

A photograph of a person with blonde hair sleeping on a park bench at night. The person is lying on their side, partially covered by a grey blanket. A blue and white duck is perched on the bench's metal armrest. The background is a blurred city street at night with warm lights and orange traffic cones.

DESIGN AGAINST HUMANITY

EXAMINING ANTI-HOMELESS ARCHITECTURE

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**NATIONAL
COALITION<sup>FOR
THE</sup>
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DESIGN AGAINST HUMANITY

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WHAT IS HOSTILE ARCHITECTURE?

Civil engineering to achieve social engineering.

Hostile architecture, also known as defensive architecture, exclusionary or defensive design or anti-homeless architecture is an urban-design strategy that utilizes elements of the built environment to intentionally guide or restrict behavior deemed undesirable by urban leaders. It often targets people who use or rely on public space more than others including youth, low-income people and people experiencing homelessness, who are disproportionately Black and Indigenous people. The effect is to also make the designs hostile to seniors, people with disabilities, pregnant women, and care givers for children and seniors.

Roots in social control & segregation:

Antecedents of 21st century hostile architecture can be seen in the following examples:

- **Social Control:** The narrow streets of 19th century Paris, France were widened to help the military quash protests;
- **Segregation:** Robert Moses an American urban planner, designed a stretch of the Long Island Southern State Parkway in 1929 with low stone bridges so that buses could not pass under them. This made it more difficult for people who relied on public transportation, disproportionately low-income and people of color, to visit the beach that wealthier, white, car-owners could visit.



Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

The modern form of this urban design strategy, originating in American in the 1960's, is derived from the design philosophy crime prevention through environmental design [CPTED], with its precursor being the concept of "defensible space." Essentially the strategy is to manipulate the built environment to create safer neighborhoods, through environmental design that is a deterrent to crime.

Examples include the planting of trees, the elimination of escape routes through curved streets, correct use of lighting, the encouragement of pedestrian and bicycle traffic, as well as property maintenance, as seen in the Broken Windows theory that emerged in the 1980's, based on premise that areas not maintained or abandoned, attract crime.



Anti-homeless architecture

As homelessness enters into its 5th decade as both a rural and urban crisis, not only in the USA but also in Europe and Japan, elected officials instead of investing in affordable and accessible housing, have invested in anti-homeless architecture as a way to make it uncomfortable and encourage people experiencing homelessness to move on to another community.

Tobias Armbrast, Daniel D'Oca and Georgeen Theodore, architects and urban designers, inventory more than 150 "tools" or "weapons" that are used by planners, policymakers, developers, real estate brokers and community activists that can be used to answer the question, "who gets to be where?" in their 2021 book, The Arsenal of Exclusion and Inclusion.



One of the new quality-of-life regulations that was passed in 1996 was New York City's Parks Department section 1-05(a)(1) on "Exclusive Childrens Playgrounds." This rule made it so that adults could only be in playgrounds and surrounding park areas if accompanied by a child 12 years old or younger. A violation of this rule is a misdemeanor punishable by not more than 90 days imprisonment and/or a fine of not more than \$1,000.[2]

Enacted under the guise of protecting children, Section 1-05(a)(1) has been enforced sporadically, mostly to remove homeless residents from playgrounds, and many other New Yorkers are not even aware of it. Whenever the rule does enter the larger consciousness, it emerges in almost comical news stories, such as when two women were ticketed in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood for eating a doughnut, when seven men were "busted" in Upper Manhattan for playing chess, or when 73-year-old Harri Melrose was asked to leave a park

benches, and public bathrooms. Because of its proximity to the BQE entrance, the playground has become a congregation area for Latino immigrant day laborers as they wait for construction work. In response to this congregation of often struggling laborers, the Brooklyn-based catholic charity St. John's Bread and Life set up a mobile soup kitchen near Hart Playground to give breakfast to more than 250 laborers in need. But some neighborhood residents feel threatened by the men waiting for work near the playground, citing the unaccompanied adult rule as grounds to request the laborers' removal from the area. The ensuing political fight over who has the right to use Hart Playground led to an agreement with the New York City Parks Department to close one of the busiest gates of the park and to place more signs informing people of the Section 1-05(a)(1) regulations in Spanish and Chinese.[4]

In the case of Hart Playground, the unaccompanied adult rule, often defended as keeping children safe, was used to remove a source of

SPATIAL INJUSTICE

EXAMPLES OF HOSTILE ARCHITECTURE: YOU ARE NOT WANTED HERE!

City planners and architects have created a variety of ways to make public space unwelcoming to certain community members. If we stop to look, we can find examples in most cities across the United States. What follows are just samples.



Slanted Benches

Benches that slant make it very difficult for people experiencing homelessness to sit or lay down, but it also makes it equally difficult for people with disabilities and seniors to sit comfortably.



Rocky or Uneven Pavement

Rocky and uneven pavement makes it very difficult for people experiencing homelessness to lay down.



Spiked Windowsills

Spiked window sills are clearly a deterrent to anyone stopping and sitting on the windowsill to rest.

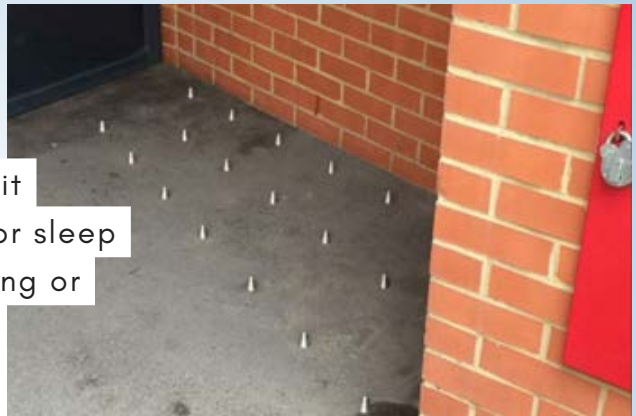
Segmented Benches

Segmented benches are clearly make it impossible for anyone to lay down to rest or sleep.



Street or Doorway Spikes

Street or doorway spikes are clearly make it impossible for anyone to lay down to rest or sleep in the doorway, especially when it is snowing or raining.



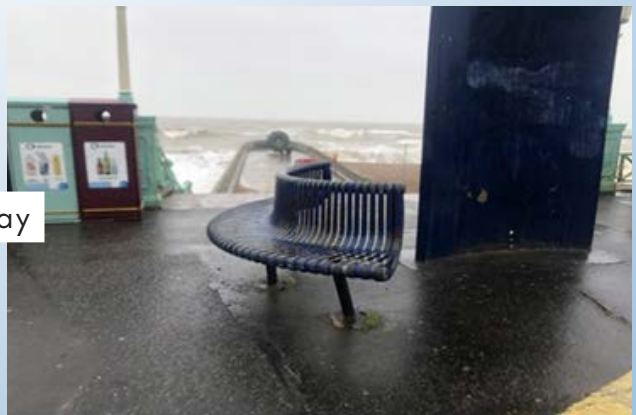
Awning Gaps

Intentional gaps in awning make it difficult to find shelter underneath the awning when it snows or rains.



Curved Benches

Curved benches makes it very difficult to lay down to rest or sleep.





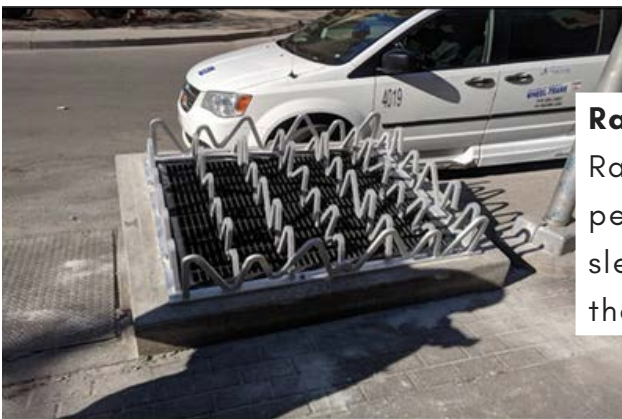
Barred Corners

Bars on corners makes it impossible to det or lay down in the corner



Sidewalk Dividers

Sidewalk dividers make it very difficult for people experiencing homelessness to find a place to rest on the sheltered side of the street.



Raised Grate Covers

Raised grate covers makes it impossible for people experiencing homelessness to rest or sleep on the grate cover to find warmth from the subway below.



Tiered Benches

Tiered benches, especially those with bars, makes it impossible to lay down or sleep on them.





Fenced Grate Covers

Fenced grate covers are designed to stop people experiencing homelessness using the grate to keep warm.



Retractable Spikes

Retractable spikes that can be raised at any time to prevent people experiencing homelessness from resting or sleeping in the doorway.



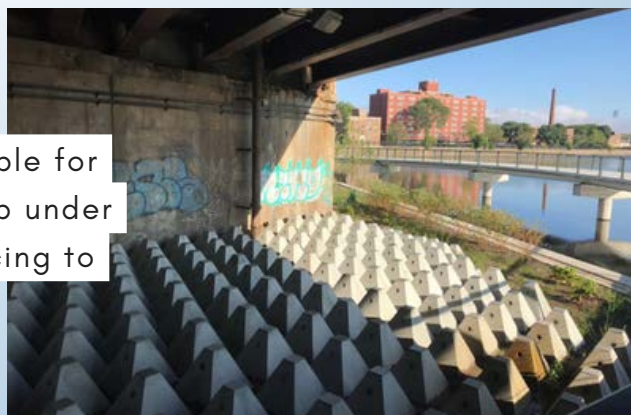
Boulders Under Bridges

Boulders under bridges makes it impossible to people experiencing homelessness to camp under the bridge as protection from snow or rain.



Grated or Spiked Pavement

Grated, spiked pavement makes it impossible for people experiencing homelessness to camp under an overpass, but also for people experiencing to park the vehicles that they live in.





Fences in Over Passes

Fences in over passes clearly keeps people experiencing homelessness from using the overpass as shelter.



Locked Benches

Locked benches obviously makes it impossible for anyone to use them.



Sprinklers

Sprinkler systems that drench people experiencing homelessness - not only on the ground but sprinklers in the ceiling above doorways.

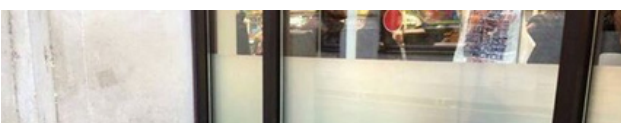
Classical music at LA Metro subway station



At a station in Los Angeles, Metro tries

Weaponizing Music

Los Angeles Metro subway station blares classical music in an effort to drive out criminals and people experiencing homelessness.



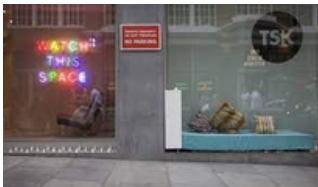
SPATIAL JUSTICE

END THE CRIMINALIZATION OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS BY DESIGN

Anti-homeless architecture is another way that communities criminalize our unhoused neighbors. Artists and activists have used hostile architecture to comment on how our communities see 'public benefit.'



STUART SEMPLE,
HOSTILE DESIGNS.ORG



MICHAEL BEITZ
HOSTILE AND FRIENDLY
BENCHES, 2021



SARAH ROSS
ARCHISUITS, 2005-2006



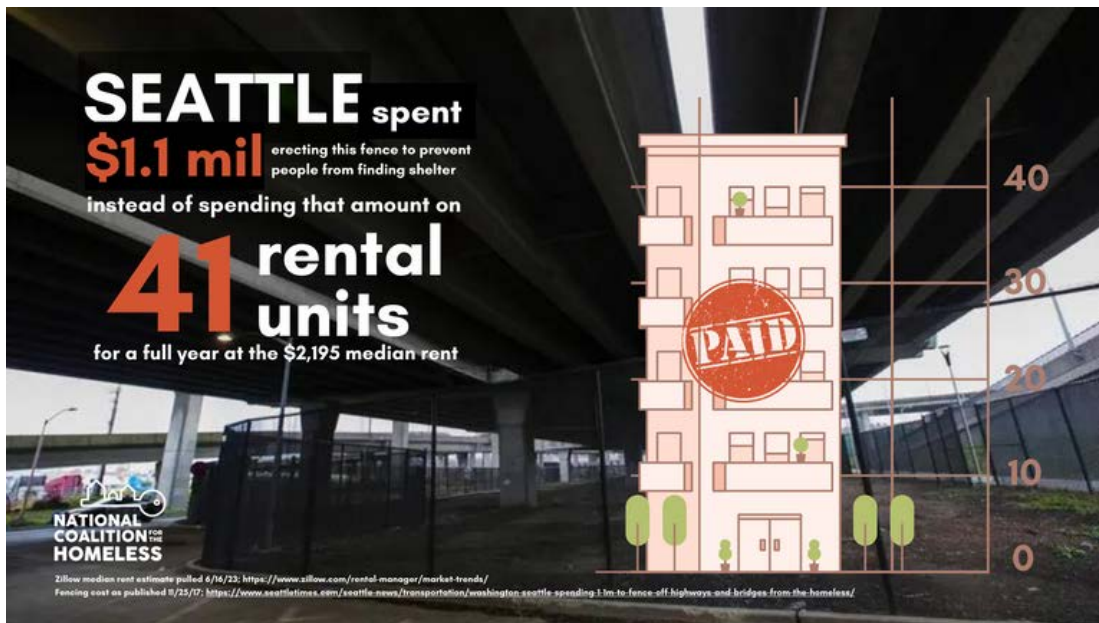
GRACE HURLEY
HOSTILE ARCHITECTURE,
2019



COST OF SPACIAL INJUSTICE: AUDIT YOUR MUNICIPLE BUDGET

Below are a few examples of how costly it is to local jurisdictions to focus on anti-homeless architecture rather than ending and prevention homelessness:

- According to the Fordham Ram, 1/17/21 article, NYC's Metropolitan Transit Authority [MTA] spent \$74 million on installing "leaning bars" in the subways as part of their \$2.8 billion "2015-2019 Enhanced Solutions Initiative."



- Seattle spent \$1.1 million to fence off Spokane Street Viaduct from people experiencing homelessness.

COST OF SPACIAL INJUSTICE CONT.

Advocates have long understood that the overall cost of criminalization of people experiencing homelessness far out-paces the cost of simply housing those forced to sleep outdoors. Here are further, smaller dollar amount examples of hostile architecture:

- Miami, FL: spending \$350,000 for 53 solar powered lights that illuminate the park after hours, although the park closes at sunset
- Spokane, WA: spending \$150,000 to install rocks in an underpass;
- San Diego, CA: spending \$57,000 to install rocks in an underpass prior to the All Star game.



Given the proliferation of anti-homeless architecture, NCH can only surmise that the costs nationally are in the hundreds of millions of dollars – funds that could be used for emergency services and affordable housing.

INCLUSIVE DESIGN



Inclusive architecture refers to space that can be seamlessly used by all user groups. Inclusive, or universal, designs must be easy to use by all types of people – children, adults, senior citizens, people of color, people who identify as LGBTQIA+ or who are non-binary, people who have a physical or mental disability, and people experiencing homelessness. The main objective of inclusive design must be to make spaces as barrier-free and convenient to use as possible.



Enabling Village, Singapore

Enabling Village represents a fresh approach to social businesses and community building. The Enabling Village combines retail, lifestyle and training for disabled members of the community in an all-accessible public space.



Robson Square, Vancouver

Completed in 1983, Robson Square is in the heart of the city and provides vital public space for many cultural events, a covered space for ice skating, and an early example of green rooves.



Friendship Park, Uruguay

Friendship Park is a public space created for the development of recreational activities, where children and youth can participate regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities.



Sheltering Benches

Originally intended as performance art, benches that provide cover, or shelter from weather, are helpful to anyone needing respite.



Sleeping Pods Under Bridge

These units utilize artificial intelligence to create a series of modular pods that are designed to help those in a tough situation find a space for the night or even become a permanent place they can count on.



Tiny Home attached to building

In order to solve the deep lack of affordable housing, our communities need all sorts of living accommodations, including Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) like this, although most ADUs are mother-in-law apartments in basements, or a converted garage home. Relaxed zoning is critical to ensuring creative housing solutions.



Friendly benches

Innovative bench design can provide either a sitting location or a table for eating or working.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Local audits

NCH calls on local advocates in every city in America that have erected anti-homeless architecture to call for that jurisdiction to do an audit of the cost, so we can get a full picture of the cost of spatial injustice.

Spatial Justice

Local jurisdictions, urban planners and architects should always focus on inclusive designs that promote spatial justice.

Affordable and Accessible Housing

At the national level, NCH recommends Congress implement the policy recommendations of the Bring American Home Now campaign's Housing Pillar.

Short term priorities:

- Improve the distribution, re-allocation, and ease of access for all housing resources made available through Covid-19 relief packages Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP I and II) and the Emergency Housing Voucher Program.
- Maximum funding for HUD permanent Housing programs (preservation, universal vouchers, and public housing capital fund).
- Increased attention and funding for HUD's Section 8 Homeownership Program.
- Maximum funding for the National Housing Trust Fund.
- Maximum funding for HUD's Homeless Assistance Program Funding.
- Immediately restore local control, flexibility, ease of access (no wrong door) to the Continuum of Care resources distributed by HUD. Ensure that individuals with lived experience are in a decision-making role at the community level overseeing the distribution of CoC resources.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS CONT.

Affordable and Accessible Housing cont.

At the national level, NCH recommends Congress implement the policy recommendations of the Bring American Home Now campaign Housing Pillar, including:

Long-Term Priorities

- Americans acknowledge that housing is a human right
- All low-income and extremely low-income area people in the US will be able to afford safe, permanent housing by spending no more than 30 percent of their income
- Fair housing will be enforced in accessing housing, in zoning, and in access to homeownership
- Homeless will be ended and prevented, and everyone will be home.



APPENDIX: REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Articles:

- Voices of Youth: Detroit teen dives into the history of hostile architecture; Model D; May 16, 2023
- Hostile Design Won't Stop Homelessness. It Just Makes Us All Uncomfortable; Honolulu Civil Beat; November 29, 2022
- Hostile Architecture Is Evil and Should Be Banned; Current Affairs; August 17, 2022
- Hostile Architecture: The Fight Against the Homeless; iilluminaughtii on YouTube; December 23, 2021
- Hiding homelessness through hostile architecture only hurts the community; The Diamondback; October 19, 2021
- The High Cost of Clearing Tent Cities; Bloomberg; April 12, 2021
- New York's War on the Homeless; The Fordham Ram; January 17, 2021
- Homelessness Maltreatment – Hostile Architecture; Love Without Walls; December 26, 2020
- 'Hostile Architecture': How Public Spaces Keep the Public Out; New York Times; November 8, 2019
- Hostile Architecture and Defensive Designs; The Wake; November 4, 2019
- What's Behind the Uptick in Hostile Architecture?; Architectural Digest; March 21, 2018
- Washington, Seattle spending \$1.1M to fence off highways and bridges from the homeless; Seattle Times; November 25, 2017

Artists:

- **Stuart Semple**, HostileDesign.org
- **Sarah Ross**, Archisuits
- **Grace Hurley**, Hostile Architecture
- **Michael Beitz**, Public Work: Benches, Hostile Architecture

Other Resources:

- Design Resources for Homelessness; accessed 6/21/23
- Rental Market Trends; Zillow

ABOUT THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

WE ENVISION A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE HAS
A SAFE, DECENT, AFFORDABLE AND
ACCESSIBLE HOME.

OUR MISSION IS TO PREVENT AND END
HOMELESSNESS WHILE ENSURING THE
IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF THOSE EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS ARE MET AND THEIR CIVIL
RIGHTS PROTECTED.

WE BELIEVE THAT SAFE, DECENT, AND
AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT (AS
WRITTEN IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF
HUMAN RIGHTS, ARTICLE TWENTY-FIVE,
SECTION ONE).



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