

## Architecture in Light of the Notions of Form and Information

*“The notion of form must be replaced by that of information”,  
Gilbert Simondon, *L’individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et  
d’information*, 1958 (2005)*

The word information, both in English and in French, finds its root in the Latin *informare* from *in* ‘into’ plus *forma* ‘a form’ meaning ‘to give form’, or ‘to form an idea of’. Originally employed to indicate the forming of the mind or teaching, the term information (Latin provides also *informatio*, signifying ‘concept’ or ‘idea’) was moreover associated to Plato’s, and later Aristotle’s, arguments about ideal forms, or ideas (*eidos*), as the most accurate representation of reality and the sole objects of study capable of generating knowledge. Ancient Greek had three terms signifying form: *eidos*, ‘visible form’; *morphē*, ‘shape’; and *phainomenon*, ‘appearance’. The observation of the variable character of appearances led Greek philosophers to examine the relation between substance, or matter, and form. The debate crystallized in the classical doctrine of hylomorphism, formulated by Aristotle, according to which matter is what undergoes transformation of form, in other words, inert substance on which form is imposed.

Currently the term information is generally understood and defined by dictionaries also as “what is conveyed or represented by a particular arrangement or sequence of things”; “data as processed, stored, or transmitted by a computer”; or, “a mathematical quantity expressing the probability of occurrence of a particular sequence of symbols, impulses, etc., as contrasted with that of alternative sequences”. Such present understandings were heralded, during the late 1930s and 1940s, in the area of telecommunication and in the applied research laboratories that contributed to the war effort developing servomechanisms. Theories and technologies from these techno-scientific fields converged and concurrently gave birth to Information theory and Cybernetics. Methods and concepts from both disciplines found immediate, convincing, applications in biology, sociology, anthropology, psychology, linguistics, and a host of other areas, including architecture and urbanism, catapulting us in our so-called “information age”. French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, in the radical *Individuation in the Light of the Notions of Form and Information* (1958), a stringent critique of the theories of information advanced in cybernetic circles, was the first to emphasize how the redefinition(s) of the concept of information necessitated a fundamental rethinking of the classical ideas of being, knowledge, and above all, matter and form.

Today, in the age of “big data”, Artificial Intelligence, 3D printing machines, and robots, confronted with exponentially growing amount of information to be processed and archived, a new generation of architects, planners and designers in every field seem at least tentatively to be addressing and questioning the relation between matter and form. The proposal for the next Phyllis Lambert International Seminar, to be held in the Fall 2018, is to convene philosophers, architects, and media theorists to debate on matter (in)formation.

**Speakers:**

- Andrea Bardin, Department of Social Sciences, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.
- Neeraj Bhatia, California College for the Arts, San Francisco.
- Orit Halpern, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Concordia University, Montreal.
- Shannon Mattern, School of Media Studies, The New School, New York
- Emanuele Quinz, Université Paris 8, EnsadLab, l'École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.
- Gilles Retsin, The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, London.
- Dubravka Sekulic, IZK Institute for Contemporary Art, Graz Technical University, Graz.
- Nader Tehrani, Cooper Union, Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture, New York.
- Kathy Velikov, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

**Moderators:**

- Thomas Balaban, École d'architecture, Université de Montréal
- Samuel Bernier-Lavigne, École d'architecture, Université Laval, Québec
- Sinisha Brdar, École de design, UQAM, Montréal
- Salmaan Craig, Peter Guo-hua Fu School of Architecture, McGill University, Montreal

- Fabrizio Gallanti, École d'architecture, Université de Montréal/ Peter Guo-hua Fu School of Architecture, McGill University, Montréal

-Irena Latek, École d'architecture, Université de Montréal