge: MIT Press

2012

pp. 115–125

Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ual/reader.action?docID=3339433&ppg=1>

According to the author Carl DiSalvo, adversarial design is a form of design that helps understand the current political condition and aid in engaging in agonism. The form of adversarial design as practice, helps in identifying the hegemony or the power structure of the current political environment. We used this property of adversarial design in the initial stages of research into the project to arrive at a junction to engage in agonistic practices. Anti Anti-homeless protest kit that was designed to engage in a conflict with the authority and the private entities taking part in such practices of discrimination, in hope of a positive social change. Some of our initial iteration, also focused on imagining a positive political condition that might be. Wherein instead of hiding the problem it would be actually solved, be it with the same shape and form of that of the spike.

COMAROFF, J
Defensive Architecture
[online] artreview.com.
2018
pp. 115–125

Available at:<https://artreview.com/ara-winter-2017-opinion-joshua-comaroff/>

(Building) Code is intended to protect people from architecture (Joshua Comaroff, 2018). Although nowadays, designers, and architects seem to be coming up with ways to protect the architecture from the people, which is aptly named Defensive Architecture. Anti-Homeless Spikes is an example of one such device. These devices came under the scrutiny and public outcry after a tweet following its installation in a private space. These devices aim is to defend the usage of the public spaces from the homeless people. Not mentioned in any building code imposed by the state, these spikes came in as a solution against the rough sleepers by private entities. Although, a lot of them were removed from around London, after the outcry. Authorities have found ways to make these devices, more inconspicuous and act the part in the urban landscape and the image that the city is trying to promote, thus evading public scrutiny.

PETTY J

The London Spikes Controversy: Homelessness, Urban Securitisation and the Question of 'Hostile Architecture'

International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy 5(1): 67-81

Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ual/reader.action?docID=3339433&ppg=1>

James Petty in his article talks about the controversy surrounding the Anti Homeless Spikes in London and the environmental social control mechanisms used by the authorities all around the world. Although a lot of these devices such as footpath, fences, pedestrian crossing are not considered hostile due to their macro scale effect and normative nature, the spikes sticks out, literally. The fact of that they are shaped as a spike while also targeting a specific group of individuals; i.e. the homeless or rough sleepers, they seem to commit a visible act of violence against that community.

The article further talks of the revanchist intent to reclaiming public spaces from a section of "public" that comprises of the homeless. This community doesn't fit the image of consumerism that the cities are currently being built around. Mitchell (1997:320) mentions how homeless threaten the meaning of a public by doing private activities (sleeping, urinating,...) in public spaces. Thus confirming that homelessness is a problem, but trying to hide it with these spikes, instead of providing viable solutions, will not help.

Fabian Brunsing
Pay & Sit: The Private Bench
2008
German

Available at: <http://www.fabianbrunsing.de>

Pay & Sit – the Private Bench was an art installation from the artist Fabian Brunsing. The bench consisted of spikes sticking out of the surface, that would only retract if paid for, thus allowing a person to sit on the bench. This project exemplifies the effect that the spikes have on the homeless population and puts it in place where it becomes hard to ignore. The spikes, once invisible to the non-homeless public, become ubiquitous with discomfort and pain. Although the payment aspect of the private bench, still ends up discriminating against the poor population of the public who can't pay to retract the spikes to sit. The bench also illustrates the idea of a quasi-public space, and how although mimicking a public space, it only provides access to a certain privileged class of public.

Priyageetha Dia
Golden Staircase
2017
Singapore

Available at: <https://priyageethadia.com/GOLDEN-STAIRCASE>

The golden staircase was an art installation developed by Priyageetha Dia, in a public housing society in Singapore. With this project, she draws attention to the demarcations of ownership and boundaries that are established in a public space. Covering the staircase in the communal living quarters, in gold foil, she establishes her personal connection on to the space. She also uses the foil for its material value and the visual appeal of gold. This installation, as a whole, draws attention towards how we interact with public and private spaces and the value associated with it. The Spikes in a similar manner demarcate the boundaries that a homeless man isn't supposed to cross. Like the gold foil used for the staircase, private entities and authorities spend hundreds and thousands of pounds to put in the spikes. In the case of Priyageetha Dia, soon after the installation went up, she had to remove it due to public and town council outcry, some of which classifying this as an act of vandalism. Should the spikes be also considered an act of Vandalism, even if done by the authority?