

Preface

Information architecture has changed.

When the practice went mainstream in the mid 1990s, library and information science, the core body of knowledge and expertise introduced by pioneers Lou Rosenfeld and Peter Morville, seemed to be all that was necessary. Information architecture was mostly seen as some sort of library science for the Web, largely tackling problems of labeling, categorization, and ordering.

Today, the illusion of the Web as a library and the Internet as a different and separated world have given way to a much more complex scenario. We live in a post-digital world in which digital and physical blend easily, and the Internet is a piece in a larger mechanism where our activities and our use, consumption and production of information happens across multiple contexts through multiple devices and unstable, emergent choreographies.

We moved from the screen to the world, to portable computing, smartphones and ambient devices, and focus has necessarily moved away from the single artifact, the website, to consider the entire product or service ecosystem as a complex, cross-channel information-based beast, some parts of which might not be online or might not even be digital at all.

Information architecture in the mid 2010s is steadily growing into a channel- or medium-aspecific multi-disciplinary framing, with contributions coming in from architecture, urban planning, design and systems thinking, cognitive science, new media, anthropology, that have been heavily reshaping the practice: conversations about labeling, websites, and hierarchies have been replaced by conversations about sense-making, place-making, design, architecture, crossmedia, complexity, embodied cognition, and their application to the architecture of information spaces as places we live in an increasingly larger part of our lives.

The narratives, frameworks, references, approaches and case-studies in the 11 chapters that follow all vastly exceed in scope and complexity whatever was in place in the mid 1990s: all the same, this is still clearly information architecture, concerned with “structuring information spaces”, orders, and meaning.

Academia has been struggling to keep up, somewhat failing to offer the closure, reflections and criticisms which are necessary to consolidate operational praxis into

a shared and cohesive body of knowledge: this book, presenting contributions from both academics and practitioners as one continuing conversation, is an invitation to acknowledge both the ongoing changes and the mutual dependence between these two camps in the reframing of the field.



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