

# РАЗВИТИЕ ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИХ КОНЦЕПТОВ

## DEVELOPMENT OF THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

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### ЛОТМАН И БАХТИН В СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ТЕОРИЯХ АРХИТЕКТУРНОГО ДИЗАЙНА<sup>®</sup>

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**Аннотация.** Сегодня теоретическое и социологическое влияние диалогических социальных теорий Бахтина и Лотмана на искусство и, в частности, архитектуру очень значительно. Это влияние анализировалось в течение последних пятидесяти лет, но необходимо проделать большую работу, чтобы понять огромный потенциал этих диалогических теорий в архитектуре, как на практике, так и в теории.

В этой статье я проведу анализ некоторых недавних идей, касающихся диалогического генезиса архитектуры и градостроительства, чтобы потом вернуться во времени и описать причины, по которым теории диалога Бахтина и Лотмана не были приняты архитекторами и дизайнерами в целом и почему до сих пор остаются в тени. Это не тривиальный способ исторического анализа культуры, временная инверсия здесь обусловлена сложностью вопроса, поскольку исследование антропологических пространств происходит совершенно иначе, нежели антропологический и культурный анализ очеловеченного течения времени.

**Ключевые слова:** семиотика архитектурного проектирования; пространственное познание; межличностная и межлокативная интерсубъективность.

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**Lotman and Bakhtin in the architectural design theories of today<sup>©</sup>**

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*Abstract.* The theoretical and sociological impact of Bakhtin and Lotman, with their dialogical social theories, upon architecture and art in general is very significant today. This impact has been analyzed over the last fifty years, but a lot of work is needed to understand the enormous potential of these dialogical theories in architecture, both in practice and in theory.

In this article I will start with some recent ideas in relation to the dialogical genesis of architecture and urban planning, to describe later why this singular work of Bakhtin and Lotman has not been accepted by architects and designers in general, and why it remains in the shadow. This is not a common approach to the historical analyses of culture, but the complexity of the matter calls for an inverted temporal way, since anthropological spaces work in a very different way from the anthropological cultural analyses of the human dimensions of time.

*Keywords:* Semiotics of architectural design; spatial cognition; interlocative and interlocutive intersubjectivity.

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## **1. On interlocative and interlocutive intersubjectivities today**

The insistence on the exclusive use of the philosophical ideas by Heidegger in the study of architecture with hundreds of quotations [Nesbitt, 1996] has prevented the expansion of the ideas by Bakhtin and Lotman [Muntañola, 2021], despite the extended analyses by Paul Ricoeur on the links between Bakhtin's and Lotman's ideas and his own work on modern hermeneutics and phenomenology [Ricoeur, 1984].

Diagram 1 defines the fundamental phenomenological space and time structures of the human existence extracted from the last books and articles by Ricoeur [Ricoeur, 2000; Ricoeur, 2001; Ricoeur, 2004]. The specific role of space in the human life, defined by Ricoeur as the third level of space and time structures in architecture, that is, the architects' designs, coexists, in that Diagram, with the works of the writers and this, according to Ricoeur, was forgotten in Heidegger's ideas. In a

lecture in Barcelona some years ago, M. Holquist described these differences in detail [Holquist, 2015].

According to Ricoeur's ideas, the space-time of architecture has the same epistemological and hermeneutic status than the space-time in literary texts, where the author, the text and the reader built the hermeneutic cycle. In architecture, the design, the construction, and the user, follow the same cycle [Ricoeur, 2016].

However, and in relation to the space and time human experiences and meanings, these «interlocutive» dimensions of verbal languages follow the arbitrary conventional codes of the words, and the concept «architectonics» by Bakhtin plays with the ambiguity of the different layers of meaning in literature and in other arts, where the human spatial dimensions are not physically present in the text, since only exist in a metaphorical way [Bakhtin, 1985; Лотман, 1966; Lotman, 1975]. By contrast, in architecture, physical space is the «language» with conventional and multisensorial relations with the users, and with a metaphorical time taking the role space had in the verbal text [Terzoglou, 2018]. The «interlocation» of bodies emerges from the same historical and social intersubjectivity as verbal language, as Husserl predicted in his famous text about the origin of geometry [Husserl, 1962]. Intersubjectivity is then, according to Ricoeur, a much more powerful concept than the dialogical historical analyses by Hegel and is, of course, the kernel of the dialogical philosophical paradigm by Bakhtin and Lotman [Ricoeur, 2001; Ricoeur, 2004].

Diagram 1 also relates this status of architecture to the «Arque» confrontation with «Telos» by Ricoeur, where Freud and Hegel enter in a hermeneutic interaction with an equilibrium between conscious and unconscious human behaviors [Ricoeur, 1969]. This is fundamental for the urban and architectural theories of today, as Lewis Mumford advised in vain [Mumford, 1944; Mumford, 1974]. Moreover, with the definition of a specific kind of signs as «traces», where architecture is totally concerned, Ricoeur opened a new way of theorizing in design in general, and in architectural design theories in particular [Ricoeur, 2000; Ricoeur, 2001]. A hermeneutic way still waiting that somebody follows it with a philosophical position in between Freud and Hegel poles.

However, I need to stop this argumentation here and move on. Other research analyses on similar topics are on the way [Muntañola, 2020, 2021].

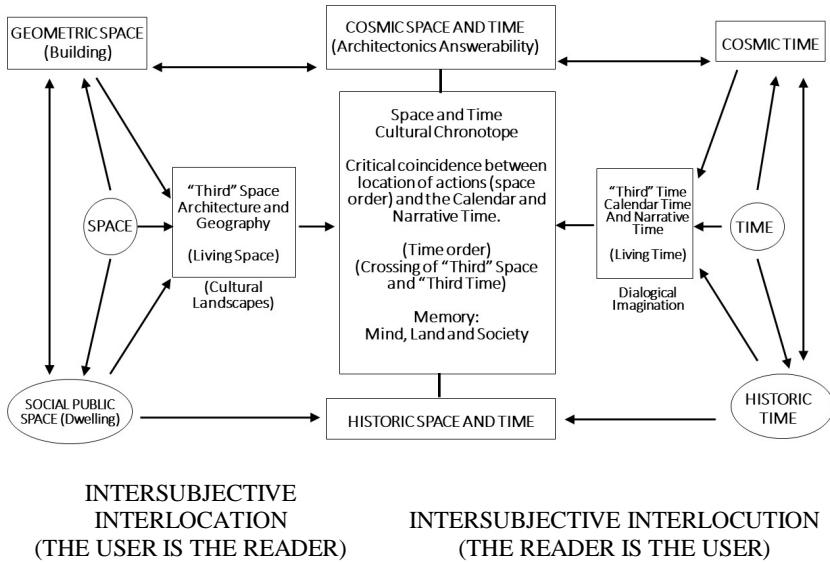


Diagram 1. The Ricoeur dialogical human space and time where arque and telos are confronted [Muntañola, 2021].

## 2. Some examples of interlocation

Starting from the structure of the Diagram 1 above, the «Semisphere» by Lotman and the «Arquitectonics» by Bakhtin [Bakhtin, 1975; Lotman; Lotman, 2005; Lotman, 2009] are suddenly meaningful and the architects' works obtain an existential dimension where the hermeneutic link between architectural design, construction and the use of sites and buildings is uncovered [Muntañola, 2006].

From a philosophical point of view, and this is evident in the concept of «architectonics» by Bakhtin in art, in general terms, the social link between the singularity of myself and the other's singularity is the key to the whole dialogical argumentation [Лотман, 1966]. That

link was hidden inside the structuralist philosophical foundation in linguistics, paradoxically, since, in the final analysis, structuralism wanted to be «social» too. However, the structures, instead to represent human existence, hide it, inside its epistemological deepness. As Ricoeur insisted, the dialogical points of view support the significant fact that everyday dialogue is not at all an «ordinary» dialogue, like in Heidegger's philosophical considerations, but fundamental, like in Bakhtin's definition of the novel literary genres as a fundamental representation of the everyday social life by each «voice» in the text [Ricoeur, 1986, 2000].

It is also important to uncover the central philosophical role of the concept of the chronotope in the dialogical theories, as a spatial and temporal socio-physical structure. That, on the one hand, defines the knots of the literary narrative and, simultaneously, on another hand, it configures the knots of the appropriation of the users of cities and buildings in general, where the users as readers are the «voices» in written narratives, and the literary «points of view» of the writer organize in the cities the socio-physical specific behavior or activities in the best places for them [Bakhtin, 1975].

From this dialogical point of view, semiotics in architecture is an «Interlocative» system of bodies interchanging experiences, since two bodies cannot be in the same place at the same time, and each body has an ethical responsibility that nobody can supplant. Then, semiotics of architecture cannot only be analyzed in an «interlocutive» dialogue in written texts, where the spatial dimensions are always virtual, because a book does not change its meaning if it moves physically from place to place. But architecture is an art of the way bodies are displaced from place to place and of the way transparencies between the inside and the outside interlocate them [Muntañola, 2020, 2021].

The following examples of some recent PhD dissertations describe this «interlocative» role of architecture that was well described by Professor Allan Penn in the recent lecture in Barcelona some years ago in the following abstract of his lecture:

«Architecture: the exosomatic in cognition, culture, and design education. This paper reviews what has been learned through 'space syntax' research about the relationship between the morphology of the environment, human behavior and social use. From this background it reflects on the role of computation in research and design, and the implication of this for the education of architects. It argues, rather than

thinking that the mind must be extended beyond the body, that the built environment takes on structure through design that in turn is learnable and learned by human minds. It proposes that architecture may offer an important mechanism through which social forms and cultures ‘get inside people’s heads’, and so transmit from generation to generation» [Penn, 2016].

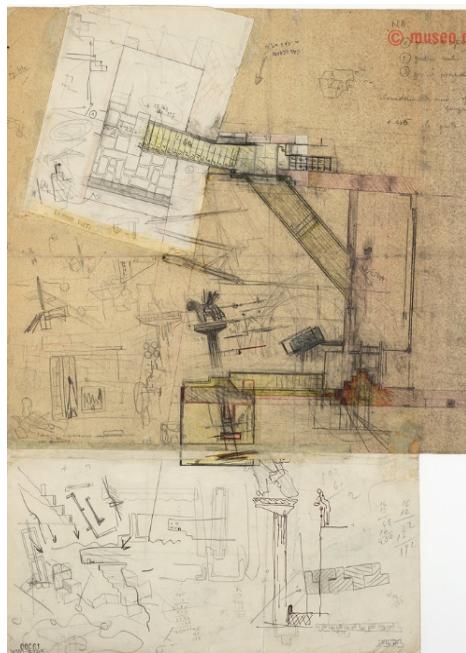
First two examples are from the PhD dissertation of the Mexican architect Nathan Martinez in Barcelona School of Architecture in 2019. The first, in Diagram 2, two representations in the interior of the Columba Museum by Peter Zumthor compare a historical photography of the site after its destruction by World War II, with a representation of the same place already rebuilt. There is an «interlocation» between the behavior of people and the traces of the old building incorporated by Zumthor in the new building, which shows that the architectural design is not simply a formal or geometric arbitrary play between forms and physical materials. Memory is the link, but modernity did not suffer from its presence, on the contrary, it is reinforced by it.

The second example, in Diagram 3 with the designs by Carlo Scarpa on the renewal of the Castelvecchio in Parma shows how the architect forecasted the physical transformation with the people behavior inside the new building, in order that they could in some way «interlocate» with the old users of the medieval castle hundreds of years ago.

The fourth’s example is the urban design new proposal by the Catalan architect in the old city of Barcelona after the City Hall demolishes some housing medieval parts. The design represented a very different way of urban planning in relation to the usual way of defining the form of the new buildings in strict relation to the street dimensions and indifferent to the historical conditions of the city. The diagram indicates how building emerges from a system of points of view in relation to the views of the main monuments of the old neighborhood. Miralles asked actual users about the best forms among a set of different formal physical possibilities. The City Hall rejected the proposal, and it has already been built following the same legal regulations as in the new extension of the city in the XIX century.



Diagram 2. Two representations of the Columba Museum by Peter Zumthor: one before construction when the building was destroyed in World War II, the other after reconstruction where Zumthor articulates the traces of the old carefully



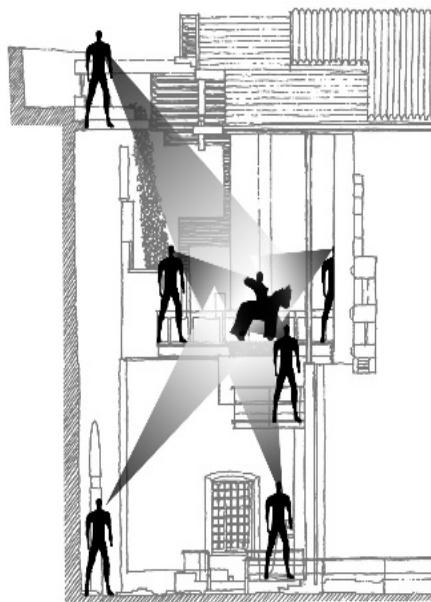


Diagram 3. Designs by Carlo Scarpa and representations of the new building with the behavior and the views of the users, in some «interlocative» prediction about the old medieval owners and users



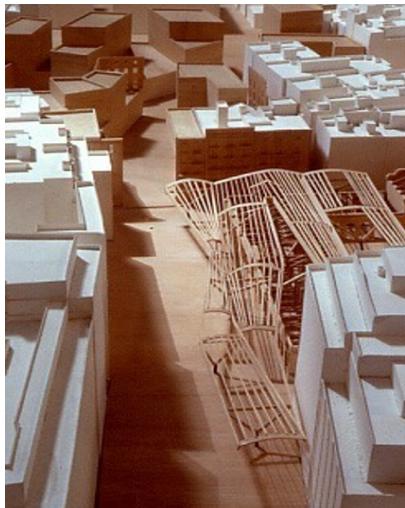
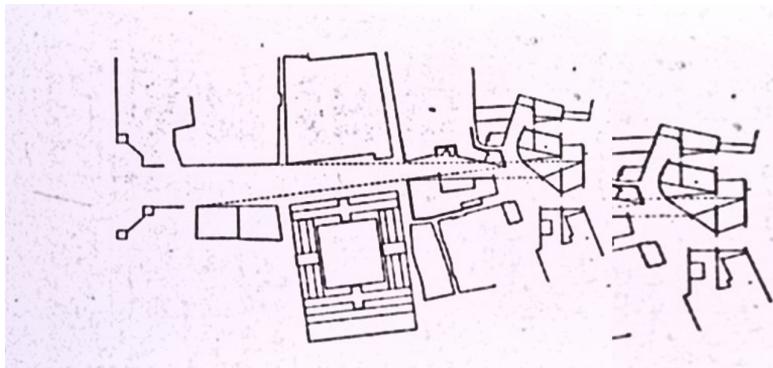




Diagram 4. Miralles proposal of a new urban renewal of a demolished part of the old city of Barcelona where the new users and the old forms and views were «interlocated»

### 3. Fakes and truths on the search of modernity in architecture

Going back to the origin of modernity in architecture we can uncover the difficulties in relation to the use of this «interlocative» power of cities and buildings.

One of the leaders of the CIAM meetings Siegfried Giedion gave the following argument in the foreword of his well-known book «Space Time and Architecture», in the 13<sup>th</sup> edition in 1963:

«In Mechanization Takes Command I intended to show how the gap between feeling and thinking emerges and how each generation needs to find its own solution to the problem, always the same, of how to build this opening between the inside and the outside dimensions of our real world by restoring the dynamic building able to support their new affinities»<sup>1</sup> [Giedion, 1963].

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by J. Muntañola.

This argument cannot be understood if we ignore that he lived and died in the same street where Jean Piaget, author of these fundamental epistemological dimensions of inside and outside, and interiorization and exteriorization, was living. The argument was elaborated in his last book «Architecture and the Phenomena of Transition», published in English after his death, in 1971, and in Spanish in Barcelona in 1975 [Giedion, 1971, 1975], devoted to the historical stages of socio-physical intersubjectivity from prehistoric times until today, a radical change in relation to previous books by himself. This socio-physical interaction does not see technology as the fundamental potential factor in human development, since an equilibrium and an affinity between culture and technology should be respected, a point of view closer to the ideas of Lewis Mumford, who had been a strong critic of Giedion's positions for years, on the symbolic values of modern art.

Another important analysis of the modernity was published by the University of Harvard Press and belongs to R. Poggioli, who died in a car accident in the USA in 1963. He was also ignored by architects [Poggioli, 1968].

Pitifully, neither Giedion's last ideas, nor Poggioli's insights were accepted in USA by the professional authorities in architecture and planning in New York after World War II. Architecture and city planning were converted into opportunities to make objects that can survive contextual and cultural determinations because they follow the same universal abstracts rules every time and everywhere. The survival of the humanity depends then on these abstract rules, now identified with the artificial intelligence powers. Then, the dialogical social powers of architecture and planning disappear, and modernity is converted into a war against antimodern aesthetic ideas, that is, against modernity itself.

Neither the Lotman-Bakhtin cultural school of thought nor the North American cultural school, with Lewis Mumford among its representatives, accepted these theoretical rules of modernity in architecture, but they were totally ignored and rejected, and this fact held up research into the social spatial intersubjective «interlocation» in architecture for a hundred years.

The originality of Lotman ideas remains in the analyses of culture not as a set of objects but as an «atmosphere» where all the human social interactions are immersed, and where the meanings of the objects

are conceived as Alain Penn pointed out above [Lotman, 2009; Noth, 2015]. The global digital word of today is paradoxically a good example of this semiotic cultural atmosphere and the COVID-19 crisis has shown the need for cultural analyses both for the human cultural survival, as well as for the universal biogenetic innovations needed by the vaccines. The dialogical theories are not against the technological developments and the innovative geometric findings, but they want to analyze the social impact of all these changes in human life. They do not take for granted the automatic human benefit of modern abstractions either in science or in art. A recent work analyses these historical powers of Lotman's ideas extensively [Tamm, 2009].

One good example of these misunderstandings is the innovative power of abstraction in architecture when physical spaces, in order to be «modern», need to eliminate functional symbolic social references, because empty places with higher levels of formal abstraction will always produce social welfare and cultural innovations. This position was vigorously rejected by J. Derrida in a letter to Peter Eisenman [Derrida, 1990]. Moreover, this position is against the ideas of one of the best mathematicians and topological innovators, Henri Pointcare, today inside our computers. Henri Pointcare admitted the virtual truth of all new geometries, but at the same time admitted the different impacts of each one on the real human experiences and human interactions, that never follow one geometry or other, but an infinite number of virtual geometries altogether that cannot be represented on the computer [Poincare, 1930]. Bakhtin's and Lotman's ideas followed this position from the beginning, when Bakhtin indicated that we talk inside all that has been talked in the past and all that can be talked in the future.

This situation reminds me of the Aristotelian discussion about the real existence of absolute empty physical voids, that Aristotle rejected with similar arguments, since if absolute infinite real physical void exists, it will be equal to human real mental existence and then, there will not be differences between the mental representation and the reality they represent, and the social intersubjective dialogism disappears and only a universal monologism will remain, in Bakhtin's terms.

It is very interesting to point out now, that the rejection of the ideas of Lewis Mumford to maintain the prestige of the international style, with Mies Van Der Rohe, Gropius and Philip Johnson, was based upon the absence of the role of users in the symbolic meanings of

modern architecture, where the formal abstractions are the aesthetic innovative signs without cultural historical distinctions. This radicality, which arrived to hide the affinities of Philip Johnson with fascist positions, has now been revisited fifty years later at Harvard University. Also, Richard Sennett took fifty years to demolish Heidegger's ideas and to revalidate Mumford's positions in his most recent and significant book [Sennett, 2019].

In spite of the reactions by Walter Benjamin in 1939 [Benjamin, 1968] and Jacques Derrida in 1989 [Derrida, 1990] about the profound mistakes involved in the absence of functionality and of the users of cultural spatial historical evaluations, the monological analysis of empty spaces conducted only from the point of view of the genial formal aesthetic abstractions of the author of the design, by using innovative technologies, new geometries and digital tools, is still often done in the media and in a lot of PhD dissertations.

There is a very subtle dialogical point here. There is a very fundamental distinction between the concept of the singularity of a person, an architect for instance, as a singularity among all the other human singular beings, and the singularity of a person with a genial singularity in itself that cannot be dialogically and socially analyzed by other singular persons because it should be fully accepted as it is. In architectural objects we find the same difference between an object that is singular itself without any dialogical relationships with other objects and the singularity of the same object among other singular objects in the human historical space and time «interlocation». The description of Bakhtin of the travel by Goethe in the medieval Italian villages is a perfect example of this distinction, since the same object in one Italian village or in another, was evaluated in different way according to the village historical situation [Bakhtin, 1985]. Also, the writings of Lotman about the concept of «the other» [Gherlone, 2016; Лотман, 1966; Lotman, 2009] are basic at this point. Because is just the absence of the user rights and values that is necessary to consider in the evaluation of empty abstract places, that can be built everywhere with the same heroic and insuperable physical high-tech transparencies by genial designers, but who are totally indifferent to the social conditions of the potential users [Muntañola, 2006, 2016, 2022].

Also, a literary example can help. Appreciation of a very good text is related to the abstract capability of the narrative and to the high

symbolic power of the voices and points of view involved in a dialogical perspective. When the voices and the points of view of the writer have no references to other books of historical situations or to some real social situations can the readers better follow the text and are they forced to innovations because of this absence of references? Of course, as I have defined before, the «interlocutive» linguistic role of verbal languages is very different from the «interlocative» power of architecture, but the real use of a singular place needs to form part of the aesthetic quality of it, if not, it cannot be used, and the designer equals a geometer. To eliminate the user is to eliminate the reader.

If our real existence survives inside infinite possibilities of new and old geometries, cities and buildings which are far from this complexity and they are, as Husserl and Giedion pointed out, limited historical intersubjective and dialogical configurations that can be rebuilt, destroyed, or preserved, but no universal virtual abstract rule can reproduce these infinite possibilities of the human existence itself.

These configurations can support some of the affinities between virtuality and reality, and between thinking and feeling, but they are always open for innovations, and no form is the definitive one. So, the best theoretical way is to use the concept of specific modernity in the sense of the best innovation that every space-time context can be able to offer and the best way to analyze this innovation is the dialogical social way [Muntañola, 2016, 2020, 2021, 2022].

Finally, it is extremely significant that the heritage of the Kantian enlightenment develops in several contemporary directions regarding the historical political conditions, such as the existential social phenomenology in Germany, with two confronted positions with Husserl and Heidegger, the existentialism by Sartre, the hermeneutic position by Ricoeur, the neo-Kantian innovative position by Bakhtin and Lotman, and the pragmatic historical vision of human technology by Mumford [1937, 1974], Tafuri [1980], Derrida [1962] and others. The radical and aggressive rejection of some of them, as well as the total ignorance of Mumford or the violent attack against Bakhtin from some structuralist linguistic orthodox positions, uncovers the fear to lose power and financial status by the authors of these violent fascist attacks, aimed to invent fake stories to demolish the freedom of others to defend their ideas and, in this way, impose their own ideas. It is from inside this context that the history of the architectural theories and practices needs

to be understood in the future, that is, inside the confrontation between «Arque» and «Telos» proposed by Ricoeur [1969]. New historical analyses are on the way, and it will soon be published [Ibelings, 2022].

### **Concluding remarks**

The critical distinction between the linguistic code and the social communication of meaning is the key point in Bakhtin's and Lotman's philosophies and this applies to architecture too. It is a pity that this distinction impacted the theories of modern architecture very late, in spite of the efforts of A. Tzonis [1990] pertaining to the importance of Mumford's criticism of the international style in 1948. This criticism is beginning to be understood just now, when thousands of studies and media publications still follow the same arguments that Gropius and Giedion argued in 1948 against Mumford' ideas, underlined the heroic modernity of empty spaces in absence of functional links to any social use, in order to increase the power of architecture as an innovative and modern art in itself, without references to dirty old meanings considered as historical «contaminations». Of course J. Derrida [1990]. W. Benjamin [1968] L. Mumford and P. Ricoeur, insisted again and again about these mistakes, because architecture is neither only form, nor only functionality, but always the link between them.

This link is what dialogical social theories can analyze, either in «interlocation» or in «interlocution», or in between both social systems of communication (see Diagram 1). However, to reduce the link only to the logical dimensions of empty forms is a weak favor to the environmental health of the humanity confronted with climate critical changes. Feelings, functions, and symbols are important dimensions of architecture too, as Sigfried Giedion intended, too late, to point out [Giedion, 1963, 1975].

Finally it seems clear that the structural semiotic and systematic philosophical relationships between hermeneutics and phenomenology are what artificial intelligence should analyze in the future. This will not be an easy task, and the works by Y. Lotman and P. Ricoeur, and the studies by Rainer E. Zimmermann [2015, 2017] have just opened the door to it. Now, the next generations, with brains and machines, step by step, will have to enter the dialogical realm aiming to build the best so-

cial intersubjective semiotic communicative networks. This could only be done if the humanity has survived the climate changes by then...

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