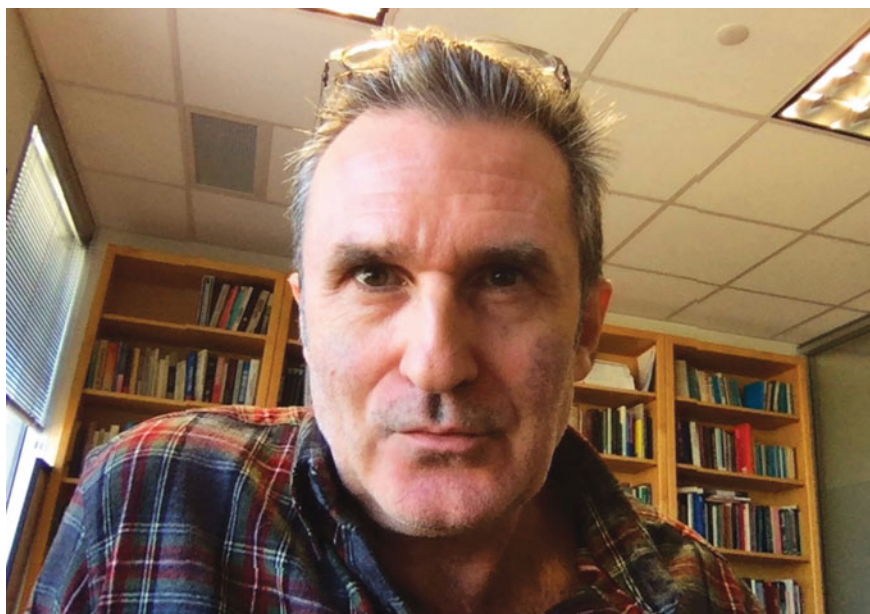# On Being Magpies: In Conversation with Andrew Dillon

Andrea Resmini

Andrew Dillon is currently the V. M. Daniel Professor of Information at the School of Information, University of Texas at Austin, where he served as dean between 2002 and 2017. He was one of the prominent scholars who actively participated in the building of the field in the late 1990s.

A. Resmini (✉)
Department of Intelligent Systems and Digital Design, Halmstad University, Halmstad, Sweden
e-mail: andrea.resmini@hh.se

Jönköping Academy for Improvement of Health and Welfare, Jönköping University, Jönköping, Sweden

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Q: That bio could only be described as terse. Would you mind if we start from what is missing from those few lines that we should know? And how did you and information architecture cross paths?

I suppose I have made a career in information, and that's more by accident than by any intent.

As a graduate student in psychology I became really interested in the actual utility of psychology to shape meaningful acts or behaviors in the world. I was not particularly interested in clinical or industrial work that most of my fellow graduates pursued, and I was troubled by the great disparity between what seemed to me a very rich theoretical landscape expressed in textbooks and classes, and the practical application of this on the lives of people. From what I could tell, psychology rarely went beyond what common sense might have easily predicted or explained.

As luck would have it, I ended up doing my master's thesis with Dr. Jurek Kirakowski at University College Cork in Ireland. He was one of the first faculty members in Ireland interested in what was called Human–Computer Interaction or Human Factors, and he set me on my path to considering design, and particularly the design of interactive information systems, as one area where human behavior was going to be important to understand. I became very interested in user interface design, as we called it then, and in how the scientific understanding of language, perception, and skill development could be used to help companies develop more usable systems. The umbrella term at the time was "information," because it was all information technology.

I went on to do a PhD in England, where I had a great six or seven years at Loughborough University, pursuing my doctoral studies part-time while working with a group of social scientists in the Human Sciences and Advanced Technology (HUSAT) Research Institute. We were doing applied research on the design of everything from kitchen appliances and car interiors to CAD systems for British Aerospace or design tools for European software companies. It was fascinating, captivating, stimulating, and all new. Here was a chance to really apply and test the value of psychology in real world contexts.

My interests solidified around hypermedia and hypertext, which were just emerging at that time, and I started conducting research in that area for my PhD, trying to understand how people navigated large and unstructured document spaces, or determining if we could design information representations that would increase comprehension or performance. From there, I accepted a postdoc at Indiana University, in their psychology department and related Institute for the Study of Human Capabilities where I concentrated on individual differences in human cognition. I returned to England after this, rejoining the HUSAT Institute, but within a year or so I accepted a full-time faculty position back in Indiana. I was young and imagined I would spend a few more years in the US before returning to Europe, but In Indiana I made connections with the computer science program at the School of Library and Information Science and started to feel quite at home there. I spent roughly eight very productive years helping found the School of Informatics, and overseeing the development of a new Master's degree in HCI. I then had the opportunity to come

to Texas to lead the development of the School of Information here, and I took it. Twenty years later, I'm still here.

Back when I was a student, we couldn't have predicted the information infrastructure that has emerged, but the same two questions consistently remain on the table: how does this impact people and what can we do to shape this emerging infrastructure so that it can better augment and complement the way people want to live. Of course, we've also seen a lot more, including the cynical side of information manipulation both from commercial and political interests. There's no end to issues we must address, there's no end to the questions, there's always a sense that we could design this differently and that we certainly could do better. It is important that we do not focus on technological advances, as they're inevitably going to happen and they tend to capture people's attention. What's vital is to understand the human response to new technologies so that we can shape better information infrastructures. In some ways, I think the rest of the world has caught up with the importance of information architecture by smashing right into it. Many are now beginning to reflect back on the emerging information infrastructure we have put in place, and have started asking fundamental ethical and political questions. Information architecture, it seems to me, is at the core of these concerns with our emerging world, even though it might not be the term people use, I sense there is a growing acknowledgement that the issues of concern to us are ultimately of concern to everyone.

Q: What about your history with information architecture and the information architecture community? You were one of the early academics involved in the definition and development of the field. How did it all start?

It is sort of intriguing. I was a bit of a cynic early on when I first heard the term "information architecture." This would have been around 1998–1999. I thought it was a catchy, trendy term for what I was doing and since I was really a scientist, I did not have time for labels. Then in 2000 I attended a CHI conference in Europe: as luck had it, on my way back I was flying in through Boston. Lou Rosenfeld had organized this Information Architecture Summit, under the auspices of ASIS&T, the American Society for Information Science and Technology, and he invited me to be on a panel. The Summit was to take place at the conference facilities of Boston airport: travel-wise, that made it easy for me to participate, and on such turns of luck are futures changed.

I didn't give the topic much thought: I knew a few of the people attending, and my plan was to simply engage in discussion and tell them how I thought information architecture was basically HCI. Yes, it was a nicer name that made us all feel rather good about ourselves, but I went to the panel thinking how short lived the term was going to be since it competed with existing disciplinary names and didn't really offer anything distinctive to warrant separation. And at the end of the weekend, I had changed my mind. Just like that. The enthusiasm of the group, the excitement about the very same issues that I was interested in, often in isolation at Indiana, the fact they were clearly framing problems in a distinctive non-HCI way, terminologically, and just the excitement that here was a group of quite different people all feeling they wanted a community, proved intriguing. I left then thinking there was something in this "information architecture" term that could be powerful.

I went back to Indiana and started talking to colleagues: what is this information architecture thing, what do we mean by that label and could we sort of create a cohesive discipline around it? I attended an event Lou Rosenfeld and Peter Morville organized in La Jolla, under the patronage of the Argus Institute for Information Architecture, to further explore the theme and, of course, the ASIS&T Information Architecture Summits continued for many years (even though summits were supposed to be one-off gatherings to address hot topics).

By the time of the Argus meet, information architecture was generating a lot of interest and there was much discussion on what it all meant. Were we engaged in "big information architecture" or "little information architecture"? These terms meant different things to different people. From my point of view, there was only "big information architecture": I was big picture all the way. I just believed we were architecting a form of existence into the world that was going to touch everybody on the planet, everybody living within these spaces within a few decades. We just had to think about these things on a grand scale. You don't ask your architect to worry about the plumbing: they know you need plumbing, but their role is to consider the building systemically. They need to think about the building as part of the local environment and about its long-term survivability. They have to think about how that space interacts with larger spaces around it and about the experience of people within the new space that's been created for them. They have to think about its look and feel as much as the mechanics, and this requires a big orientation to do properly.

I still believe that the architecture metaphor has limitations. But it does convey this notion of "bigness," this idea of thinking in design terms and in terms of lived experience. I ended up giving several talks on "big information architecture" and I was keen on pushing it as part of the curriculum development at the schools I was in. I agreed to write a column on information architecture for ASIS&T that ran in their Bulletin for five or six years. I also tried to get more information architecture into the ASIS&T conference, and to engage more of my colleagues with information architecture, however it was becoming clearer that the information architecture community that was emerging didn't really want to be part of this other, more traditional, professional association. That's why the Information Architecture Summit became an independent annual event, and a very successful one too. The end result was a new, mostly profession-oriented information architecture community which didn't overlap with the more academically oriented community that ASIST&T represented. Meanwhile, it also became clear that the bifurcation, the "big information architecture" versus "little information architecture" split, would not easily be resolved.

The problem was, and is, that having its own conferences and gatherings is a natural thing for a discipline to do, but an intellectual discipline won't survive unless it has firm roots in the academy, and I think we never quite resolved that for information architecture. If your field doesn't have the sort of scholarly credentials the academy expects, it means you're not going to have an established, accredited process to turn graduates into professionals, or PhDs into researchers and professors. In the long run, the lack of a recognized research and education path has an impact on any profession as well. Normally, this is a slow process, so it's not determined yet for information architecture, but in my view we didn't use our first decade as best as we might have

to lay solid foundations for such a process. Colleagues who are in the professional world, they're perhaps less concerned with this, they have their own concerns and the academic side is a secondary concern at best. For me, as an academic, the education side was and is a crucial identity issue. Information architecture clearly has a core set of ideas and practices that unified lots of work that may not have existed in one single discipline and I still believe there's an opportunity to scope this out. It still hurts to think that we haven't made the discipline more visible to others.

Q: Have we lost a once in a lifetime opportunity there?

I don't believe so. User experience has eaten some of that space, for sure, but also offers us some clues. While it could be argued it is a lump-them-all-together kind of term, and one that doesn't invite very nuanced distinctions between individual practices, user experience has gained traction even in academia. Interestingly, many of the students who come to us seem to consider being an information architect or a user experience designer as two sides of the same professional identity. That would probably not have been true twenty years ago. So, at the speed at which academia moves, maybe we're right on course and we're emerging on schedule. But if I look back, it's clear we never gave much thought to making history. We never thought we were even creating a field. And then the initial excitement got blown out of the water in the dotcom bubble burst. The economy tanked and for a while there was no work in information architecture, which I suppose suited the cynics who did not care for the label, but then when the economy returned, information architecture came back. There was a second wave which has sustained itself over time, and I always tell students that it is very important to be aware that there is a long-standing professional identity we need to manage: people may become very concerned with labels, and sometimes a label gets eradicated because of an economic shift. It's interesting and telling that information architecture was not eradicated: it tells me that the term remains meaningful and the profession is valid. There is a core set of qualities that will survive most economic upturns and downturns, and this is an identity worth retaining.

Q: The relationship between academia and practice is the primary reason behind the Roundtable, this book, and the book before it, "Reframing Information Architecture." All the same, as you were saying, it is not infrequent to find practitioners who don't seem to care too much about the educational or research parts: the link between the formalities of education and research in information architecture and the continuous survival and development of a healthy practice, and vice versa, *are not immediately apparent to them. It isn't now and it wasn't back in the early 2000s, judging by what you and others were saying and writing at the time. So while on one hand you may well have been vindicated, because if anything information everywhere, systemwide "big information architecture," is what has been changing the world in the past twenty years, on the other we haven't yet solved that education/research/practice conundrum, have we?*

No, we haven't. It is a conundrum because if you don't codify your knowledge and find a way of representing it, if you don't have an identity wrapped around some professional ways of being and doing, a discipline fritters away, blown about by

events outside its control. I recognize that when we look at academic disciplines, they can seem stodgy, limited and slow moving. A group gets together, starts their own conference, formalizes regulations for membership, organizes research, curricula, structures its own scholarly output in a venue such as a journal and so on. These all take time. Professions move more nimbly, and in the early part of this century the mood in the information architecture camp was even that information architecture didn't have to do those things, that's not what we were about.

At the time I probably didn't appreciate enough how important professional structures were, in and out of academia. That's not to say that I think the only solution is an association with membership dues, that's a pretty dated model in some respects, but those structures first emerged and stayed around in many intellectual arenas because they help establish and consolidate an identity. I suspect there is real value here that we might have been too quick to dismiss in our embrace of the new. This is one part of it. The other part is that you cannot really establish much that's meaningful and sustainable unless you have a body of knowledge that you can claim, conceptually, theoretically, and practically, as yours. What makes you a biologist, what makes you a doctor, what makes you an information architect. This body of knowledge may not necessarily be exclusively yours: plenty of knowledge, theoretical and practical, is shared across fields. But we didn't succeed terribly well in codifying that kind of knowledge structure within information architecture, partly because we were magpies. We pulled bits from psychology, bits from design, bits from computer science, librarianship etc. and brought them to the nest, hoarded broadly but then reflected sparsely.

This cross-fertilization is a truism for quite a few of early twenty-first century disciplinary movements, but information architecture really needs to become more reflective. A set of core principles and understandings needs to be in place: not everybody has to agree on what is the canon, but a sense of collective engagement with the idea of a core has to be in place so that academics can take up what is normally their responsibility, building that up into a body of knowledge which forms the basis of education and drives new research. I suspect now that if we were asked to say who are the top ten information architecture academics in the United States or the world, we'd struggle. Moreover, I'm not sure many faculty yet identify themselves that way. And I think that's also part of the challenge.

Q: This fluidity you mention is most definitely a part of the troubles information architecture is facing in higher education and academia. In the practice, information architecture, user experience, or information systems can be lumped together or even be confused with one another to no great loss overall. Academia, or an academic career if you will, is built around precise Aristotelian boxes: that something is distinctly identified as information systems rather than computer science matters for publications, funding, curricula, and ultimately space. How are we solving this problem?

The set of concerns centering on information, even as a term, has been broadening and broadening in these past years. I helped create a School of Information at a time when university administrators were scratching their heads telling me one

cannot call a school that, because everybody *does* information. I found that a meaningless criticism: we all communicate and educate as well, but we do have schools of communication and education, so why should information be any different? What we provide here is information architecture, designing and studying the impact of information spaces on people, anything from literacy and usability up to privacy and policy, there are information impacts resulting from this emerging information architecture.

My response would keep administrators quiet for a while, but then new people would come in and the questions would come up again. We're a great school but a small one. We still know that every time a new president or a new provost comes in, they'll scratch their head at some point and come over to visit us and ask "what is it you guys do over here?" I doubt they ever go to the School of Computer Science and say that. I doubt they ever go to the School of Liberal Arts and ask that. But they all come to the School of Information and raise that question. We still have some miles to go before we can convince everyone that information architecture forms a legitimate area of inquiry or scholarship. This concern will outlast me: I'll probably be retired before we even get close to resolving it. As we said, academia works slowly.

These concerns are identical to those you mention in terms of establishing credibility and identity for an epistemological space for information architecture within academia, something I think is really important. I'm still wrestling with that, as an academic and as administrator, but it's clear higher education is still presenting students a skewed perspective in which we do not insist as much as we should on the structural soundness of human experiences. What sort of world are we creating where we get to shape all sorts of experiences for people without addressing what it means to be human or what's good for them, where we do not consider systemically how designs can be manipulated and exploited for someone's advantage? These are clearly, to me, information architecture problems. Which also means that user-centeredness is probably a key to make the role of information architecture more concrete to those who take decisions.

I have a minor obsession with the term "user-centered design" and how it now means many different things to different people. We've never actually really codified it. It is particularly fascinating to think that it emerged in the 1950s from a coalition of interests, early human factors and industrial design, architecture and product design, as an attempt to systematize this idea of the human in the loop being considered part of the design challenge. It predates computing concerns by a decade or more. Architects in the 1960s, maybe using slightly different turns of phrase, were constantly arguing how to systematically address human issues in design. Those arguments actually parallel the arguments we have now, and I'm not sure that we've made a huge amount of progress in that time. We should think of user-centeredness as a core value for information architecture. I would advocate that strongly. Values, to me, are a key component of being a professional.

Q: One could argue that being human-centered is epistemologically inevitable for any type of design activity, after all we don't know what it means to be an octopus, but also that design has explicitly and repeatedly stated a concern for

human-centeredness. I'm thinking of Leonardo's Vitruvian man or, more recently, of Le Corbusier's Modulor.

That's part of our identity but the key to being user-centered is not just to acknowledge we ultimately design for people, of course we do, but that we put the concerns and interests of people first. This is a meaningful difference. It doesn't matter whether the idea came from architecture or from industrial engineering. Human-centeredness is one of the core ideas which the community should find a way of articulating. If you design to extract a transaction from a customer, or just to reduce error in a control process, you are not really being fully user-centered, you are customer-centered, or system centered, and there is a real difference. I think there is a value choice we have to make, and obviously not everyone wants to make it. This book and these conversations, and the work you have done so far, are part of the effort. To me, it's fundamental, it's overdue, and it's exciting that we are doing it. It would be nice if we had all reached agreements on this much earlier on in the emergence of the field, but in a way we couldn't have. These are just naturally long drawn out processes. If you look at the history of any field you see similar patterns. Psychology had its own birth pangs, as did computer science.

Q: It sure feels like a slow process. You mentioned reflectivity. In his 2009 closing keynote at the ASIS&T Information Architecture Summit in Memphis, Jesse James Garrett asked the audience how we knew his work was good. He argued we didn't really know; we just took his word for it. A powerful rhetorical artifice, but also a strong argument in favor of critique if there ever was one. Critique, quality, what is good information architecture have all been topics of discussion at the Roundtable since it began in 2013: we've definitely made progress, but a complete frame has yet to emerge and what is there is primarily conceptual in nature. If we look at the history of design or architecture, the conversations around the artifacts, Breuer's Wassily chair or Starck's Juicy Salif, have traditionally been the focus. We don't center the conversation on what Zaha Adid said in an interview, but rather on the Eli & Edythe Broad Art Museum she designed in East Lansing. Is it good or bad? What are the artifacts of information architecture we should discuss? How should they be discussed? Or is this the wrong approach and we should figure out an entirely different narrative to support that reflective deepening of the conversation you mentioned?

Jesse's point is fascinating. What is "good?" You can point to an award-winning chair now and tomorrow, and it won't change. It's an artifact and it won an award. It might go out of fashion but its qualities as a chair can be recognized over time. We have a challenge. Information architectures shift so rapidly. When we show students the Amazon's homepage from 1994, they don't go "oh that's great." If you show anybody an award-winning design or something that we thought was quite brilliant in 2005, it might now look like it came straight out of the ark. This has even become its own thing, a staple of conference talks: someone shows you an old, tragic-looking web page and everyone laughs. What gets often drowned in that laughter is a more in-depth conversation on why that tragic web page may happen to have represented a major breakthrough at the time. Part of the issue is that I don't think we've even resolved whether we should point to a visible instance or to the process. The latter might be innovative forever, even if the output is not.

Q: That's probably part of the educational gap you mentioned before. We cannot seem to identify correctly what rules we should judge by and so we stop at the low resolution of an image or the odd formatting of a piece of text. It could also be said that, if we consider the epistemological level of the field in accordance with the M3,[1] the digital/physical information architectures we design today are transient, unfinished, and volatile. This is not that dissimilar to what service design theory has wrestled with, and we could glean much from how we've been critiquing expressive art forms such as film, music, or dance. If we can critique a ballet, in itself and in its relationship to the concept and history of "ballet," we should be able to critique a contemporary information architecture. And of course, any such language we devise will evolve over time: not many in 1908 would appreciate or even understand Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction" or Nolan and Joy's "Westworld." No diegetic gaze back then, no scrambling of the timeline. Still, there is a continuously developing body of knowledge we can refer to and that allows us to reflectively appreciate breakthroughs, as you said, or historically situate a specific movie. We similarly understand that early incunabula are not "good books" by today's standards, that the aptly named "boneshaker" might have been an ingenious device but not a "good bicycle," and that the modernist, Corbusian house, a machine to live in, has plenty shortcomings and we probably wouldn't want to live in one, but we understand the validity of what the attention to air, light, heating, and rational spaces meant at the time.

Yes, absolutely spot on. Movies are a fascinating example. A movie from the 1920s or the 1930s will certainly challenge us: the special effects were much more primitive; action scenes, pace, language were all very different; the sense of scale or depth, or even the light they were able to capture with a camera introduced what we would now see as limitations to what they could do. But we can still appreciate the power in the story and how innovative that might have been in shooting a certain scene, because the viewing of that film is an experience.

There is obviously a language or a way of framing the quality of experiences that recognizes the constraints of time which we operate under. We don't have that yet in information architecture, and I don't know that we can borrow that kind of rhetoric from the languages of critique for more experience-oriented fields. Rather than looking for the physical instantiation we should probably ask ourselves which are the elements that constitute a dynamic experience in space. Here the parallel with performance-like experiences could really help. The way we talk about this does hinder our ability to reflect back and get closer to answering Jesse's question about what makes a good information architecture. That's a fundamental question, even if we know that "good" is a loosey goosey term that will also be redefined.

Movies seem also to suggest, as maybe music also does, that some artifacts push beyond the boundaries of the fashion or culture of the time they're created and stand out in a way that we can think about their qualities, whatever they are, independently of that. Those with scientific backgrounds in the community would probably object that if we're going to resort to criticism as a source of insight, we're doomed, and that

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[1]Lacerda, F., & Lima-Marques, M. (2014). Information architecture as a discipline—A methodological approach. In A. Resmini (Ed.), *Reframing information architecture*. Springer.

art criticism means eternal disagreement rather than shared, testable, standards. It is an understandable position, but an unfair one. Are the Beatles the most important musicians in the history of pop simply because they sold more than anybody else?[2] That's a pretty crass kind of measure as well. I don't have a solution, but aligning a language of critique and a language of science is going to prove a real challenge.

Q: For my part, I clearly consider all sorts of design activities, including information architecture, as arts and crafts endeavors. The built environment is my primary key, with its foundations in phenomenology, embodiment, spatiality, and placemaking. In this sense, the "architecture" part of information architecture is definitely not just a metaphor, it is an accurate description of what we do, even though we use more abstract raw materials than bricks and mortar, primarily information, to build spaces and create places. I'm at peace with the idea that criticism is what we need, with all of its shortcomings. As you said, it's not like knowing someone had a billion downloads on Spotify tells me anything for certain in terms of how important that song will be in the history of music. Both approaches have their place in a healthy conversation, as do different ways of assessing value and schools of thought, but we're most definitely missing the former while we have some of the latter thanks to human-computer interaction and related fields.

Acknowledging each other's existence would be a first step. We have ways to evaluate performances across disciplines which aren't science and that are not firmly rooted in peer evaluation: the humanities, the arts, we know how to gauge contributions in those spaces which are critique based. If I have to reflect and try to answer Jesse's question, how would I know that he has done good information architecture work? I've heard him talk. I've read some of his work. I've listened to him argue and I formed my evaluation that way. None of that is based on any external acknowledgment such as awards, nor can I point to design evidence. That's much more elusive. That's not necessarily wrong as you say, but the question he raised speaks to the uneasiness that exists in the community about establishing our credentials and giving ourselves equal authority to other disciplines. As an academic, one way to get there is by consolidating our epistemology, what we claim about the world and the role of information architecture in it. We'll argue about these things: every field does, but it's part of maturing and a process that perhaps we might want to pursue a little more actively.

Q: What are the core ideas you consider important to consolidate information architecture as its own field? What are we missing?

Well, since I'm a psychologist I would say that there are some fundamental basics about the way humans grasp the world that we have to build on.

I do believe as you do that we're part craft, design, but I also think we're part science, and I actually think those two ways of problem solving are not terribly far apart, as I try to teach students. If you're designing, at some point you'll take a leap,

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[2]Even more poignantly, if we consider album sales, Garth Brooks is the second best-selling artist of all time. Bob Dylan is 45th, two positions behind the Backstreet Boys. Source: Clark, T. (2020). The 50 best-selling music artists of all time. Business Insider. https://www.businessinsider.com/best-selling-music-artists-of-all-time-2016-9.

maybe from a set of requirements or maybe from a very fuzzy concept, and think of a solution. What is that leap? How do you make that jump? I sure can't teach you how to "create." This is the step you yourself take based on your entire life experience. Science, psychology can provide you with guidelines for what you should rule in or rule out in making the leap. If you design against the principles of visual closure or the limitations of short-term memory, your solution is likely to be less useful, less acceptable, or less desirable. These principles aren't going to serve you for every possible solution in every possible situation, but they help acquiring the necessary experience, the craft, that over time allows one to distinguish between good and bad information architecture. This is not to say that we should suddenly become an annex of psychology, but there are rules and principles of how people respond to information that we should know about.

Should we worry about the design of organization-level structures? I think we should. I consider that a fundamental area of application for information architecture: how do contexts of use evolve and what are the dynamics of a group adopting, using, and sharing these information spaces. Principles of sociology and organizational theory can be brought into facilitate that necessary leap from requirements to solutions.

What belongs in here is not just an understanding of user-centered design, it is a methodological understanding of design processes in general, of how far structured methods can take you, and of the layered nature of information architecture. Designers bring to the process a form of codified knowledge about design which is different from the one I bring as a social scientist. Additional disciplinary contributions would add more perspectives. An information architecture curriculum would need to codify these different languages and approaches into a coherent vision. What I most surely wouldn't do is spend a lot of time arguing about what goes in and what moves out. It's not as if we can aspire to having an absolutely clear-cut curricular identity for information architecture that would work everywhere. We'll always have disagreements, but maybe it wouldn't be as hard as it might have been twenty years ago.

Q: If it might not be as hard, what's standing in our way then?

If we talk about the academy, then people, administrators. But they're a barrier because the real issue, the real challenge is attracting into a field sufficient people from outside who can recognize what we do. One of the strengths or probably the greatest strength of our school, and any school like ours for sure, even though I can only speak to ours in particular because it was designed this way, is that we might have twenty faculty and thirteen or fourteen different PhDs: we have sociologists, historians, philosophers, designers, computer scientists. People ask "how did that happen?" and I say "by design," it was intentional. For prospective candidates, it's not their background or their disciplinary box that matters: it's the questions they ask and how they go about answering them.

Within an academic environment, this has its challenges. We still have endless discussions with junior faculty who say they come from a certain tradition, publish only in certain journals, and who are worried about how their work will be evaluated

by those who might have different touchpoints. We tell them they'll be evaluated on their own strengths, that they shouldn't worry about trying to fit into what they imagine are the top two or three journals in the field, but this is not common practice nor an established way of looking at one's career in academia. It also collides with other academic fields where senior faculty can typically point junior faculty to the top five journals and tell them go on, publish there and you'll get tenure. Our approach is more along the lines of "just do some interesting work and share it with the world: we're going to recognize you for that, do it and let's worry about how to explain it in five years." It still doesn't eliminate the stress that derives from having to bravely chase one's goals for five years with the end line looming close enough to have one asking constantly "am I making progress or am I going to be out of a job?". Infrastructure and leadership are vital here, they exist to create a better space, and while we've done, I believe, a pretty good job at Texas, it's inevitably slow work. I've now spent fifteen or sixteen years of my life helping create this kind of environment. It's also fifteen years where the legitimate question could be "where were you in the information architecture community?" and the answer is I was on the underside, building infrastructure. It's still, I believe, extremely important work for the reasons I mentioned, but not that obvious in the eyes of the field at large.

Q: I couldn't agree more. And we covered some of what you have been doing and some of what has happened, so maybe this interview will help answer that question, if it ever comes up. I have one final curiosity: suppose you could peer into a magical crystal ball. What does the future of information architecture look like?

It's pure blue skying, but I would say the potential and possibilities are huge. "Big information architecture" is a very meaningful label for a set of concerns, of methods, of practices, and of beliefs that wrap around a set of values that matter enormously for today's world. I hope enough people are beginning to understand that the creation of the information infrastructure that everybody on the planet will exist in very shortly happens to be a pivotal moment for our existence and it's vital that we get it right. It is a precious human space that will carry all sorts of implications for how we live, and that must be designed for correctly. As we get a chance to shape it, we should address fundamental issues of equality and fairness. Information and its architecture should augment us in a way that enhances our better tendencies rather than our negative ones. That would imply an even bigger information architecture, shifting even more away from doing the building to actually concerning itself with ethical and perhaps even moral issues. That's something that we may have to wrestle with going forward.

In a more practical sense, the world is realizing now that information architecture is fundamental to existence on this planet. The world at large may not use our terms, they may not understand that information architecture exists as we see it, but they recognize the changes. In forty years, there's not going to be anybody left on this planet who remembers a time when there wasn't a pervasive information architecture of that kind. Not often can you point to moments like this in human history: we might end up being forgotten by history, some weird anomaly that a postgraduate student will unearth two hundred years in the future and remark: "You know, two hundred

years ago there were these people talking about information architecture like it needed to be understood and shaped." By then, information architectures are going to be such an integral part of everyday life that they're taken for granted, and people then will have a hard time envisioning that there was a time people were wrestling with this and doubting information architecture was "a thing" or if it was "big" or "little."

We're entering that phase now and the opportunity for us as a discipline is there. Are we still going to argue amongst ourselves? Yes. Will we find out in ten years that young information architects still worry about whether their identity or the professional role is recognized and understood? I suspect as much. But can we now take a leadership role in helping to alleviate some of that? I think we should and, judging by this conversation, we are. Just remember we're magpies.

Andrea Resmini is associate professor of experience design and information architecture in the Department of Intelligent Systems and Digital Design at Halmstad University and the Director of Innovation and Research at the Center for Co-production, Jönköping Academy for Improvement of Health and Welfare at the School of Health and Welfare, Jönköping University. An architect turned information architect, Andrea is a two-time past president of the Information Architecture Institute, a founding member of Architecta, the Italian Society for Information Architecture, the Editor-in-chief of the Journal of Information Architecture, and the author of *Pervasive Information Architecture* (2011) and *Reframing Information Architecture* (2014).