# 'High Code' architecture

## *A diagram of de-materialization and reinstallation of architecture*

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abstract
*Architectural representations do not merely realize the transmission of intervened information between the architect and his audience. Through the growing importance of representation and the use of digital means of expression, which is obviously met in contemporary architectural discourse, one can safely suggest that in certain cases the information is created rather than treated or consumed through the procedure of digital representation.*

*The issue raised is of far greater range than just the replacement of traditional means of representation. One can already trace definite signs of a new communicative entity, profoundly based upon the use of digital means, alongside the classic body of architecture. This new essence is the result of architectural representation, in its autonomous interpretation, when it creates the meaning and the information that initially was assigned only to transmit. All these special conditions are more effectively reflected into a new concept, this of 'high code architecture'.*

*'High code architecture' implies and presupposes the existence of an additional inner mechanism that creates it. The procedure of emancipation of the architectural representations is rather incomplete without the validity of an associating mechanism between the representation itself and the represented object. This phenomenon can be studied through a diagram of de-materialization and reinstallation of architecture. This diagram is materialized in three distinctive stages:*

*1. The architectural object is de-materialized through various representations and procurations via digital, figurative and print media to finally become an image.*

*2. The images, as representatives and/or substitutes of an architectural object, re-materialize and form a kind of architecture that is of 'abstracted perception' and free of theoretic and ideological weights.*

*3. An array of morphological types, 'iconic pictures' is created, that form the base of the so called 'high code architecture'.*

*Keywords: Architecture; Representation; Image; Iconic.*

## Introduction

Architectural representations do not merely realize the transmission of intervened information between the architect and his audience. Through the growing importance of representation and the use of digital means of expression, which is obviously met in con-

temporary architectural discourse, one can suggest that in certain cases the information is more *formed* and *shaped* rather than only *treated* or *consumed* through the procedure of digital representation. And one can relatively safely talk about a major shift of focus through the entire design process, from concept to construction. What is completely new, different and inherent in digital images, as they exist today is the astonishing ease of their production, their reproduction and their global, real time distribution among the architectural communities all over the world.

The issue raised is of far greater range than just the replacement of traditional means of representation. The insightful ones, among all scientific observers, can already trace definite signs of a new communicative entity, profoundly based upon the use of digital means, alongside the classic body of architecture. This new essence is the result of architectural representation, in its autonomous interpretation, when it creates the meaning and the information that initially was assigned only to transmit. It constitutes a typical case of what Jean Baudrillard (1994) describes as 'simulacrum', an autonomous model of simulation or representation. There is evidence for the validity of this new entity and its registration as a substitute for architecture. A whole star-system for architects and their creations is already based on creation shown or visualized and not actually constructed.

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While all the above is carefully kept within the frames of a rather limited discussion, related to technical mat-

ters that concern the mechanism of production of this new entity, this wouldn't mean that the phenomenon does not bear projections and implications of architectural, social, spatial or morphological kind. All these special conditions are more effectively reflected into a new concept, this of 'high code architecture'.

'High code architecture' implies and presupposes the existence of an additional inner mechanism that creates it. The procedure of emancipation of the architectural representations, as mentioned before, is rather incomplete without the validity of an associating mechanism between the representation itself and the represented object. Whether the architectural creation foregoes or follows its representation, this mechanism beholds the potential bond of both tails.

This phenomenon can be studied through a diagram (Figure 1) of de-materialization and re-installation of architecture.

This diagram is evolving in three distinctive stages. Bearing a standard of controlled abstraction, these stages could be described as follows:

## First stage: Loss, Architecture is de-materialized

The issue here has to do with the relation between architecture and its representation. This representation can be of various types, whether two dimensional documentation drawings, or three dimensional projective representational drawings, linear perspective drafts or chromatic approaches, plain traditional paintings or mixed collage techniques, digital photorealistic illustrations or broader data simulations, virtual reality applications or combinations of any
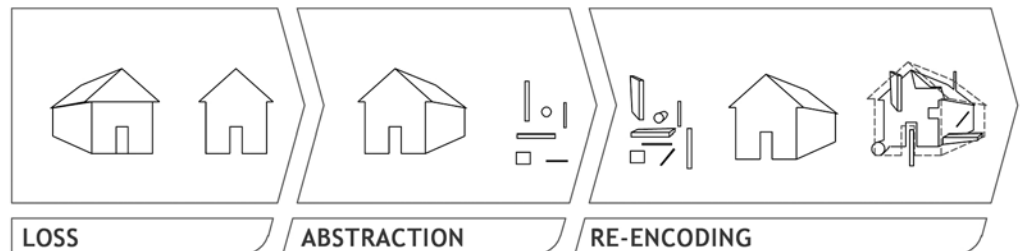


*Figure 1*
*Diagram of de-materialization and re-installation of architecture*

of the above. Whatever the representation may be, there is a fundamental common attribute.

This attribute is no other than the common denominator of the loss of one dimension. The three dimensional architectural project gives its place to a two dimensional image entity. Whether it is constructed or not yet realized, whether it is fictional or virtual, it 'squeezes' itself in the limited frames of a space 'one dimension less' than its previous state. Even the experience of navigating in real time and in three dimensional spaces, offered by today's digital technology and the relevant software, in most cases it is not more than an intellectual convention, with logical concessions, or even illusions and vague reflections of space. Singular cases, though, should be taken separately into consideration. There are very successful examples, when virtual reality projects are a real three dimensional conception venture, such as the 'Osmose' project (1995, Char Davies, Softimage). They do not describe the average situation, though.

What remains after this stage is the 'image' of architecture. The 'lost' dimension of architecture is its 'lost' physical mass. This is obviously open to a double-sided interpretation. For some, the image of architecture is an amputated version of architectural truth. For others, the produced image is the pure essence, the very conceptual notion of architecture, without the limitations applied by geometrical and morphological tolerances of the mass and by the physical volume of things.

If someone would attempt to see this stage's application to the 'real' architectural world, one could examine the modern movement in architecture. The kind and the quantity of modern iconography that has prevailed through the last 80 years that Modernism exists, is a typical example of how images can be created as an immaterial, iconic interpretation of a series of architectural projects.

## Second stage: Abstraction, Images are re-materialized

The second stage describes the procedure that produces form and space, as a spatial interpretation of the image. The images, as representatives and/or substitutes of an architectural object, re-materialize and form a kind of architecture that is of 'abstracted perception' and free of theoretic and ideological weights. Architectural form of this kind appears and is realized without a previous intellectual process and speculation, which was necessary for traditional architectonic gestures. Main task of this stage is the absolute transmission of the image's qualities as they are left from the first stage to a three dimensional architectural project.

Basic characteristic of this stage is abstraction. This abstraction involves both the immaterial qualities of an architectural project, such as the meaning, the ideological identity and the political position, as well as the morphology of the space produced. There are two possible explanations as to what is really the truth underlying the political suggestion above. Whether architecture is no longer expected to lead a political and ideological intervention, or politics itself has cancelled its role to lead and act as a pioneer in social life and architecture is consequently following. In any case, after this second stage, architecture is reduced to a mere materialization of its creator's aesthetic vision, directly dependent on the relevant image. For what concerns the architectural form, this abstraction is not expressed only as an attempt to obliterate all that is redundant. It is mostly expressed through the consideration as redundant of every element that implies something more than the aesthetic suggestions of the image.

Returning to the modern movement as a large scale, long lasting case study, this second stage can describe with a relative accuracy the transition from modern to post-modern. The intrinsic difficulty to constitute a coherent theory for the post modern experiment can be quite obviously explained through the scheme mentioned above. The post modern, as a re-materialization of the modern image is sterile when it comes to define a meaning, a reason and a philosophical rationale.

## Third stage: Re-encoding, High code architecture

The third stage has already received a group of images from the first part of the procedure as well as a set

of abstract architectural three dimensional gestures as defined previously. In a condition of conceptual maturity, the two preceding stages are to be confronted to reality and find a place to exist in a complicated environment, socially, politically, economically and technologically. It is the environment that was ignored and overlooked during the second stage, an environment constantly present, though.

What happens next is architecture taking up a new theoretical load. This time the load is encoded; it consists of a condensed collage of meanings, a set of implications seemingly irrelevant to each other. The notions of variety, complexity and contradiction are once again present. The difference this time is that these qualities do not proclaim any extroversion similar to the kind of architecture entering the first stage. These notions are hidden, imploding to themselves, focusing in their own attributes. The most impressive aspect of this procedure is that it does not always end up with a constructed version of architecture. With an ever increasing rate, they remain as a web of visual representations, where meaning does not derive from each image separately, but from their entirety.

The result is the base of the so called 'high code architecture'. It is a version of architecture that does not feel the need to be realized, but is fulfilled by visually mentioning a certain architectonic issue. It is a version of architecture, which creates an array of morphological types, 'iconic pictures' (Hill, 1998). This version of architecture is a group of spatial operations, which look like a three dimensional graphics exercise, adopting techniques and routines that were formerly mainly used in other fields, such as the periodical press and the electronic media. Adopting such media characteristics, 'high code architecture' is a rich, fragmentary architecture, involving a dense load of meaning, with no strong sense of coherence connecting them.

## Conclusion

The issue raised, is that of the renegotiation of the architect's role. Whether that is one of expansion or of substantial deviation, it is always viewed through his/her part as the protagonist in a diagram of architectural creation. Digital technology has dramatically facilitated certain aspects of the architect's task. At the same time it has opened up and vigorously enlarged the related 'audience', by adding new groups of architectural consumers, the majority of which could be described as architecturally illiterate. Architects passively accepted this audience, as market tactics initially suggested and ultimately demanded so. This audience once again encouraged and accommodated both by market rituals and by the digital revolution, seems to treat and consume architecture with the exact same greed and bulimia that it treats any other product.

Everyone involved in the procedures of architecture stand ecstatically in front of such a massive phenomenon, which tends to permanently disorientate architecture as we know it. It seems as more important to define precisely the questions, rather than try to set the frame of the answers. None of the two tasks, after all, can bear unilateral approaches.

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