

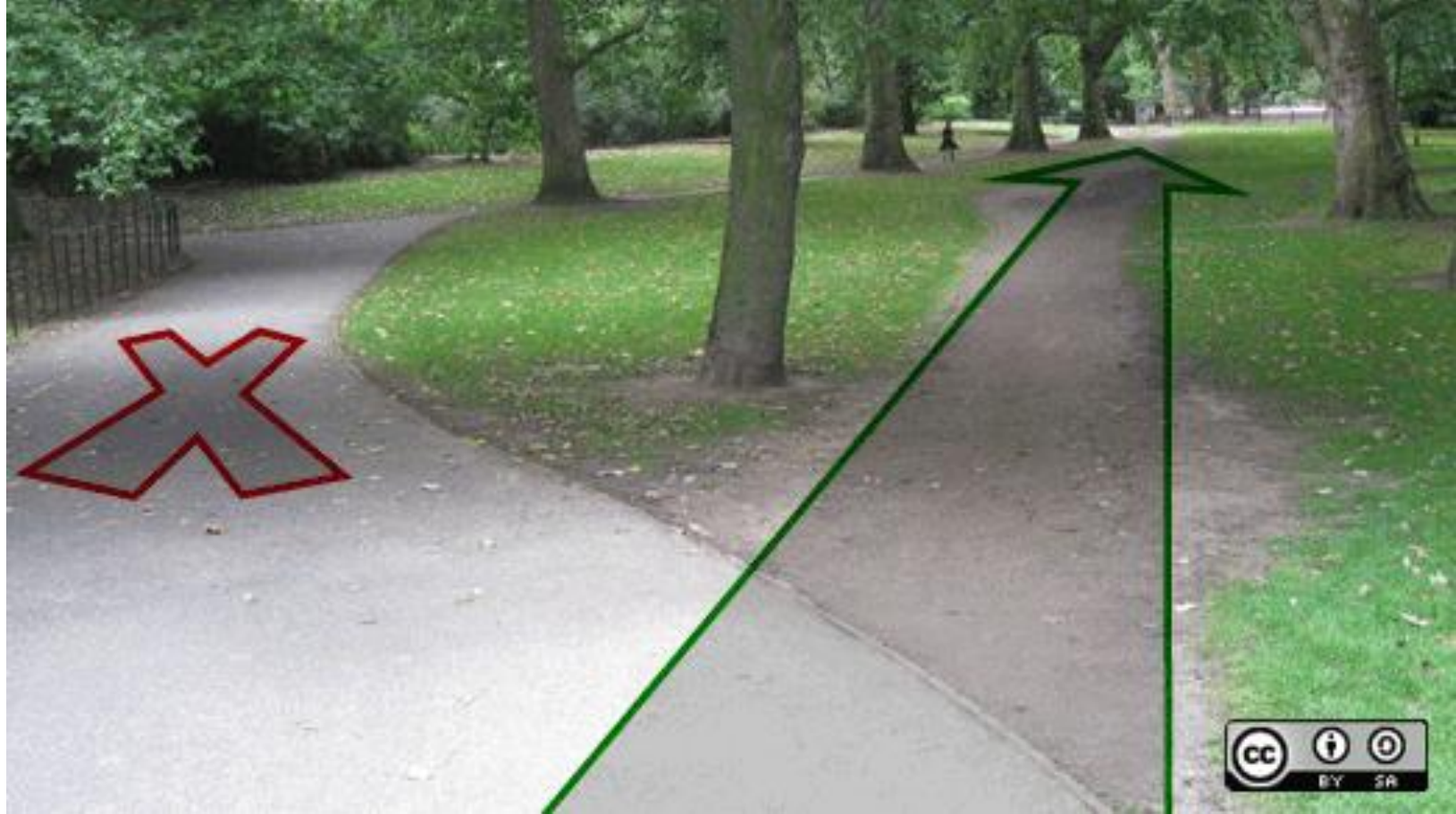
An aerial photograph of a dry, cracked riverbed. A single, weathered piece of driftwood lies horizontally across the center of the frame, where the riverbed narrows. The surrounding landscape is a vast, flat, light-colored expanse, likely a salt flat or a dry lake bed, characterized by a dense network of fine, irregular cracks and larger, more prominent fissures. The overall tone is monochromatic, with various shades of beige, tan, and light brown.

desire paths

correcting the architects

definition

According to Wikipedia, a desire path (also known as a desire line, social trail, goat track or bootleg trail) is a path created as a consequence of foot or bicycle traffic. The path usually represents the shortest or most easily navigated route between an origin and destination. The width and erosion of the path are indicators of the amount of the use that the path receives. Desire paths emerge as shortcuts where constructed pathways take a circuitous route, or have gaps, or lack entirely.



1. Users Vs Architects

(http://opensource.com/sites/default/files/styles/image-full-size/public/images/business/LIFE_DesirePath.png?itok=Rn08s62q)



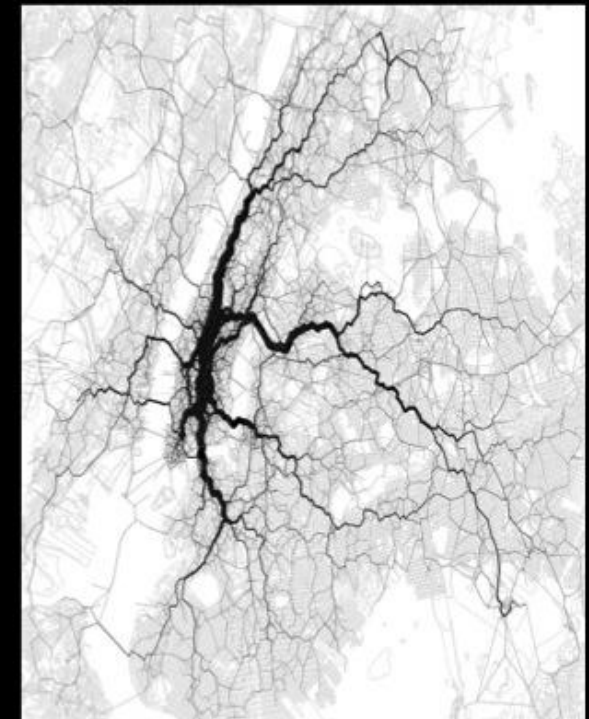
2. Desire Paths after a snowy day in New York (Feb. 9 2013 Blizzard - Mark Bonifacio)

3.

USERS' DESIRE LINES



Nathan Abel's Snow Trajectories of Cattle in Denver



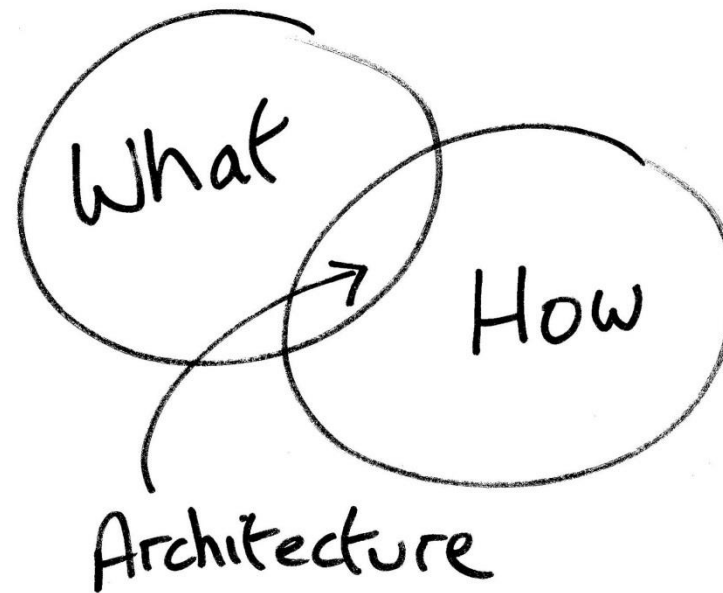
Eric Fischer's Twitter Traffic Map of New York City

why?!

Architects and landscape architects struggle to find the golden line between accessibility and aesthetics, but don't always succeed. When people start dwelling and move around their "masterpieces", it's time for criticism.

"Can architects exist autonomously from the reality established by human experience, activity and identification?"

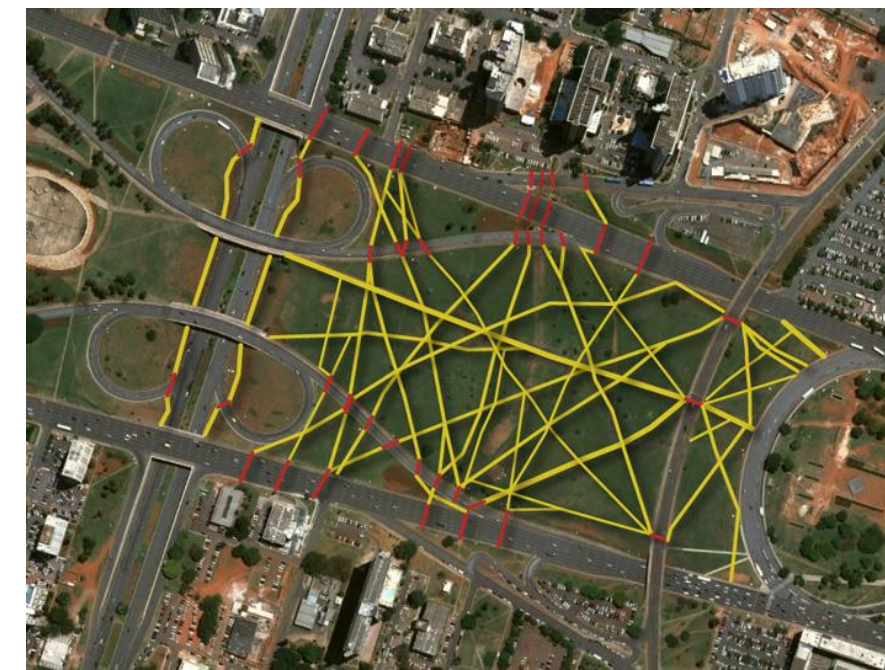
-P. Eisenman



5. and 6.(below) Brasilia: incursions of organic human life superimposed on top of the plan
http://lh5.ggpht.com/HbxfX4sSsyM/SwnU1KsvhRI/AAAAAAAAAD1g/NzZE_q9COj8/s800/Brasilia.jpg



6. (http://lh5.ggpht.com/HbxfX4sSsyM/SwnU1KsvhRI/AAAAAAAAAD1g/NzZE_q9COj8/s800/Brasilia.jpg)



4. People as architects
http://media.tumblr.com/ed43da20960e48d9a700b4014e0fd40b/tumblr_inline_mg75oqB6NG1qebx25.jpg

“The dislocation takes place between the conventional and the natural.”

-P. Eisenman



<http://annkearsley.com/content/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/AKD%E2%80%A2Unity-snow-track-desire-line-12-10-1200x700.jpg>

We can find desire paths all over the urban environment, but not only there. “Beaten paths” is a term for the desire paths that we find in the woods. Desire paths can also be formed after a snowfall in the city. Then people actually “forget” the paths that architects have created for them, and they use their subconscious to get to their destinations, by making their own connections, or just by following the path that others formed first.



<http://overthebarsinmilwaukee.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/desire-line.jpg>

citizens in the role of the architect



A failing in all design thinking is faith that one can perfectly predict human behavior. Often a wiser strategy is to observe first how people are led to specific sites, try to understand, and only then predict.

“Human centrality is an essential question in the context of architectural aesthetics”

-Åsa Dahlin

architects in the role of the citizen

The nature of human being is very complex, and the role of the architect is to understand this nature, and create the environment where human beings can live and develop. Studying in 3 different schools of Architecture the past 8 years, I've been through the different learning process to achieve the above aim. All these process occurred from the big conversation among architects about the implication of accessibility and usability in their design.

In my process I strive to make architecture more user-friendly. That's how I noticed the large amount of desire paths all over the urban environment. During my design process, I don't want only to anticipate how people will move, or to incommode their pathways just for aesthetic reasons. So I begin by incising straight lines on my plans in order to connect the shortest distance for the people to move, keeping in mind that there are people who want to walk along beautiful paths but also people who want to get faster to their destinations without needless diversions. For the same reason I highlight the different entrances and exits on a plan according to their significance or the frequency of their usage. Some other times, I follow patterns that are applied in other reference projects. But I don't copy the references. I just use the knowledge that I gain by observing their usage. I take all the positive and negative points, the desire paths that have been created and I try to find the reasons that led to them. Then I apply this knowledge to my project.

Architects are citizens themselves. Therefore they need to rebuff the role of "God" who creates everything for the people, but instead become the people and adjust their design to the citizens' needs. This is what I always strive to do, and this is what I recommend for our profession to do. Then the desire paths will concur with the actual designed paths, something that flag the success of the architectural profession.



10. The complexity of human being

desire paths as a tool

Desire Paths can be used as a tool in landscape architecture. Citizens have proven that they don't always follow the paths that the architects design for them, but they rather create their own, that connect two places in the shortest, or more convenient way. Therefore, architects should stop designing by anticipating how people will move, but rather conduct some kind of social experiment: Grass or some other trace material can be the "white canvas" of a site plan. For example the courtyard of a public building can be green where the people can walk freely on it. It won't take long until desire paths will be created. Thus, the accessibility to different parts of the buildings can be studied easier. Finally, the paths that people chose to move along can be paved, and that will be with any doubt the best design.

11. Letting the people "walk" their story (State of Michigan, Image Courtesy) of USGS. 2011)



Concluding...

Desire paths make us wonder how central is human being in defining the concept of Architecture. They are the first step towards understanding the importance of the centralized human being in architecture, and of the accessibility around and in the buildings.

There has been a shift in the role of the architect in the '60's. From the use of drawings, architects turned to diagrams and statistics. That means that they started using more the science of observation in order to perform. Nonetheless, in the case of landscape design, architects seem to neglect these observation methods. The designers should consider the fact that common people could have a role in the design process (statistics, diagrams, examples), which will lead to better results.

Desire paths are actually a symbolization of the interaction between human being and their environment. People move around and create traces. Architecture is the science of balance between harmony, utility and beauty, virtues that should be be equally applied. But for some reason, it seems like "accessibility" is a term completely opposite to the aesthetics. And desire paths are the proof of that. When architects design a building, they usually pay more attention on the attainment of the interior accessibility, unlike the exterior and the landscape design. Although desire paths are created outdoors, sometimes Architecture "fails" indoors as well. Therefore architects can use the knowledge that is drawn from desire paths and apply it in the architectural design, both in outdoors and indoors spaces.

What is the quality of the architectural design? Aesthetics, function or both? Architects should deal with the problems and make people feel more comfortable. An optimal way to design pathways in accordance with natural human behavior, is to not design them at all. Simply plant grass seed and let the erosion inform you about where the paths need to be. Finally, desire paths could perhaps, using economic terminology, be seen as a form of revealed user preference or at least revealed choice, with a substantial normative quality.

SOURCES

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