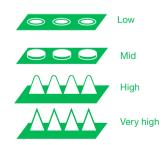On the sixth of February 2023, a group of MAGCD students at Central Saint Martins visited the V&A museum in London. As part of the *Rapid Response Collection*, they saw a displayed artefact captioned as 'Architectural Spikes'. Cast in clear plastic, these spikes were unassuming and seemingly non-threatening. However, with further research, it came to surface that these 'architectural spikes' are in fact a common form of Hostile Architecture, customary of modern urban design, and intended to shape human behaviour in public spaces. One of the most common reasons behind *hostile design* today, is to prevent rough sleepers accessing specific public areas. The visual and theoretical exploration of this particular object of design led the team to create the publication you now hold, a handbook of information, statistics, and visual guides to serve as an insights on how hostile architecture impacts those living in the streets of London.

Throughout this publication, you will find the following cues as a way to represent "hostility levels".

Hostility level

Low

Mid

High

Very high

Have you ever seen these? You might have not even noticed their strange shape or reasoned about their inconspicuous design features. Yet, right in play sight lays an interesting story that speaks of us as a 21st century individualist society. Hostile architecture is no joke. It's everywhere, cleverly placed, simply designed to welcome most and exclude some. In recent years there has been a vogue for the use of hostile design features to control people's behaviour in public spaces, unfortunately almost always targeted to homeless individuals. There has been a fair amount of media coverage on this issue, perhaps raising awareness, making a lot of noise, yet leaving the public with a sense of impotence, as the issue seems to big too tackle, and mere morality doesn't go far enough to make a substantial difference in the lives of those most affected.

Hostile architecture is a form of architectural design that claims to prevent crime and help maintain order. This strategy uses the built environment to discourage certain people from using public spaces for activities different to their original intended purpose. It can be as subtle as simply not providing a place to sit, as obvious as a wall or fence, or as aggressive as metal spikes embedded in pavement. These designs often go unnoticed in the busy cityscape.

WHAT IS HOSTILE ARCHITECTURE?

HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

In a city like London, where some councils have prioritised the commoditization of aesthetics, it's not surprising to find an ever evolving landscape of hostile architecture features. Not limited to objects such as benches, spikes or fences, the hostile nature of the city revolves around surveillance and other mechanisms of spatial intimidation. This is particularly true of areas like Westminster, Kensington and Camden, in contrast with more suburban boroughs, where surveillance and control is perhaps loser and less obvious.

The real issue comes from the fact that hostile architecture doesn't intent to address the root problem, hence creating a difficult moral response in communities by acting as a tool for deflecting responsibility. This is a complicated subject intertwining many social issues around justice and the role of wider society in supporting those who are most vulnerable. Today, there is real need to develop a more holistic approach to design, based on inclusive, down-to-earth research that includes a variety of people and voices.

"When you're designed against, you know it,"

"Other people might not see it, but you will. The message is clear: you are not a member of the public, at least not of the public that is welcome here." The same is true of all defensive architecture. The psychological effect is devastating.

—— Ocean Howell, University of Oregon

"This kind of design makes public space hostile and uninviting and threatening, and that connotation spills into the whole function of spaces."

—— Stuart Semple, British artist

Defensive architecture is revealing on a number of levels, because it is not the product of accident or thoughtlessness, but a thought process. It is a sort of unkindness that is considered, designed, approved, funded and made real with the explicit motive to exclude and harass.

We cooperate with urban design and work very hard at not seeing, because we do not want to see. We tacitly agree to this apartheid.

—— Alex Andreou