

(Pre)Served at the Table

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The constitution table in the center of the green chamber called the “Finanskomitéens værelse” (Finance Committee Chamber) or “Kongens audiensgemakk” (King’s Audience Chamber)

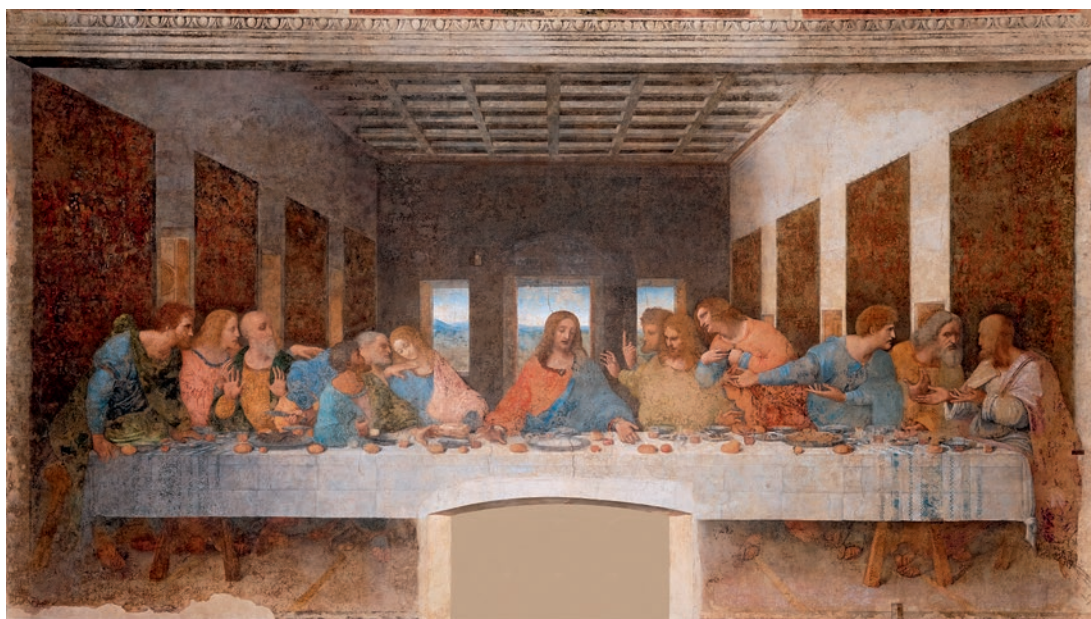
A modest folding dining table stands in the middle of the green-colored chamber on the upper floor of the Eidsvollbygningen, an eighteenth-century wooden mansion located in a rural setting north of Oslo. It is only when reading the metal plaque screwed to the tabletop that one becomes aware of its significance. Called “Grunnlovsbordet” (the constitution table), it was on this table that, in 1814, the Norwegian constitution was signed, making it the most important table in the nation’s history. Being the site for this pivotal moment, and instrumental in converting the entire building into a national monument, eventually listed and frozen in time, it hints at the significant role that tables have played across time. An appropriate surface for negotiations, conversations, meals, games, and much more, a table orchestrates social interaction in a very particular way: it lets people meet on the same horizontal level; it allows for both informal and formal settings; it forces us to face each other, look each other in the eye, and to communicate in one way or another. A table pulls us together, but the tabletop provides us at the same time with a comfortable distance from our tablemates, offering a perfect balance between the social and private, between exposure and secrecy. Depending on its shape and size, a table establishes hierarchies; it dictates both spatial and social positions, leaving someone at the head, someone at the bottom, and someone in between. At times you are seated beside an enemy, at times beside a friend, and at times you find yourself seated at a roundtable with a particular kind of nonhierarchical setting. As history has taught us, tables are highly political and emotional settings.

The most famous table in Western history is undoubtedly the one at which Jesus assembled his twelve disciples for the Last Supper, so superbly depicted by Leonardo da Vinci in the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan in the late fifteenth century. The long, symmetrically laid table orchestrates this legendary scene: a composed Jesus seated in the middle of his disciples engaged in fierce debate. The table, a removable tabletop on trestles covered with a white tablecloth, is both formal and informal, representing the authority of Jesus and the gravity of the moment—and at

the same time the casualness of a good meal shared among friends. The fact that everyone sits on the same side of the table, a compositional maneuver by the painter and probably modeled after how a Renaissance prince would dine in front of his subjects, also gives the spectators a place at the table, as it were. With this, da Vinci tackled the many subtle and ambivalent symbolic implications of Christianity and constructed a model for future table settings.

In the context of the four experimental preservation roundtables that led to the creation of this book, King Arthur's mythical Round Table might be a more relevant reference. First described in 1155 by the Norman poet Robert Wace, it was meant to represent the chivalric order and the equal status of everyone seated at it. And it has become the appropriate model for gatherings in need of a nonhierarchical setting.

A contemporary version of King Arthur's table is the horseshoe-shaped table of the United Nations Security Council Chamber, designed by Norwegian architect Arnstein Arneberg, so heavily tainted by international politics and so widely broadcast in photographs, television, and films. For the three-year, \$2.2-billion restoration that began in 2012, the UN building had to be emptied and stripped, and temporary locations offsite had to be found. The symbolic properties of the Security Council Chamber in New York, and its emblematic table in particular, called for a special solution: the whole chamber had to be replicated at a nearby site so that broadcasts from the sessions would appear as before, avoiding pictorial unbalance and political controversy. Even though the ceiling of the replica was considerably lower than the original, and the iconic Per Krohg mural was a cheap print reproduction, the original table and accompanying chairs, moved and successively restored, ensured the success of the illusion. When the table and chairs were returned to the meticulously restored original chamber, only a trained eye could



Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, 1495–98



Arthur's knights gathered at the Round Table to celebrate Pentecost. From a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Prose Lancelot* attributed to Walter Map (Gautier Moap) or Michel Gantelet.

notice a difference: the pit within the table's circle housing the stenographer's and secretary's tables was removed, allowing a more direct communication between the representatives. During the restoration process, the suggestion to enlarge the table to include more members was rejected. The symbolic nature of the table overruled any attempts at revolt.

Tables are powerful structures often entangled in issues of preservation. Sometimes they are objects of desire, converted into museum artifacts representing distant places and periods; sometimes they are unique monuments in their own right, testifying to important historical events; and sometimes they serve as metaphors. In the introduction of the book *Tabula Plena: Forms of Urban Preservation*, Bryony Roberts elaborates on the Latin term *tabula rasa* in contrast to the newly created term *tabula plena*. Roberts points to an alternative definition of *tabula* as a "game board" or "table," and suggests how *tabula plena* could act as a conceptual framework for urban preservation, connoting an urban site full of existing buildings from different periods, in opposition to *tabula rasa*, which in architectural discourse is the commonly used term for the "clean slate" in modernist urban renewal. She stretches the Latin meaning, equating *tabula plena* with "a table after a dinner party, with the complex arrangements of plates, glasses and silverware positioned by a series of social negotiations."¹

For preservation, tables have played an important role as sites for conversations, negotiations, and decisions.

Throughout the history of architecture, sitting around tables has been a much-appreciated exercise, sometimes facilitating radical disciplinary turns. The idea of gathering a loosely associated group of people around a table to discuss a paradigm in making is probably as old as the profession itself, but has rarely had more impact than the eleven legendary gatherings of the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), held in Europe between 1928 and 1959. Called the "congress of collaboration," CIAM became the topos for future architectural discourse: the appropriate setting for serving the world radical new ideas.

Throughout the history of preservation, sitting at tables has been equally popular but far less recognized. One of the first and most prominent gatherings was the First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, held in Athens in 1931. It is regarded as a defining moment in the discipline of modern preservation and resulted in the seven-point manifesto known as the Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments. The charter is often confused with the more famous Athens Charter, published by Le Corbusier in 1943, referring to the fourth CIAM conference in 1933, which was held on the promenade deck of the ocean liner *SS Patris* on its way from Marseilles to Athens. Many have pointed out the irony of these two manifestos being conceived at practically the same time, at the same place, and under the same name, the first implying the conservation, the other the demolition of the historic city.

It would be too much to expect a veritable charter to materialize from every roundtable discussion, but the format has yielded some unexpected and rewarding results. The idea behind the experimental preservation

¹ Bryony Roberts, ed., *Tabula Plena: Forms of Urban Preservation*, Zurich, 2016. The term *tabula rasa* originates etymologically from ancient wax tablets that could be melted clean and reused. The term *tabula plena* was used by Jorge Otero-Pailos during discussions in Oslo in 2014, and has appeared previously in writings about architecture urbanism. See Nan Ellin, "What is Good Urbanism?," in *Emergent Urbanism: Urban Planning and Design in Times of Structural and Systemic Change*, ed. Tigran Haas and Krister Olsson, Surrey, 2014, p. 102; and Nan Ellin, *Good Urbanism*, Washington, DC, 2012, pp. 15, 16.



The restored United Nations Security Council Chamber without the sunken area in the middle for stenographers and secretaries



The interim Security Council Chamber

roundtables was to assemble a wide range of professionals to partake in an open conversation about new ideas and forms of preservation—people who we believe are capable of reformulating the discipline. The truly international and heterogeneous group of participants represent different institutions: universities, museums, art practices, architectural offices, and creative businesses. They represent different professions: architects, artists, historians, curators, social anthropologists, and conservators; and they express themselves through very different formats: buildings, drawings, sculptures, academic writing, prose, scientific experiments, photographs, 3D prints, exhibitions, and more. This diversity, and the fact that no one had a preconceived idea of what experimental preservation could be, created an atmosphere of openness and curiosity well suited to exploring new territory.

The concept of an international, interdisciplinary assembly of “preservationists” finds its roots in the League of Nations, established in 1920, and the many advisory committees and expert committees that it spawned.² The International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, being one of the most prominent of these, gathered such people as Henri Bergson, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Béla Bartók, Thomas Mann, and Paul Valéry. The idea that a collaboration between the sciences, the humanities, and the arts was needed to secure world peace is a powerful one, but the inherent friction of multidisciplinary and multinationality, and the subtle dynamics of negotiation, was possibly more important for initiatives that came later.

The 1931 Athens Congress, hosted by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation (the secretariat of the League of Nations International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation and the precursor of UNESCO), assembled a wide range of professionals from sixteen European countries that included architects, museum curators, politicians, conservators, engineers, art historians, urban planners, and others. One of the key players at the congress, the Italian Gustavo Giovannoni (1873–1947), was himself an embodiment of multidisciplinary; he was an architectural historian, restorer, architect, teacher, civil engineer, and urban planner. One could argue that this disciplinary abundance enabled Giovannoni—and the congress—to overcome the presiding conventions of preservation and open up to a broader understanding of cultural heritage, allowing for the challenges facing industrialized society to enter the discourse, and for the discipline to be organized according to international law and regulation.

The experimental preservation roundtables not only cultivated multidisciplinary and multinationality, they also revealed a desire to move beyond traditional disciplinary categories: Andreas Angelidakis adopts the role of the *psychic* or *life coach* of buildings; Alex Lehnerer assumes the role of the *amateur historian*; and Azra Akšamija stages herself as *state preservation bureaucrat* and an *archeologist coming from the future*. The theatrical act of impersonation, moving oneself beyond the limits of one’s own professional identity, seems to be necessary in a situation in which professions become increasingly more specialized and isolated. Like the intelligent, complex, and ambiguous Shakespearian fools, the experimental preservationist maneuvers through the field with lightness and unpredictability,

offering new perspectives and challenging established conventions. The number of young professionals now entering the stage—given exposure at exhibitions and through publications and symposia—engage in a broad spectrum of the field; there is a mix of scholars, curators, urbanists, artist, engineers, designers, and construction workers, among other professions (not unlike Giovannoni). This breadth does not seem to come at the expense of depth, but it remains to see if this generation will engage in and affect the at-times brutal and cynical building industry.

The roundtable discussions took place within three different environments: the *museum*, the *biennale*, and *academia*, allowing for different audiences, agendas, and dialogues. There seems to be an obvious correspondence between ideas and the environment in which they are formulated. All three environments have throughout history acted as testing grounds for new ideas on preservation, and it is rewarding to trace their history.

MUSEUM TABLES

In museums, tables mostly appear as exhibition artifacts, but also at times as surfaces for exhibitions, studies, and debates. In depictions of the *Wunderkammer* from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, tables count among the many furniture types used to display objects, and throughout history have permitted a more accessible and active mode of display than vitrines, shelves, and walls: they allow for “hands-on” experiences, academic study, and public discussion.

An alternative connotation of the word *table*, as in “list” or “catalogue,” points to the practice of the systemization of artifacts in the form of inventories and registers, so cherished by museums throughout history.³ As Thordis Arrhenius argues in her book *Fragile Monument: On Conservation and Modernity*, our ideas of *preservation* and *museum* are both born from the iconoclastic crisis of the French Revolution and the resulting inventorization

2 Lucia Allais points out that the CIAM gatherings were modeled on a “revolutionary” internationalism in which class solidarity transcends national allegiances, as it was adapted by the artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century. In contrast, the Athens Conference belongs firmly in the history of Wilsonian diplomacy, which gave birth to the League of Nations, whereby regular meetings are organized in order to normalize relations between states. See Lucia Allais, “Will to War, Will to Art: Cultural Internationalism and the Modernist Aesthetics of Monuments, 1932–1964,” PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008, p. 65.

3 The two meanings derive from the same root, originating from the Old English *tabule* “flat slab, inscribed tablet,” the Latin *tabula* “plank, tablet, list,” and reinforced in Middle English by the Old French *table*. The earliest examples of the word, from Latin *tabula*, referred to a flat board, slab, or surface, and it did not grow legs until around 1300. One of the first meanings was a gaming board—in the case of backgammon, the plural *tables* was used, because its board has two folding halves. The early sense of table is also found in *tablet* (Middle English) for a small slab of stone. *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, s.v. “Table,” <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/table> (accessed March 10, 2016).



The Venice roundtable with (l. to r.) Reinhard Kropf, Ines Weizman, Andreas Angelidakis, Svetlana Boym, Thordis Arrhenius, Erik Fenstad Langdalen, and Jorge Otero-Pailos



David Chipperfield Architects, Staircase hall, Neues Museum, Museum Island, Berlin

of images, objects, and architectural fragments.⁴ Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their histories have been intertwined and become interdependent: the museum being a testing ground for new forms of preservation, and preservation legitimizing museum practices.

Françoise Choay points out how the 1931 Athens Conference “closed an era when the great monuments of art and history were conserved museologically for the sake of an aristocratic European elite, and opened the field to new lines of questioning.”⁵ In many ways, international law and legislation replaced the safeguarding provided by the museum, leaving preservation free to operate outside the museum walls and engage in the full complexity of modern society. Of course, preservation never left the museum; it rather continues to play much the same role it always has: conducting material, chemical, and curatorial experiments on artworks, objects, architectural fragments, and sometimes buildings (as in open-air museums). The conservative character of the museum makes it a “museum of preservation practices,” and creates, through the stature of its conventions, a very appropriate context for experiments. When Jorge Otero-Pailos installed his giant latex cast of the interior of Trajan’s Column in the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2015, the work confronted the many modes of preservation performed by the museum throughout its history: the transportation of original pieces of antiquity to European museums in the early nineteenth century, the plaster cast industry of the late nineteenth century, the cleaning and restoring practices of the museum workshop, and the contemporary fascination for copies and replicas. Likewise, when Alexander Schwarz and his team from David Chipperfield Architects realized the sophisticated and much-celebrated transformation of the Neues Museum in Berlin, they dealt with multiple layers of history, constructing a sort of museological Matryoshka doll: including the shadow of the former pleasure garden of the Stadtschloss, the ensemble of nineteenth-century buildings on Museum Island, the 1859 Neoclassical museum by Stüler, the post-World War II discourse of German heritage, the inscribing of the whole island on UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 1999, and the rebuilding of the Neues Museum in 2009.

The discipline of preservation obviously needs the conventions of the museum to regenerate, using it as a laboratory for experimentation. Museums are increasingly engaged with the public, inviting people to interact and partake in the production of knowledge and the curating of histories. Here tables come in handy. We will most likely encounter even more of them in the future.

BIENNALE TABLES

When the second experimental preservation roundtable took place during the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale curated by Rem Koolhaas, it was exactly fifty years after the Second International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Monuments drafted the pivotal Venice Charter. Additionally, it was thirty-four years since the first true architecture biennale was organized, curated by Paolo Portoghesi and titled *The Presence of the Past*, which famously formulated and showcased postmodernism for a broader

audience. In her essay “Debates on Display at the 1976 Venice Biennale,” Léa-Catherine Szacka sheds light on Peter Eisenman and Vittorio Gregotti’s *Europe-America* exhibition that took place four years earlier at the Venice Art Biennale, and in particular the “Quale Movimento Moderno” debate that took place on the day the exhibition opened.⁶ Szacka points out how this exhibition, and the debate that expanded on it, revealed a schism between Europe—representing a “real-world” attitude with works by, among others, Giancarlo Di Carlo, Hans Hollein, Lucian Kroll, Aldo Rossi—and the United States—representing a more personal and formal attitude with works by Raimund Abraham, Peter Eisenman, John Hejduk, and others. The debate, assembling a row of prominent people that included—in addition to most of the exhibitors—Stanley Tigerman, Alvaro Siza, James Sterling, Robert Venturi, Robert A.M. Stern, Aldo Van Eyck, Herman Hertzberger, among others, also exposed the generational and ideological tension between the people from Team 10 and CIAM on one side, and a new, more heterogeneous generation in search for alternatives on the other. The event revealed a new interest in the urban fabric from an anti-functional perspective, recognizing the historic city as a rich source for formal and theoretical exploration.

In addition to serving as a “testing ground” for the paradigm shift that was on its way, Szacka identifies the debate as an important marker in the prehistory of the Venice Architecture Biennale, facilitating the exchange of ideas between architects of different nationalities and ideologies. She points out the unusual setting of the debate: the participants were seated along three tables placed in rows facing the audience in the auditorium at Palazzo

4 Thordis Arrhenius, *The Fragile Monument: On Conservation and Modernity*, London, 2012.

5 Françoise Choay, Introduction to *La conférence d’Athènes sur la conservation artistique et historique des monuments (1931)*, ed. Françoise Choay, trans. Lucia Allais, Paris 2002, p. 7.

6 Léa-Catherine Szacka, “Debates on Display at the 1976 Venice Biennale,” in *Place and Displacement: Exhibiting Architecture*, ed. Thordis Arrhenius et al., Zurich 2014, pp. 97–112.



“Quale Movimento Moderno” debate, Palazzo del Cinema, Lido di Venezia, August 1, 1976

del Cinema on the Lido, similar to da Vinci's setting for the Last Supper. In contrast to the "members only" meetings of CIAM and earlier congregations of architects, the debate aimed to communicate directly with a broader audience, in line with the general intentions of the 1976 Biennale. The debate gained significance partly also because it became a media event, being recorded, photographed, and archived, which ensured its place in history. Szacka recognizes the impossibility of such an event today "putting, in a single room, twenty-something architects, some very influential and some soon to become influential, and have them discuss, around wine and cigarettes, practical, philosophical, and theoretical issues of the discipline."⁷

The number of new architectural biennials and triennials emerging in recent years signifies a disciplinary turn, shifting the focus from built work to more research-driven and experimental practices often closely linked to academia. Perhaps the embedded authority of the exhibition format itself has generated this shift, or perhaps the recent economic crisis can be blamed; for whatever reason, however, there is obviously a need for new testing grounds. The biennials and triennials, with their wide-ranging exhibitions, roundtables, lectures, workshops, book launches, performances, educational programs, among other events, seem to be the perfect laboratory for exploring new ideas.

ACADEMIC TABLES

A peculiar event in the history of architecture was the assembly of twenty-eight architects around one table in Thomas Jefferson's Rotunda at the University of Virginia on November 12 and 13, 1982, the event transcript of which was published three years later as *The Charlottesville Tapes*.⁸ The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS), the institution that facilitated American participation in the aforementioned events of 1976 in Venice, was planning to host a conversation in New York as "a get-together ... for a discreet, in-house 'show and tell.'"⁹ The event did not happen, for a variety of reasons, only to "reappear" in Charlottesville by invitation of Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, Jacquelin Robertson, and Robert Siegel, who assembled a group of well-known architects: Philip Johnson, John Burgee, Léon and Rob Krier, Henry Cobb, Robert A. M. Stern, Arata Isozaki, O.M. Ungers, Rafael Moneo, Paul Rudolph, Toyo Ito, Hans Hollein, César Pelli, Tadao Ando, Kevin Roche, Richard Meier, Stanley Tigerman, Rem Koolhaas, Frank Gehry, and Carlo Aymonino. The gathering of this rather ideologically diverse group did not include an audience, and, protected from the scrutiny of historians, critics, and journalists, allowed for an open exchange of ideas. The invitation asked each participant to present a previously unpublished project for collegial criticism, and despite the many embedded conflicts the conference proved to be open and generous. The presentations were all done at a large table, with a screen for slide projections on one end and a foldable wall for pinning up drawings on the other. The four sessions of six presentations allowed each participant a ten-minute presentation, and colleagues twenty minutes for criticism. The format did not allow for an in-depth discussion and the event is less

known for any groundbreaking discussions than the prominence of its participants.

Jacquelin Robertson, one of the initiators and one of three chairs of the conference, points out how the event revealed an ideological difference between the Americans and Japanese, on one hand, who spoke of "achieving an urbanism of single buildings or complexes," and the Europeans, on the other, who attempted "to deal with the larger canvas of 'the city.'"¹⁰ "The only arresting incident of the two days" was, according to Robertson, a petition put forward by Léon Krier, which emerged from Carlo Aymonino's presentation of a project for the reconstruction of the Roman Coliseum. Krier's petition was addressed to the Italian Ministro dei Beni Culturali and asked for an "architecturally correct and integral reconstruction of the Coliseum and other monuments of classical antiquity in Rome," and "strongly recommend[s] that these buildings be used for modern private or public purposes and institutions and that they be integrated into the urban and social fabric of Rome."¹¹ The petition divided the participants into two groups: one in favor (Graves, Isozaki, Hollein, Gehry, Roche, Stern, Robertson, Pelli, Moneo, Eisenman, the Kriers, Monacelli), and one opposed (Ungers, Koolhaas, Johnson, Meier, Ando, Ito, Burgee, Siegel, Tigerman, Gwathmey).

The Charlottesville event represents a peculiar and incidental predecessor of our experimental preservation roundtables: the assembling of a loosely related group of professionals around a common table; the presentation of projects and the performance of acts of experimental preservation; the recording of the events; and the later publication of these events in book form.

7 Ibid., p. 112.

8 *The Charlottesville Tapes: Transcripts of the Conference Held at the University of Virginia School of Architecture, Charlottesville, Virginia, November 12 and 13, New York, 1985.*

9 Jacquelin Robertson, Introduction to *The Charlottesville Tapes*, p. 6.

10 Ibid., p. 9.

11 Petition published in the back of *The Charlottesville Tapes*, p. 222.



Presentation of Philip Johnson and John Burgee, 1982, facsimile from *The Charlottesville Tapes*

A great number of the participants of the experimental preservation roundtables are engaged in teaching, and consider teaching closely linked and sometimes essential to their experimental practice. In the academic environment, tables have always played and continue to play an important role.

The “Radical Pedagogies” research project led by Beatriz Colomina at the Princeton University School of Architecture has identified an undercurrent of radical architectural pedagogy throughout the second half of the twentieth century, highlighting a number of experiments that took place in (or at the fringes of) the academic environment.¹² The long list of case studies includes initiatives that might also be characterized as “radical experimental preservation pedagogies,” by figures such as Lina Bo Bardi, Enrico Peressutti, and Aldo Rossi. Among the most prominent examples is ILAUD, the International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design, founded by the Italian architect Giancarlo De Carlo in 1976 (the same year as the *Europa-America* exhibition), and that took place in the cities of Venice, Siena, and Urbino, among others. During its twenty-seven-year history, ILAUD assembled hundreds of students from twelve different universities along with a long line of influential architects and pedagogues such as Peter and Allison Smithson, Herman Hertzberger, Donlyn Lyndon, Sverre Fehn, Renzo Piano, Enric Miralles, and others, for annual five-week workshops.¹³ With an experimental and holistic approach, the workshops initiated discussions and produced design proposals for reimagined historic cities and landscapes. Equally as interesting as the material produced during these gatherings was the organizational structure that facilitated the workshops. Perhaps most



Workshop sessions at ILAUD, 1992

12 “Radical Pedagogies” is an ongoing multiyear collaborative research project by a team of PhD candidates at the Princeton University School of Architecture, led by Beatriz Colomina, which involves seminars, interviews, and guest lectures by protagonists and scholars. The project explores a unique set of pedagogical experiments of the 1960s and 1970s that revolutionized thinking in the discipline. The project was exhibited at the 3rd Lisbon Architecture Triennale (2013), the 14th Venice Architecture Biennale (2014), and the 7th Warsaw Under Construction festival (2015).
13 ILAUD still exists in the form of a web journal; see www.ilaudwebjournal.wordpress.com.

important was the *lack* of a rigid structure, with the workshops set up as a loosely organized group of friends and colleagues sharing a common “spirit” of experimentation and open-mindedness, avoiding dogmatism and disintegration. Desk crits, reviews, lectures, public meetings, and field trips accompanied the workshops, and excerpts from the proceedings were published in an annual journal.

Emerging from Team 10 and bringing forward many of the ideas of this influential movement, De Carlo and his friends emphasized the importance of the academic environment. Although the idea of an academic *laboratory* was not new, that of bringing together students and professors from a dozen universities representing a like number of different pedagogies created a new kind of friction and released a new potential for inter-institutional exchange. ILAUD allowed for a full integration of faculty and students and a broad exchange of ideas across institutional boundaries, more so than Erasmus, the European Union’s academic exchange program that, despite its good intentions, often leaves institutions as islands in the academic ocean.

The ongoing collaboration between the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) and Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP)—and the four roundtables that sprung from it—has played out very much like the ILAUD example. The initiative was established by a group of loosely associated individuals engaged in research and teaching at the two schools, sharing a common interest in reformulating the discipline of preservation. Moving beyond institutional boundaries and academic routine, the collaboration has enabled students, PhD candidates, and professors to engage in collective projects, traveling between the schools and absorbing the different learning environments. The collaboration has resulted in exhibitions, seminars, and publications, and has consequently engaged a broader audience: the faculties at both schools, the professional communities, and the public. Most significantly, the collaboration resulted in the much-celebrated 2015 proposal for a new government quarter in Oslo, exhibited together with the projects of the six preselected teams of MVRDV, BIG, Snøhetta, Asplan, White, and LPO. This research-based teaching initiative creates a model for future projects whereby the two schools take on similar commissions, thus engendering the production of new ideas.

Tables stand at the center of the preservation discourse: whether they are sites for desk crits and workshops at architecture schools, for debates at biennials and museums, for the negotiation in parliaments and city councils about protecting or demolishing buildings, for policymaking in national and international institutions, or as sites for experimental preservation roundtable discussions. The roundtable as such is perhaps the appropriate metaphor for experimental preservation practices: enabling subtle negotiation, the circulation and recycling of ideas, nonhierarchical interaction, open conversation, and, last but not least, good food and great fun.