

Andrea Resmini

Limbic Resonances

Editorial

In the 2015 sci-fi thriller / drama series “Sense8”, written by the Wachowskis and J. Michael Straczynski and directed by the Wachowskis, the eight protagonists — born on the same day in different parts of the world — form a cluster of people who can communicate telepathically, and experience and feel what any of the others is experiencing through some form of heightened “limbic resonance” [1]. Unbeknownst to them, they are what the show calls “homo sensorium” or “sensate”, the next step in the evolution of mankind [2]. Chased by a sinister shadow organization which seems bent on eradicating sensates from the gene pool, or maybe turn them into weapons, the group progresses from confusion and doubts about their own sanity to fully embracing their collective self — and the power that comes with it — and use it to fight back.

An affirmative, heartfelt spectacle, but also a slow-burn that spends a lot of time on character development rather than on plot points or action sequences, “Sense8” certainly may be read like a cinematic investigation of society’s current coming to terms with the collective presence made possible by digital and its consequences, the protagonists’ “limbic resonance” — their capacity to share and empathize and “be there” for each other — a sci-fi musing on how “technology simultaneously unites and divides us” [3] and what could happen if empathy and a love of each other were what an online society could light up in people.

“Sense8” can be, and has been, critically lauded for its take on identity and gender, but my love for the show originates from how clearly and deeply it cares for its characters and because of its ability to very explicitly capture today’s new sense of presence, the shared lives we all live, and make that “being here and elsewhere” visible and meaningful to viewers in a way that only good storytelling can.

The idea of writing about place and presence in “Sense8” — how shots and sequences are treated by the Wachowskis — has been at the back of my mind since 2015. Through the years, I have been infrequently but steadily adding notes and thoughts to a black notebook — now containing a motley crew of entries discussing composition, timing, cuts, camera movements, point of view — and slowly working out a structure for what I believe is

starting to look like a book chapter. So when journal administration required me to go through the post-2019 editorials, the fact that in the [Spring 2021 one](#) I wrote that the journal had important contributions to make in terms of “world-hood”, “thing-ness”, and “presence”, in its many possible meanings, just screamed “Sense8” at me. At the back of my mind for sure, and a limbic resonance if ever there was one.

In that editorial, I listed those “many possible meanings” as being primarily related to the role of information architecture “in a world where information is seamlessly (being) embedded in the fabric of everything”; to how presence is now inextricably connected to ideas of consent, inclusion, participation, representation, and co-creation; and to the recognition of information architecture as an existing but often misidentified or downplayed part of any information-based artifact.

In an information-rich world, the information architecture of the world — from songs or movies to houses and cities, from products and services all the way to superstructures such as education or political representation — is the critical component we keep overlooking. Who cares for the piping as long as the water is flowing and there’s no leak, after all? How could the journal help make this piping and its importance more visible and meaningful, more present?

In that editorial, I also compared the journal to a privateer, and ships keep a log of their ports of call. Those logs are a bare-bone narrative record of their journey, but they are also official documents. The narrative record of information architecture, some 25 years after “Information Architecture for the World Wide Web” hit the shelves and almost fifty after Wurman’s seminal “Architecture of Information” conference for the AIA, is slowly disappearing from the hard disks and the memory of those who were there, from the internet, from history. A new generation of practitioners is stepping up who weren’t even born when the “Polar Bear” book made its debut: being able to show where we have been and where we come from is becoming more and more important by minute. Presence needs a past to build a future, and we haven’t been particularly good at keeping our past present.

This is what we start to formally address with this issue, taking baby steps into very large and ambitious plans that we will begin to deliver in earnest in 2024 and beginning to weave what can only be qualified, as of February 2023, as a critical rhizome of limbic resonances that link the past of information architecture to its present and its future. The journal will collect, critically consolidate, publish, and maintain key information architecture resources — that are currently dispersed on the internet and hard to come by — accessible. The editorials will contribute additional pointers to articles and materi-

als which have marked the history of information architecture but that have been, with time, pushed to the side. Once more, let's dance.

The Business of Understanding (2000)

This article is a long excerpt from chapter 2 of “Information Anxiety 2”, Richard Saul Wurman’s 2000 book, and includes Nathan Shedroff’s discussion of the relationship between data, information, and knowledge.

The Ethics of Information Architecture (2000)

Morville’s column on the ethics of information architecture, published in the ACIA [4] “Strange Connections” [5] column of November 2000.

Designing Digital Space Through a Visual Language (2000)

Axel Kilian’s dissertation for the Master of Science in Architecture Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology presents an interesting point of view on the evolution of the discourse on the spatiality of digital in the past twenty-five years. Kilian maintains that approaches toward digital space mainly “mimic physical space”, and that an alternative approach based on vision and memory is possible.

The Information Architecture of Cities (2004)

Nikos A. Salingaros’ discussion of the information architecture of cities published in the Journal of Information Science in 2004. Salingaros approaches the city as a dynamic, complex “information architecture system”, and posits that thriving cities have to surpass a “complexity threshold” to avoid becoming “dead and sterile”.

Information Architecture (2005)

Andrew Dillon and Don Turnbull’s discussion of information architecture for the 2005 Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science. Part history and part critical reassessment, the article is a great snapshot of the reflective conversations being had right before the crisis that hit around 2006–2007.

References

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Rosenfeld, L. and Morville, P. (1998) *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web* (1st ed). O’Reilly Media.

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Footnotes

[1] For more on “limbic resonance” outside of science-fiction, see Lannon, R., Ammini, F. and Lewis, T. (2000). *A general theory of love*. Random House; and Barsade, S. G. (2002). The Ripple Effect: Emotional Contagion and its Influence on Group Behavior. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47(4), 644–675. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3094912>.

[2] “More Than Human” is the title of a 1953 science fiction novel written by Theodore Sturgeon that in all probability was the spark from which “Sense8” originated. The novel tells the story of a group of six extraordinary individuals who can “blesh” — blend and mesh — their abilities together and act as one organism.

[3] PR Newswire (2013) Only On Netflix: Sci-Fi Giants The Wachowskis And J. Michael Straczynski Team-Up To Create “Sense8”. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/only-on-netflix-sci-fi-giants-the-wachowskis-and-j-michael-straczynski-team-up-to-create-sense8-200215501.html>.

[4] The Argus Center for Information Architecture (ACIA) will later develop into the Information Architecture Institute: more about it in “Advances in Information Architecture”. See References.

[5] The column, that Morville ran for a little more than seven months between 2000 and 2001, remains a vital resource today. https://argus-acia.com/strange_connections/.

Cite as

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A two-times past president of the Information Architecture Institute, Andrea co-founded the Journal of Information Architecture; *Architecta*, the Italian Society for Information Architecture; the *Academic / Practitioner Roundtable*; and *World IA Day*. Andrea is a compulsive reader of WWII submarine warfare trivia, Tolkien drafts, and Jack the Ripper case studies. He is the current Editor-in-Chief of the journal.

