

# Architecture as a Verb/ Design as Cultural Practice

**The fixation of architectural praxis with the celebration (or commodification) of aesthetic genius in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been supported by an emphasis on the architect as reified author of the artistic object, rather than as facilitator of cultural practices.**

In describing the architecture culture of museums in the late twentieth century, art historian Claire Bishop explains:

In the modern museum model, exemplified by MOMA, the guiding narrative is linear historic time, advancing toward the future on a Western-centric horizon; its dispositif is the white cube, destined for the modern notion of the public. In the postmodern museum, exemplified by the Tate Modern and the Centre Pompidou, the apparatus is multiculturalism, seen in the equation of contemporaneity with global diversity; its structure of mediation is marketing, addressed to the multiple demographics of economically quantifiable 'audiences.'

Under Bishop's configuration, in the former, the public as people are rendered generic and universal in their cultural praxis. In the latter, the public as people are defined as consumers of culture in the commodification of the container (architecture) and the contained (art, culture, heritage, etc.). In both conceptions, the concept of architecture as a noun highlights its static condition and emphasizes the Howard Roarkian model of the architect as genius form giver. Is it possible for an architectural verb to counter notions of cultural commodification and aesthetic genius in search of extending architecture culture to those people and places left out or behind of cultural discussions? If so, how does a shift from a noun-based architecture to verb-based architectures, allow one to interrogate: how spaces construct a particular world view for ourselves; how the discipline of architecture has passed on that world view; and, how the profession has embedded that worldview within the built environment?

This paper will challenge the notion of by whom and for whom is the practice of architecture in the twenty-first century, by: acknowledging the current stranglehold of the "Bilbao Effect" on the institution; introducing a discussion of values-centered paradigms used in architecture, preservation, and design thinking; and, describing an architectural thesis that confronts traditional paradigms by focusing on cultural praxis and discussions of who qualifies as a form giver and how form is given.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology, or What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (London: Koenig Books, 2013), 43. See also: Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* (September-October 1997); and Rosalind Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," *October*, 54 (Fall 1990): 3-17.
2. Architect Craig Wilkins has previously crafted a conceptualization of architecture as a noun and as a verb in addressing the omission of African-Americans from both the practice and disciplinary thinking of architecture. Craig L. Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equality. Notes on Race Space Architecture and Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). I also discuss architecture as a verb in B.D. Wortham-Galvin, "Agency, Action and Pedagogy in the Making of Contemporary Places," *Dialectic IV: Architecture at Service*, accepted for publication in Spring 2016.
3. Witold Rybczynski, "The Bilbao Anomaly," Witold Rybczynski on Culture and Architecture website, published August 25, 2011, <http://www.witoldrybczynski.com/architecture/the-bilbao-anomaly/> (accessed March 1, 2014). The author borrows this phrase from the title of a blog post on the subject of the Bilbao Effect.
4. Witold Rybczynski, "The Bilbao Effect," *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 2002): 138.
5. Wayne Curtis, "Brand-New Cities," *The American Scholar* 75, 1 (Winter 2006): 113.
6. Rosalind Krauss, op cit. provides a clear and early articulation of the commodification of the museum that later became known as the Bilbao Effect. Paul Allen (co-founder of Microsoft) commissioned Frank Gehry to design the Experience Music Project in Seattle in 1996 prior to the opening of the Bilbao Guggenheim. In 1999 the Corcoran Gallery of Art held an invited competition (with just Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, and Santiago Calatrava competing) for the design of an addition to its Beaux Arts home, with Gehry winning the commission that due to controversy and funding was never built. Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin attracted 350,000 before it had any exhibits. For discussions of this museum phenomenon see: Rybczynski, "The Bilbao Effect," 138-142; Curtis, op cit., 113-116; L. Yudell, "Bilbao Effect at the Ballet," *Architectural Record* 198, 9 (2010): 72; Suzanne Greub and Thierry Greub, eds., *Museums in the 21st Century. Concepts Projects Buildings*, (Berlin: Prestel, 2006).
7. Rybczynski, "The Bilbao Effect," op cit., 140.
8. Curtis, op cit., 114. Curtis quotes Hawthorne's Los Angeles Times article without citation.
9. Ibid.

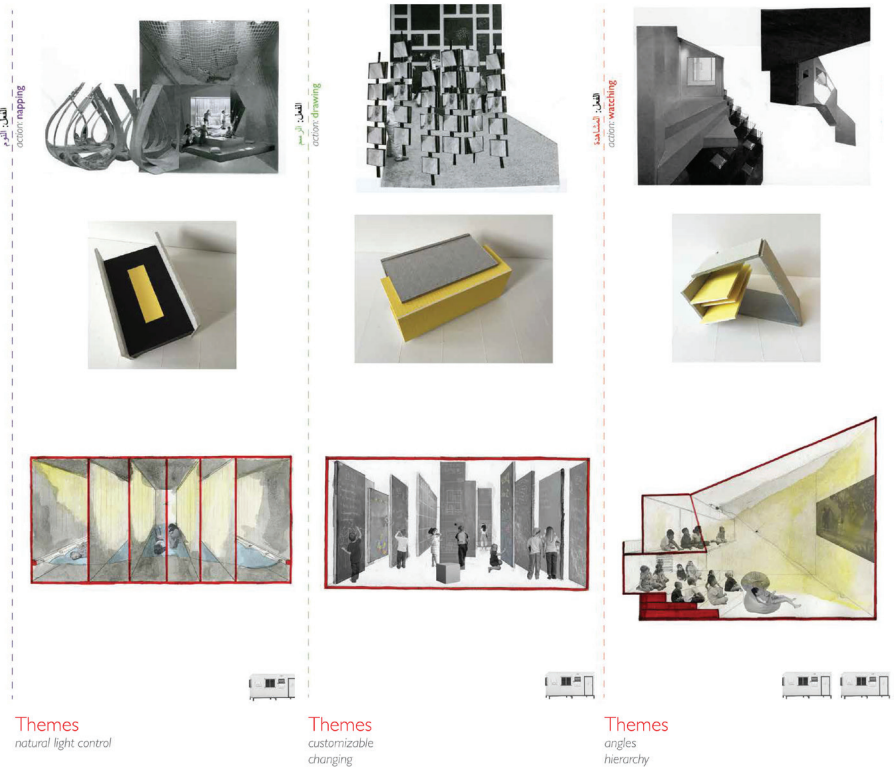
## THE BILBAO EFFECT OR THE BILBAO ANOMALY?

It is clear that Frank Gehry's design for the Guggenheim Museum in the Spanish industrial port of Bilbao remains a watershed moment in the nexus of architecture and the commodification of culture and design. The ubiquitous phrase the "Bilbao Effect" speaks to the power of this moment. It is notable that the phenomenon surrounding this museum in fact speaks more to the architecture and architect than it does to the client and the collection. Opening in 1997, Frank Gehry's tour-de-force of sculptural titanium generated about \$500 million in economic activity and roughly \$100 million in taxes during its first three years and approximately five million visitors in its first five years. As journalist Wayne Curtis notes, "It's evidently no longer enough for a city to have a defining single icon or a richly textured and complex history. It must now have a brand." The "Effect" that cities believe in is that star architect(ure)s will brand them and attract the same quantities of visitors and dollars that Bilbao Guggenheim did in its first decade of operation. The "Effect" on the relationship of culture and architecture has been that (even before Bilbao Guggenheim even opened) other cities began commissioning their own iconoclastic buildings: which supported the rise of the star architect, commodified the cultural impact of architecture, and made the collections and/or missions of these museums secondary to the consumption of the architectural spectacle. Gehry's inability to handle the deluge of commissions arriving on his door step led to the meteoric rise of a generation of celebrity architects: Santiago Calatrava, Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, Thomas Mayne, Rem Koolhaas, Jean Nouvel, and others (many of whom architectural critic Witold Rybczynski points out built their rock-star reputations almost entirely via competitions and theoretical architecture, not seasoning their architectural acumen via built work). Architecture critic Christopher Hawthorne notes the reverence these star architects receive, with cities anointing them as "urban alchemists" magically saving urbanity in ways that comprehensive planning cannot. "Celebrity architecture, like floodwaters, has overflowed the urban channels and is now pooling and eddying everywhere, including many smaller cities," adds Curtis.

Star-Architecture as spectacle (or as a series of ducks as Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour coined figural-object architecture in 1972) was a boon to the reification of Architecture and Architects, but its significance to those activities that the architecture supported has been questioned. In the case of Gehry's Bilbao or Libeskind's Jewish Museum (Berlin, 1999), the building is the thing—neither the art nor Jewish culture held sway during the first decade of these buildings' occupation. Pilgrimage to them was not based on viewing art, culture, or memory, but on paying homage to the genius of the Architect and the Architectural Object. The neglect of the interior contents also extended to the urban surrounds with Rybczynski opining,

Show-dog architecture [...] is unlikely to pay much attention to its surroundings. [...] The chief aim of architecture should not be to entertain, titillate, or shock viewers. [...] Buildings] are not-one-night stands, like blockbuster movies or blockbuster art shows. [...] Great architecture [...] should have more to say to us than 'Look at me.'

And, yet, the urbanism wrought by architectural design at the turn of the twentieth century was only a tweeting of ego and iconoclasm. Under this paradigm, "the vision of a city is not a collection of functioning neighborhoods, but a collection of what amounts to very large and shiny Hummel figurines. The city is not a living organism but a lifeless curio shelf of willfully stylish buildings." But what if architecture as a verb could, in fact, incorporate the capaciousness of urbanism as styled by journalist Jane Jacobs in her descriptions of the "street ballet" of Greenwich Village in New York City wherein mixing a diversity of peoples, ages, activities, socio-economic classes are the metric for making successful places. Can design understood as cultural praxis bring forth a process wherein architectural products are valued for becoming architectural processes of incompleteness and dynamic (in)stabilities.



10. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas* Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1972). In their seminal architectural treatise these architects made the distinction between the “decorated shed” and the “duck” in architectural design. The former is a simple architectural box onto which ornament is applied, the latter derives architectural image via the construction of unusual forms. The group borrowed the name “duck” from roadside structure in Flanders, New York built in the 1930s that sold poultry and eggs and was shaped like a duck.
11. Rybczynski, “The Bilbao Effect,” 141–142.
12. Curtis, op cit., 115.
13. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). I discuss Jacobs and the implications of her urban theories at length and introduce the notion of design practice as cultural practice in B.D. Wortham-Galvin, “Making the Familiar Strange: Understanding Design Practice as Cultural Practice,” *The Urban Wisdom of Jane Jacobs*, ed. Sonia Hirt (New York: Routledge, 2012): 229-244.
14. Randall Mason, “Theoretical and Practical Arguments for Values-Centered Preservation,” *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Studies* 3, 2 (Summer 2006): 26.
15. Mason, op cit., 26.
16. Key texts for further reading on these topics include: B.D. Wortham-Galvin, “An Anthropology of Urbanism: how people make places (and what designers and planners might learn from it),” *Footprint: Delft School of Design Journal*, No. 13 (Autumn 2013): 21–40; Jeffrey Hou, ed., *Insurgent Public Space: guerrilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012); Michael Lydon, et al, eds., *Tactical Urbanism: short term action, long term change*, The Street Plans Collective and Next Generation, [http://issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative/docs/tactical\\_urbanism\\_vol\\_2\\_final](http://issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative/docs/tactical_urbanism_vol_2_final); and Gilad Meron, “Public Interest Design: An Annotated Bibliography,” Center for Sustainable Development, School of Architecture, University of Texas (2012).
17. Chelina Odbert and Joseph Mulligan, “The Kibera Space Project. Participation, Integration, and Networked Change,” in *Now Urbanism, The Future City Is Here*, Jeffrey Hou, et al (London: Routledge, 2014): 177–192.

Figure 1: Sample studies of child-oriented verbs and the interior spaces that could support those actions done in photo collage, model, and watercolor. The verbs depicted above (a fraction of the study) from left to right include: napping, drawing and watching, *Design studies by Nada Maani*.

## THE PUBLIC & DESIGN THINKING

In his discussion of memory culture in the United States, preservationist Randall Mason notes that the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries hold much in common, to include “convulsive, global economic and social changes; periods of political flux and angst; and trenchant discussions about the proper scopes and roles for governments.” Mason notes that today’s struggle with memory culture is distinguishable from that of the early twentieth century in at least three ways:

1. the current memory culture is more grassroots and therefore less elitist (although these are matters of emphasis and degree, not absolute terms);
2. it is more openly politicized, and the awareness of unequal power among agents in the memory culture is notable (witness the ubiquitous concern with “participation” and “access” these days); and,
3. contemporary memory culture is inseparable (or nearly so) from the market.

While Mason’s aim is to contextual the emergence of a new model for preservation practice in the United States, both his characterization of the context and his proposition for a new methodology for preservation are relevant for the rethinking architecture as a verb. These points of context for memory culture are relevant for design productions as heretofore fringe activities have become more mainstream processes under the monikers of public interest design, democratic design, and/or tactical urbanism.

Public interest design, democratic design, and/or tactical urbanism share philosophical foundations that emphasize that the design of our built environment is socially and politically charged and, thus, design thinking should be a tool for furthering social justice issues. All three engage in socially-oriented, civic practices that emphasize the role of the public in place making in an increasingly privatized society. All three also emphasize various levels of participatory action in the making of things and places. These movements are now world-wide as

18. Odbert and Mulligan, op cit., 179.

19. Mason, op cit., 35.

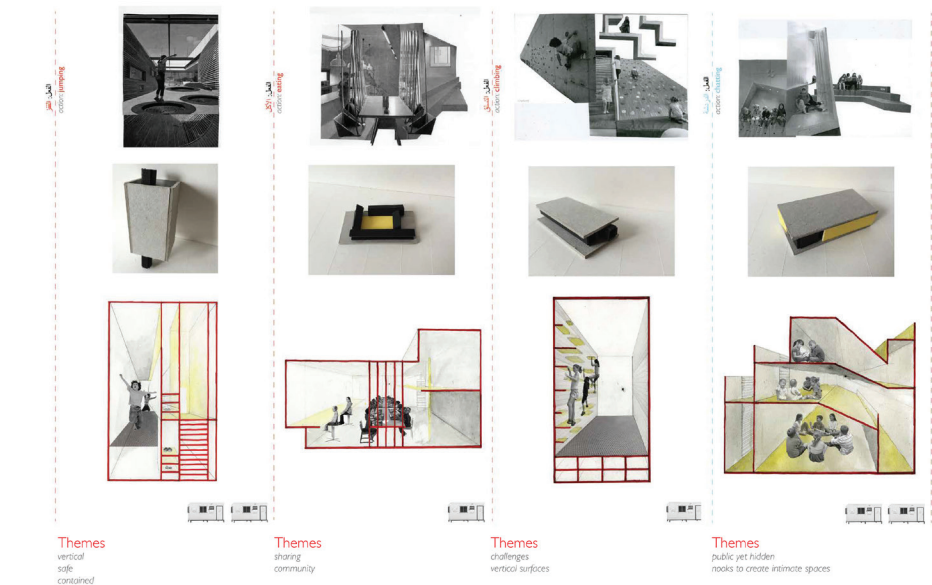
20. Mason, op cit., 37; Odbert and Mulligan, op cit. Horst Rittel is credited with coining and conceptualizing “wicked problems” as first published in a response to Rittel, by C. West Churchman, “Wicked Problems,” *Management Science* 14, 4 (December 1967), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.14.4.B141>; Rittel finally published his idea in Horst Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning,” *Policy Sciences* 4 (1973): 155-169. Essentially a wicked problem is one difficult to solve (or recognize and define) because of the complex interdependencies involved.

21. A foundation design thinking literature review would include: Booch, G., 1990: *Object Oriented Analysis and Design with applications*, 2nd Edition, Menlo Park, CA, Addison-Wesley; Buzan, T., 1991: *Use Both Sides of Your Brain*, 3rd Edition, New York, Plume, Penguin; Newell, A., 1990: *Unified Theories of Cognition*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; Kim, S.H., 1990: *Designing Intelligence; A Framework for Smart Systems*, New York, Oxford University Press; Boden. M. A., 1990: *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*. London, Cardinal; Rowe, P. D., 1991: *Design Thinking*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press; Barkow, J., Cosmides, L. and Tooby, J. 1992: *The Adapted Mind*, New York, Oxford University Press; Jones, J. C., 1992: *Design Methods*. New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold. Buzan, T., 1993: *The Mind Map Book, How to Use Radiant Thinking to Maximize Your Brain's Untapped Potential*, New York, Plume; Coyne, R.D., Newton, S. and Sudweeks, F., 1993: “A Connectionist View of Creative Reasoning” in Gero, J.S. and Maher, ML., *Modeling Creativity and Knowledge Based Creative Design*, Hillsdale, NJ; Eysenck, HJ. 1994. “The Measurement of Creativity.” in Boden, M.A. ed., *Dimensions of Creativity*, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press; Regier, T., 1996: *The Human Semantic Potential: Spatial Language and Constrained Connectionism*, Cambridge, MIT Press; Lawson, B., 1997: *How Designers Think: The Design Process Demystified* (Completely rev. 3rd ed.). Oxford; Boston: Architectural Press.; Schank, R., 1997: *Virtual Learning*, New York, McGraw-Hill; Pinker, S., 1997: *How the Mind Works*, New York: W.W. Norton; Smith, B.C., 1998: *On the Origin of Objects*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press; Johnson, S., 2001: *Emergence; The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities and Software*, New York, Scribner; Buchanan, R., 2001: “Design Research and the New Learning”. *Design Issues*, 17(4), 3-17; Lawson B., 2004: *What Designers Know*, Oxford, Architectural Press; Pink, D.H., 2005: *A Whole New Mind; Moving From the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*, New York, Penguin; Cross, N., 2

Figure 2: Sample studies of child-oriented verbs. The verbs depicted above (a fraction of the study) from left to right include: jumping, eating, climbing, and chatting, *Design studies by Nada Maani*.

they intertwine the cultural and physical in cities in the Global North and South. What these various practices suggest is the need for value-based processes in design. The methodology used by Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI) in the Kibera Space Project is exemplar of value-based processes being implement in design. While working in Nairobi’s informal settlements, KDI sought to transform marginal waste areas into “Productive Public Spaces.” For KDI, productive public space:

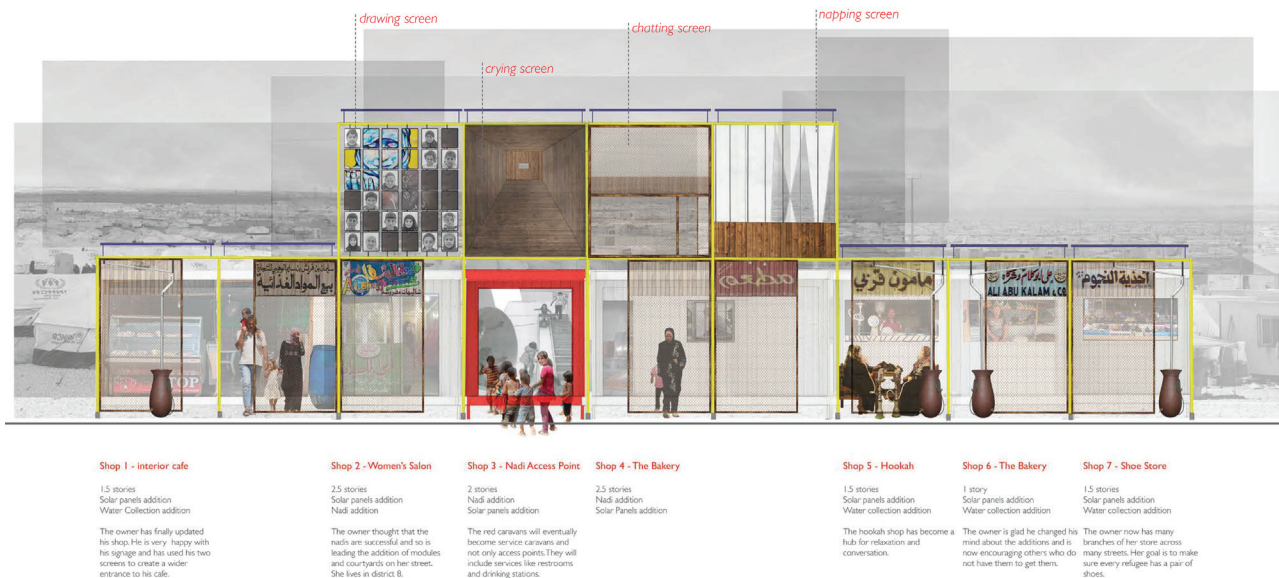
1. transforms an environmental liability into usable public space;
2. authors and operates by its end-users collaborating with outside groups;
3. integrates income-generating and socially empowering uses;
4. adds value to a space without alienating the original community;
5. meets expressed community priorities and links to larger improvement efforts; and,
6. uses strong design concepts to create beautiful places.



This certainly is what Mason suggests for memory culture work as well, as he notes that the shift is from a focus on the aesthetic object to its significance. Mason’s arguments for a values-centered preservation include: the ability for more holistic understanding of places that support a large range of values; the inclusion of more diversity of stakeholders and full recognition of whom they might be; comprehensive knowledge about a site’s value; revealing gaps in current knowledge. While Mason is talking about places and sites, the same arguments could apply to design as cultural praxis and architecture, thus, formulated as a verb.

The implications of KDI’s design process and Mason’s proposed process an architectural verb displacing the iconic architectural noun include: allowing plural conceptions of place; designing capaciously from the points of view of experts and lay people so that values, priorities, and management are not determined a priori to their publicness; having social justice drive economic gains for institutions rather than the later delimiting the former; valuing process over product; not alienating the local when favoring of a global reach; and, linking to local priorities and/or other wicked problems of community concern.

What KDI and Mason represent is one part of a larger process model known as design thinking. Design thinking has a wide body of literature that began in the 1960s but has flourished



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in earnest in the twenty-first century and is proffered by a variety of disciples to include: architecture, design, engineering, business, computer-science, and neuroscience. Published origins are often traced to Herbert Simon's *The Sciences of the Artificial* (1968), Victor Papanek's *Design for the Real World* (1972), Horst Rittel's *Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning* (1973), Robert McKim's *Experiences in Visual Thinking* (1973), and Peter Rowe's *Design Thinking* (1987). Today design thinking is most oft characterized as a mode of creative action that provides a means of addressing intractable human concerns (a.k.a. wicked problems); and is oft cited as the foundation for tactical creative action. Design thinking is characterized by: the exploration of present and future conditions; simultaneous alternative scenarios; identifying both known and ambiguous terrain to discover hidden and marginalized parameters or constraints; iteration; redefinition of the initial problem; embracing ambiguity; using divergent thinking to offer variant ideas; using convergent thinking to prefer, resolve and realize solutions based on the divergent iterations; and/or seeing all design activity as social activity. In other words, design thinking is a process, not product, driven model. Design thinking is, therefore, at odds with the late twentieth century architectural models set up by the much lauded "Bilbao Effect" that commodifies architecture (and culture) into a brand/product to be consumed.

### AN ARCHITECTURE OF VERB: NADI AL ATFALL

These ideas framed the pedagogical foundation for the direction of Nada Maani's architecture design thesis. Maani started her thesis by asking: How can architecture transform a refugee camp into a livable city that is designed around existing social networks? Like many architecture students of the millennial generation, she had a (Global North-based) humanitarian value system and a set of design skills, but was unsure of how to link them without engaging in a form of architectural colonialism. With the guidance of her thesis chair (the author), her exploration of that question was framed by: contemporary cultural landscape studies; understanding the nature of Islamic urbanism as the cultural inheritance brought to the camp by the refugees; and, situating the physical interventions within the concept of the liminal. The goal was to construction a design process that would support agency in the urbanism and multiple publics of a society wherein interiority dominates the life of Islamic refugee children and women. Maani's chair proposed the following methodological structure: cyclical engagements with external non-architectural research; architectural research (focused on tectonics, utility systems and the Syrian vernacular); fieldwork at the Zaatari

Designery Ways of Knowing, London, Springer; Krippendorff, K., 2006: *The Semantic Turn: A New Foundation For Design*, Boca Raton, FL, CRC Press; Ogle, R., 2007: *Smart World: Breakthrough Creativity and the New Science of Ideas*, Boston, MA, Harvard Business School Press; Ware, C., 2008: *Visual Thinking for Design*, Burlington, MA, Morgan Kaufmann; Farson, R., 2008: *The Power of Design: A Force for Transforming Everything*, Ostberg Greenway Communications LLC, Norcross GA; Brown, T., 2009: *Change By Design; How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation*, New York, Harper Collins; Cross, N., 2011: *Design Thinking; Understanding How Designers Think and Work*, Oxford, Berg; IDEO, 2012: *Design Thinking For Educators* © 2012 IDEO LLC. All rights reserved. <http://designthinkingforeducators.com/>.

22. I discuss tactical actions in Wortham-Galvin, "An Anthropology of Urbanism," op cit. Rolf Faste, David Kelley, and Richard Buchanan characterize the design thinking effort: Rolf Faste, et al, "Integrating Creativity into the Mechanical Engineering Curriculum in ASME Resource Guide to Innovation in Engineering Design, Cary A. Fisher, ed., (New York: American Society of Mechanical Engineers, 1993); Tim Brown, "The Making of a Design Thinker," *Metropolis* (October 2009): 60-62; Richard Buchanan, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," *Design Issues*, 8, 2 (Spring 1992).
23. I discuss this critical distinction between design process and design product in Wortham-Galvin, "Making the Familiar Strange," op cit.

Figure 3: Development of child-oriented nadis as public spaces shown in elevation along Champs Elysees. Fictionalized story narrative of potential resident development is provided below drawing, *Drawing by Nada Maani*.



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24. Wotham-Galvin (2016) op cit. For a more thorough discussion of Maani's thesis and the pedagogy behind its direction and the contexts of the Syrian refugees that informed it please see my article as well as Nada Maani, "Refugee Camp to City" (M.Arch thesis, Portland State University, 2015)
25. Key early texts on cultural landscape impacts include: Jackson, op cit.; D. W. Meinig, ed., *Interpretation of ordinary landscapes: geographical essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); and, Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of fear* (New York: Pantheon, 1979). For power and control discourses see: Denis Cosgrove, ed., *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge: University Press, Cambridge, 1988); B. Bender, ed., *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg, 1993); Don Mitchell, "Cultural landscapes: the dialectical landscape—recent landscape research in human geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 26(3) (2002):381–389; and, R. H. Schein, "The place of landscape: A conceptual framework for interpreting an American scene," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87 (4) (1997): 660–680.
26. For more on Islamic urbanism, see: B.S. Hakim, "The Islamic City and its Architecture," *Third World Planning Review* 12(1) (1990): 75–89; Naser Alsayyad, "The Study of Islamic Urbanism: An Historiographic Essay," *Built Environment* 22(2) (1996): 91–97; and S. Slyomovics, ed., *The Walled Arab City in Literature, Architecture and History: The Living Medina in the Maghrib* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).
27. In addition to the Oxford English Dictionary definition of the liminal as a threshold, anthropologist Victor Turner wrote extensively about socio-cultural liminality wherein he characterized social liminality as a state in which the individual was 'structurally, if not physically, 'invisible''. That is, the status of liminal individuals is socially and structurally ambiguous. This aligns with the state of the refugee, displaced from their home countries and often living permanently in a temporary state. In order to address the socio-cultural liminal state of refugees, this thesis design process sought to embrace the architectural liminal moment between the public and the private and reformulate its tectonics, use and design. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

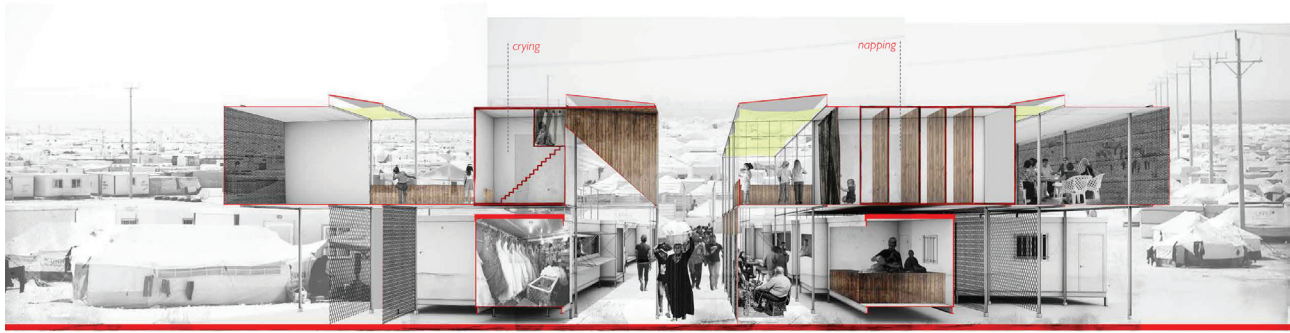
Figure 4: Section perspective of potential nadis along Champs Elysees, Drawing by Nada Maani.

camp; verb-based spatial explorations of architectural program (Figures 1 & 2); attention to the economics and scarcity of material resource to facilitate resident action; and, working primarily in section, model and three-dimensional renderings to highlight the positioning of (scaled) human bodies in the configuration and use of space.

Maani spent her winter break travelling between her parent's home in Jordan and the Zaatari camp. She spoke with NGO workers in the camp, toured the camp as a whole, and then focused on the quotidian experiences in the camp's unofficial commercial center and the primary cardo-decumanus: along the Champs Elysees. Her observations of the lifeways of the people's of the camp—both public and private—led her to the following revisions of her initial decisions: she wanted to use specific interventions in the Champs Elysees as a prototype or model that she intended would spread diffusely over all of the neighborhoods as determined by the residents; she wanted to design for the children of the camp, with a particular awareness of the needs of female children as well as women; she wanted to use the materials of the caravan as a primary architectural material source; and, given the socio-cultural nature of the layered Islamic multi-publics, Maani wanted to design spaces of liminality between publicness and privateness. She was asked to codify her fieldwork and make a cyclical round of remote research to support her decisions. Summarized, her visualizations noted that despite being designed in a top-down bureaucratic manner, grass-roots urbanism flourished in the camp. In seeking normalcy, primarily male adult refugees had adapted their environment. Organic development and tactics toward making the camp livable have taken hold. Nevertheless, children and women were still on the margins of these efforts. She wanted to bring them to the center via an architectural facilitation emphasizing their agency in the camp; rather than the current invisibility.

In searching for a design methodology that would support the unsanctioned urbanism already nascent in the camp, Maani researched public interest design and tactical urbanism projects as guides, as well as conceptual notions of the right to the city. Her methodological precedent studies allowed her to ask how design thinking can:

- Challenge issues of ownership.
- Reorient the current static, singular, male-dominated public realm.
- Reorganize notions of publics.
- Transform how the camp is organized based on patterns of culture.
- Understand the negative hierarchies existing in the city and facilitate more positive structures.
- Support healthy and safe spaces for children and women.
- Support cultural and political expressions.
- Respect the Islamic cultural landscape while opening up opportunities for children and women's right to participate.



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Those issues were critical as she sought to use the socio-cultural performative publics (and privateness) of the tradition of the courtyard and the architectural liminal layering that supports it by using and transforming the materials and morphologies present in the camp: the caravans and the emerging lively, unsanctioned (male-dominated) souq. She took as her palette the traditionally unseen liminal space of the courtyards and the rooftops of traditional Islamic urbanism and reconstructed it atop the caravans. Her intervention asserts a socio-cultural permanence supporting the layered publics of children and women while simultaneously bringing families together in a variety of realms along the camp's every changing souq. Maani wanted to ameliorate the "dropping out of common space" and "loss of a geographical place" for the refugees with an attention to how those spaces function to support all peoples within the Islamic cultural landscape.

Maani's studying of the tectonics of the caravan and its material components were layered with her socio-cultural research and her vernacular traditions studies. All three research operations led her to offer a kit of parts that could support the most vulnerable within the camp—the children—a way to inhabit the camp more fully, yet safely. Maani's tectonic and spatial manipulations of the existing materials and typologies (both within the camp and transported from Syria), allow for more robust publics to engage in camp life outside of one's private caravan. Her kit of parts, honoring the liminal layers of the traditional courtyard, develops what she calls nadi al-atfaals (children's clubs): a system of child-oriented public interior spaces that sit atop the caravans (Figures 3–5). Her 'rooftop' structures are meant to be permanent, allowing for the caravans to continue to come and go daily (as is current practice). Her elevated nadis, thus, allow more stable patterns of culture to emerge atop the ephemeral hub of souq activities. In addition, the structure of the nadis would provide a currently absent liminal space in front of the commercial caravans. Through tactical occupation, this scaffolding would be used to enhance the burgeoning urbanity of the souq by providing an extra layer of inside-out space for social productions.

In utilizing a system of screens (taken and transformed from Islamic courtyard and façade design), Maani intends for the people of the camp to determine locations, program, and design the nadis to support the various neighborhoods diffuse throughout the camp. In doing so, Maani sought not to mimic the morphologies of the courtyard and the souq but to transform those typologies to support the multi-layered publics that exist in resilient Islamic urbanism and allow them to flourish and transform the thinner version of Islamic culture that exists in the camps. The nadi system was meant to activate choice and opportunity not only in their location, but also in their use and continual adaptation (Figures 1-5).

By asking what do children do, and how could an additional layer of outside-inside space support their more visible introduction into camp life, Maani intended to enhance the quality of cultural life and infrastructure for all residents. Maani was asked to identify a list of verbs that support the actions of the children, not only extant but also desired. She was then asked to study these verbs through collages, models, and in drawing perspectives to understand

28. Given that her proposed area of investigation takes place within a hastily constructed Islamic urbanism, it was important for the design process to acknowledge the relationship between culture, custom and space is critical to designing for multiple publics in a predominantly Islamic culture. Maani was asked to study the liminal places—the thresholds—between the public space of the urban and the private space of the domicile to understand how public and private spaces are physically manifest, enacted, and/or contested in Islamic cities in the Global South. See B.D. Wortham & Isaac Williams, "Walking the City: The Physical and Social Urban Form Made Public," Proceedings for the ACSA 96th Annual Conference (Houston, March 2008).
29. Victor Turner wrote extensively about socio-cultural liminality wherein he characterized social liminality as a state in which the individual was "structurally, if not physically, invisible" (Turner, op. cit., 95). That is, the status of liminal individuals is socially and structurally ambiguous. This aligns with the state of the refugee, displaced from their home countries and often living permanently in a temporary state. In order to address the socio-cultural liminal state of refugees, this thesis design process sought to embrace the architectural liminal moment between the public and the private and reformulate its tectonics, use and design.
30. Based on her fieldwork, Maani noted that the Zaatari refugee camp is gradually moving away from top-down service provision into a

Figure 5: Section perspective of potential nadis along Champs Elysees, Drawing by Nada Maani.

self-provisioning urban conglomeration, where refugees are provided with various forms of cash-based assistance and encouraged to address their own needs themselves. Local camp leaders figure heavily in the tactical operations of the camp as they smuggle humanitarian goods and drugs. The thriving commerce on the Champs Elysees is technically illegal; yet, \$11 million U.S. dollars change hands in this commercial district each month. The bridal shops are some of the most popular with approximately 30 weddings a week taking place in the camp. Because of the unsanctioned commerce on the Champs Elysees at least 65 percent of residents do have some form of income. In order to support their unsanctioned burgeoning commercial center, the refugees modify U.N. provided caravans individually for 'public' uses, and urbanistically (in defiance of the official surveyed camp plan) so that their arrangement allows for the simulation of courtyard spaces between domestic caravans. Maani, op cit.

31. Maani noted that female children were particularly vulnerable with only 42 percent attending school and 46 percent entering in arranged marriages before the age of 18 (well above the average of 13 percent in Syria itself). The life a female child was one sequestered within the privacy of the caravan (whether her parent's or her husband's). Maani, op cit.
32. An excellent bibliography for public interest design and tactical urbanism can be found in: Gilad Meron, *Public Interest Design: An Annotated Bibliography* (Center for Sustainable Development, School of Architecture, University of Texas, 2012). The right to the city was introduced by Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space* (London: Blackwell, 1991).
33. Following the foundational understanding of Islamic urbanism (morphologically and socio-culturally), Maani focused on the Syrian courtyard house and its ability to balance local building materials and methods, environmental systems, social and familial structures. Maani was interested in how the courtyard satisfied the needs for women's and children's public space and the families private space at the same time. She was also piqued by its temporal nature because of its changing functions. She also noted the significance of the Syrian souq as the hub of everything sociable.
34. Agier, op. cit. (2008): 2 & 29.
35. A Nadi Al-Atfaal as defined in the article and by Maani in her thesis is a children's club.
36. See: Wortham and Williams, op cit.; Ernst Grube, "What Is Islamic Architecture?" in *Architecture of the Islamic World*, George Mitchell, ed., (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1978). Stefano Bianca, "Fez: The Ideal and the Reality of the Islamic City," in *Architecture as Symbol and Self-Identity*. Proceedings of Seminar Four in the series Architectural Transformations in the Islamic World (Cambridge, Mass.: The Aga Khan Awards, 1980). Traditional Arabic urbanism is, in part, about interiority, with a significant part of the life of the city takes place behind the solid, imposing walls within the ubiquitous courtyards. In fact, the hierarchies between the publicness of a main street and the back of house activities that take place in the alleys of the Global North

how form and space could support those verbs. Once she had identified her technical manipulations of the caravan structure and a series of tectonic screens that would support an 'elevated' new set of publics, she returned to her verbs to begin to study how her tectonic and spatial choices could be manipulated to support those verbs. Maani designed a tectonic system that is supported by a system of screens. Her nadis address the actions such as: reading, gathering, crying, drawing, creating, dangling, watching, eating, etc. They also support access to critical infrastructures such as drinking water, bathing, toilets, and electricity. She did not master plan the specific locations or programs of the nadis. Rather, she would assert that it is the designers' role to put that kit of parts in the hands of the residents and asks them to choose where and when they want the what to happen in support of more diversity of publics within the camp (Figures 1–5).

The social contestations present in refugee camps are numerous and varied relating to who makes places and who occupies them when the inhabitants are fundamentally displaced peoples. In their well intentioned response to provide humanitarian emergency aid, these master planned camps regulated by the United Nations and/or host countries are socially regulating peoples in ways that delimit their ability to capacious embrace their patterns of culture. In order to support a humanistic development of cultural publics in these camps, developing a design that orients toward the most vulnerable, takes advantage of resources already at hand, and designs them in a way that facilitates the agency of the refugees is what this design process has proposed.

## CONCLUSION

The move from the goal of achieving common community (whether local, regional, or national) to valuing difference entered academic discourse in earnest at the close of the twentieth century. Different groups understand place differently and people's experience of spaces are not often revealed or made visible in the complex politics of space that overlap with issues of memory, heritage, and experience. Iris Marion Young proposes that city life should not aspire to community (which excludes those not a part of the predominating homogenous group) but to "difference without exclusion." This aligns with Henri Lefebvre's proposition of the right to the city as the right "to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of [...] moments and spaces." In proposing a definition of city life in which togetherness is defined by the coming together of strangers rather than the sharing of a common culture or values, Young asserts that urbanity should emphasize a publicness that is "heterogeneous, plural, and playful, a place where people witness and appreciate diverse cultural expressions that they do not share and do not fully understand." Geographer Kurt Iveson notes that: "The multi-sphere model of public space replaces the liberal model's attachment to the ideal of a universal public sphere with an ideal of the public sphere as the structured setting for the interaction of a number of publics." Iveson also adds: "The social groups that are the bearers of the difference that Young wishes to embrace are not formed prior to their occupation of public space, but through this occupation." This occupation of difference is precisely what an architectural verb can facilitate counter to the Bilbao Effect's liberal urbanity where commercialization cloaks architecture into a false rhetoric of publicness. If an architectural verb is to pry open spaces it is not for an early twentieth century value of achieving a codified singular American community but a twenty-first century plural and public space of difference.

How can architecture as cultural practice challenge architectural products to generate a design process about people, not about things? How can the architectural verb use thingness as a means to the ends of: increasing participations, politicizing inequalities of authorships and issues, contextualizing design into a contemporary memory culture,



making social aims an inseparable part of the economics of architecture, emphasizing co-production, making transparent gaps in architectural processes and productions, making evident who is framing a process or product through clear demarcation of the partisan nature of authorship, opening up global discussions that are relevant to local priorities, and playing with temporal modalities by allowing both the temporary and permanent to drive practices.

The issue of agency is the heart of twenty-first century architectural praxis. Who should decide what to make, and how, where and for whom it is made? These are not new discussions but ever more pressing in in light of the wicked problems facing our global and local cultures, economies, and politics. Architecture could become the institution where today's wicked problems (poverty, gentrification, access to water, ecological justice, empowering women and girls, etc.) enter into public discourse by using architecture as a verb as a means to generate new discussions and/or allow people at the margins to become significant discussants. How can design as cultural praxis allows architecture to be something other than be a bastion of patrimony, a way of inculcating nationalism, a commercially consumed object? Does the tactical urbanism paradigm, when partnered with more permanent institutions, support those left out and behind conservations of culture and society? Does their potential inclusion via design thinking mean that the museum can in fact be used to illuminate the wicked problems of global contemporary society in ways not currently under consideration?

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are displaced in the medinas of the Global South to the courtyards and the rooftops. While Global North urbanism may lay claim to the loggia, porch or the balcony as the liminal space of ambiguity (where the public and private realms commingle), for Arabic urbanism, it is the courtyard and rooftops that serve as a moment of difference. Its activities performed therein also dance between full exposure and concealment, particularly with regard to the patterns of culture for women and children.

37. The term patterns of culture is borrowed from anthropologist Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973).
38. I discuss the issue of difference relative to public space and place making in B.D. Wortham-Galvin, "Queering reuse: An Adaptive Urban Design Methodology in Support of Difference and Resilience," *International Journal of Interior Architecture + Spatial Design*, 5, accepted for publication in Summer 2015.
39. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). Quote from Young, I. M. (2014). *City Life and Difference*. In J.J. Giesking & W. Mangold (Eds.), *The People, Place, and Space Reader*. New York: Routledge. (Originally published 1990): 247.
40. Lefebvre, H. (1996). *The Right to the City*. In E. Kofman & E. Lebas (Eds.), *Writing on Cities*, Oxford: Blackwell. (Original Work published 1968): 179.
41. Young, "City Life and Difference," op cit.
42. Iveson, K. (2014). *Putting the Public Back into Public Space*. In J.J. Giesking & W. Mangold (Eds.), *The People, Place, and Space Reader*. New York: Routledge. (Originally published 1998), 189.
43. Ibid, 190.