

Day 23: London Spikes

Wednesday, December 2, 2020 9:37 PM

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

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Abstract

This article examines an ostensibly new feature of the securitised urban landscape: 'hostile architecture'. Following controversy in 2014 London over 'anti-homeless spikes' – metal studs implanted at ground level designed to discourage the homeless from sleeping in otherwise unrestricted spaces – certain visible methods of environmental social control were temporarily subject to intense public scrutiny and debate. While contests over public and urban spaces are not new, the spikes controversy emerged in the context of broader socio-political and governmental shifts toward neoliberal arrangements. Using the spikes issue as a case study, I contextualise hostile architecture within these broader processes and in wider patterns of urban securitisation. The article then offers an explanatory framework for understanding the controversy itself. Ultimately the article questions whether the public backlash against the use of spikes indicates genuine resistance to patterns of urban securitisation or, counterintuitively, a broader public distaste for both the homeless and the mechanisms that regulate them.



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Published: 2016-03-01

Issue: [Vol. 5 No. 1 \(2016\): International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy](#)

Pages: 67 to 81

Section: Articles

24 citations in [Scopus](#)

16 citation(s) in [Web of Science](#)

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