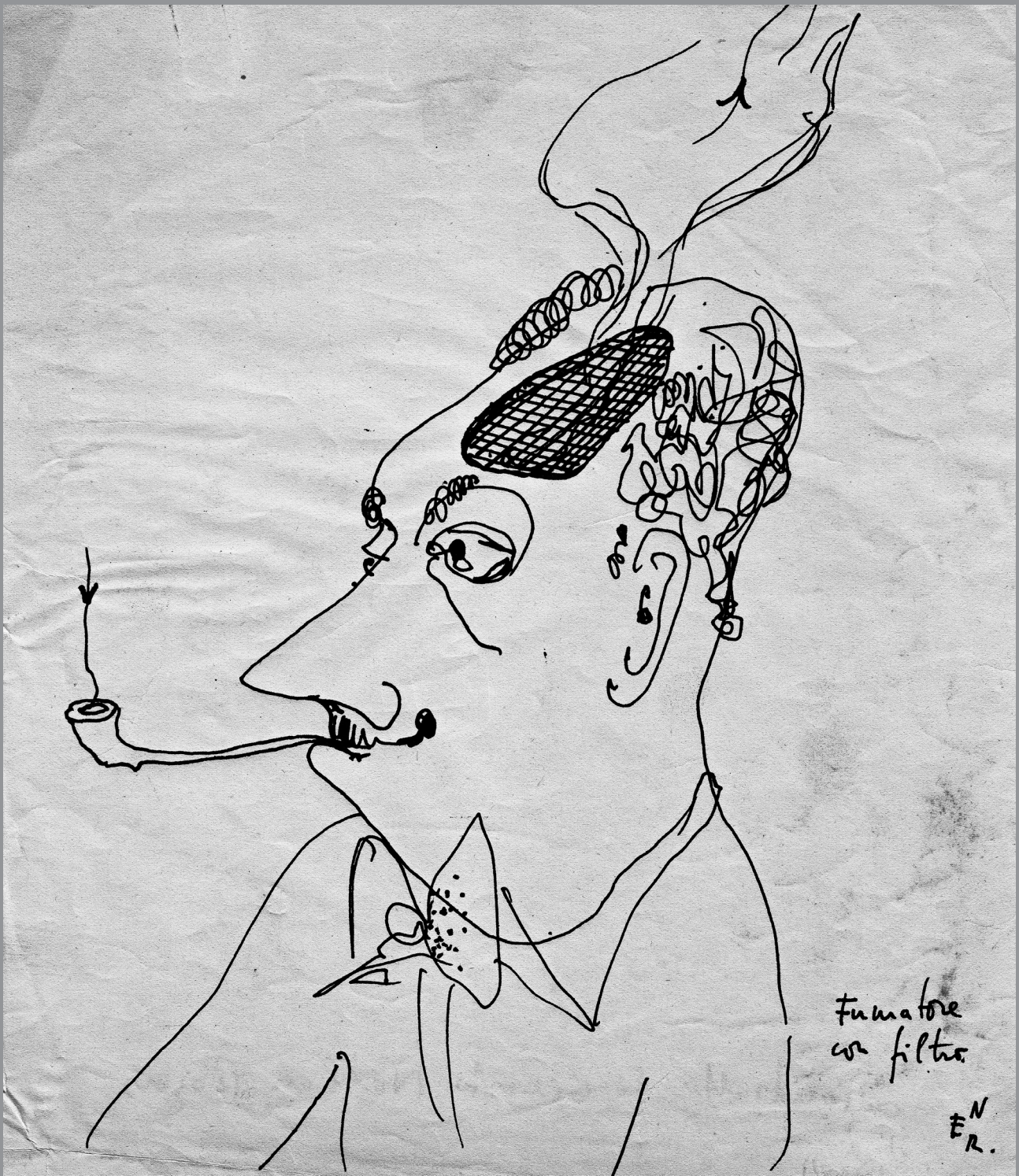


Ernesto N. Rogers and the CIAM: Teaching for Democracy

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8 September 1943: The day the Italian army surrendered to the Allies is a—perhaps the most—decisive milestone in Ernesto N. Rogers’ life. From that transformative moment on, the young Italian architect¹ built an extensive, in-depth international dialogue that led him to be recognized as a master in other, even quite distant, cultural contexts. It was in this concurrence of public and private life, which was practically a coincidence for him, that the career he had established as a partner in the BBPR² and as a leading figure in the second generation of Italian rationalists would open to far broader horizons, enriched by his exile in Switzerland, where he, a Jew, fled just a few days after that terrible date.

By Serena Maffioletti

From 1932 on Rogers had focused his research, both individually and especially in the fusion of the BBPR, on the osmosis between the designer, the theorist, the critic of architecture (and early on of art), and the educator, all of which were nonetheless preceded by the importance of “*essere cittadino*.” Yet from the moment he arrived at the *Camp d’internement universitaire de Lausanne*,³ all of his efforts—albeit in different ways, at different times, in different places, and on different topics—flowed into one undivided path, that of the educator who by experimenting prefigures, by dialoguing builds harmony, by taking risks proposes.

*We believe that building is not enough for the architect, but feel the need to state, to express, in the synthesis of our work, besides the contingency of life, the thinking and the character of the present day.*⁴

This statement was written collaboratively by Gianluigi Banfi, Lodovico Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti, and Ernesto N. Rogers and prefaced each of their graduation theses. It declared the need to listen and to interpret, therein defining a dialectical project stressing responsibility toward the reality of their time. From the very start and forever on, it would characterize all of their work, becoming the stable, cohesive, fertile humus for all the “educational” efforts that ensued. It motivated the experimentation with a multitude of “inventions” in exhibitions mounted by the BBPR and by Rogers in particular, especially in the pre-war years. It prompted encroachments into other, often new arts, such as photography and film, in quest of new themes for architecture, new spatial concepts for contemporary living, and new approaches to the dialogue between art and public. It also motivated the approach Rogers would take as editor of “*Domus*,”⁵ first, and lat-

er of “*Casabella*,”⁶ both of which were intended not as “magazines” per se but as platforms for interaction and dialogue aimed at building a “school,” an architectural tradition.

After all the ambiguities, sufferings, and limitations imposed by the Fascist regime, the interruption brought about by exile and the dialogue that became much easier to hold with Swiss friends—especially Alfred Roth and Max Bill—gave Rogers the room he needed to profoundly clarify his thoughts. In the lectures prepared for his first teaching assignment—a course on the theory of architecture and urban planning at the Faculty of Architecture at the *Camp d’internement Universitaire de Lausanne*—he outlined a new theory of architecture, reconstructing the vocabulary and syntax of architecture, identifying therein the key variables of his time, as evidenced in the lecture titles: *La variable mécanique*; *La variable du matériel*; *La variable de la mesure humaine*; *La variable économique*; *Conclusions sur la variable U*; *La variable du sentiment B*; *La variable de la proportion*; *La variable morphologique*.

*The Modern architect feels that his goals are subject to a moral imperative and plants the roots of his work in the fertile soil of human values. Like every poet, the architect must be a prophet and interpreter of the society in which he lives: forging a new artistic standard in the law history imposes upon him.*⁷

In his lectures he examined the elements of architecture understood as art “applied” to life, as an action devoted to humanity. While defending the continuity of Modern Architecture and the permanence of its goals, Rogers opened a new discourse on the development of the contemporary language of architecture, proposing a redefinition of the concept of function, in which usefulness and beauty act as dynamic paradigms that include the dialectical motion between subjectivity and objectivity, between individual and society, between time and space. Rather than stressing the construction of the elements of a new language, he advocated identifying new “vari-

< Figure 1. Ernesto N. Rogers, “*Fumatore con filtro*” (self-portrait), Serena Maffioletti Archive.

ables," mobile tools that could be interpreted subjectively and combined variously in architecture, understood as a responsible, individual response to a collective issue. Rogers remained faithful to this vision of architecture, expressed ironically with the formula $A = f(B, U)$,⁸ and referred to it constantly: "I call it pentagram because, rather than being a handbook of fixed things, it is a pentagram, where you can compose any music, perhaps even skipping a line [because] it serves all music, it permits new variations and new inventions in every work."⁹

Rogers' university lectures were probably among the first theoretical systematizations in Europe born of the ashes of the teaching inevitably racked by the war. Through them, he also reinvented the role of educators, recognizing them as individuals who, together with the unknown variables of the relationships between education and society, took on the wealth and complexity of a pedagogy based on the Socratic Method: "steering clear of any authoritarian approach, I do not avoid my full responsibility as an educator and a guide."¹⁰ It is also interesting to note that Rogers, when invited through CIAM to teach in South America, chose a real, exigent theme for his semester at the University of Tucuman:¹¹ the design of the new University City.

Thwarted by the Italian academy, Rogers was unable to teach in Italy until the 1952–53 academic years at the Milan *Politecnico*, where he would eventually be appointed full professor in 1964, just a few years before his death in 1969. His teaching there was profoundly incisive, yet he was also quite actively involved in CIAM debates and actions on teaching and education, particularly in the 1950s. It is in these efforts at reforming architecture education that it is actually possible to grasp the breadth of a democratic, international, contemporary vision.

The *VI Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne* (Bridgewater, 1947), which was strongly influenced by the demands of postwar reconstruction and by the CIAM's geographic and thematic expansion, opened with the work of ad hoc commission formed to address the renewal of architecture education. Acknowledging the fundamental nature of this issue, the *VII Congrès* (Bergamo, July 1949) devoted the *Troisième Commission* to reforming the teaching of architecture and urban planning: Rogers (who had been a council member of since 1947) was president, Jane Drew was vice-president. The Commission's work was introduced by the *Réforme de l'enseignement de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*, a text that emphasized the lack of correspondence between teaching methods and society's needs, the lack of integration between the disciplines—especially architecture and urban planning—and the fact that students were completely out of touch with professional and artistic en-

vironments. The Commission made several suggestions: it proposed that architecture education be based on developing individual personality and talent, that the history of architecture be interpreted as a function of creativity, that the humanities be combined with scientific and technical studies. With the aim of freeing teaching from academicism, it also emphasized the importance of studios and professional practice: "Method is more important than information, it must rely on intuition, analysis, critical thinking, and synthesis. Life in its constant evolution is the source of all inspiration."¹²

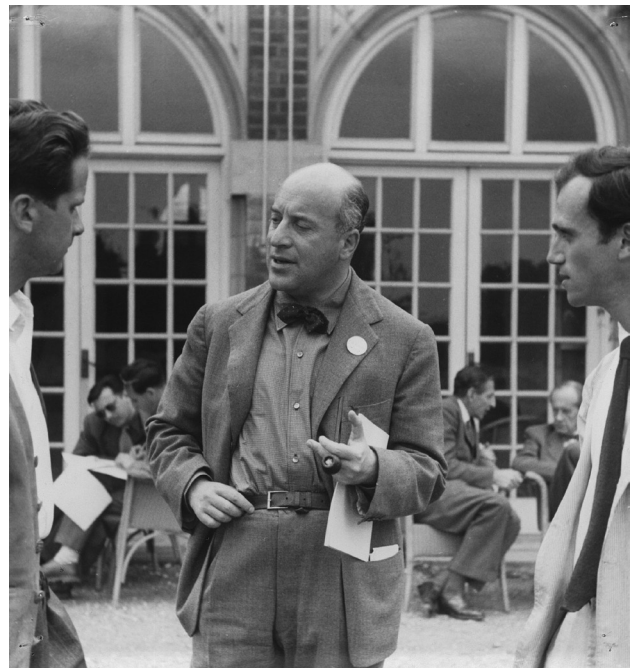
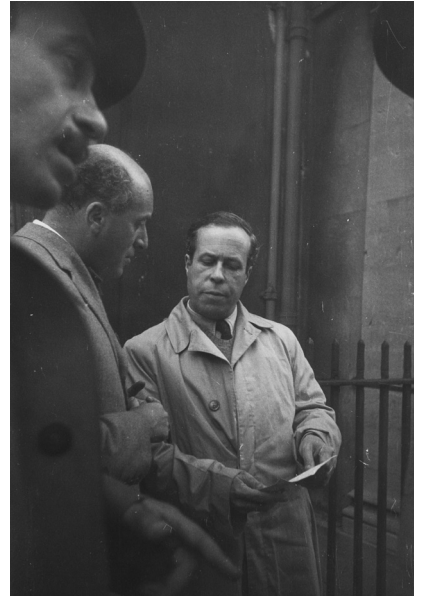


Figure 2. Ernesto N. Rogers with Vittorio Gregotti and Giotto Stoppino, "The Human Scale Architecture Room", IX Triennale di Milano, 1951.

The *Rapport de la Troisième Commission* recommended that the Commission be made permanent and be composed of one delegate from each country. This would permit a decisive international role in educational reform, making it possible to draft a *Charte de l'enseignement de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* at some time in the future. With this goal in mind, the Commission requested that local groups identify their schools' weaknesses and possible remedies, that professional offices be opened to students, that international cultural exchanges be intensified, and that CIAM Schools be created. "We have such an important and grandiose task in Europe,"¹³ wrote Alfred Roth to Rogers, whose international reputation was solid enough to be among the few invited to London for the first CIAM Summer School.



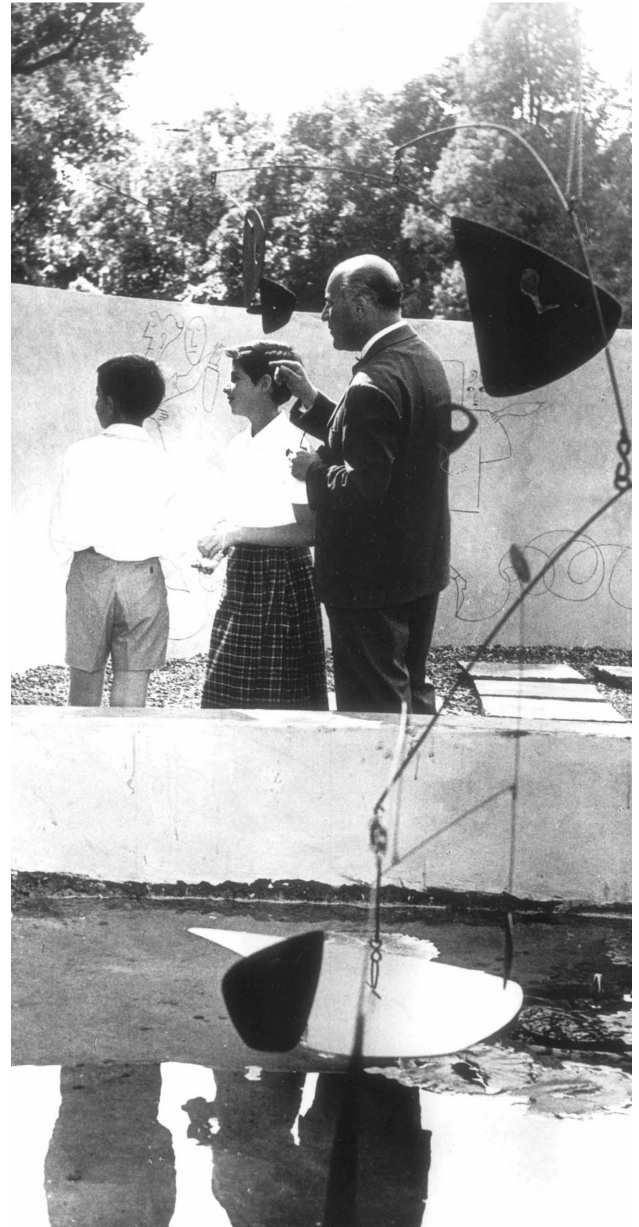
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Figure 3. **Ernesto N. Rogers** and **Alfred Roth** at the X CIAM (Dubrovnik, 1956). gta/Archiv/ETH Zürich (42_AR_X_72).

Figure 4. **Ernesto N. Rogers** with **J. Lluís Sert**. gta/Archiv/ETH Zürich (42_AR_X_90).

Figure 5. **Ernesto N. Rogers** during the VIII CIAM (Hoddesdon, 1951). gta/Archiv/ETH Zürich (42_IT_9_599).

Figure 6. **Ernesto N. Rogers** in the Children's Labyrinth, X Triennale di Milano, 1954.

The CIAM Council imparted their program to the First CIAM Summer School, organized in August–September 1949 at the Architectural Association in London: the projects focused on serious problems in London’s reconstruction and the teaching was freed of any predefined approach in favor of an open experience shared between students, professors, and practitioners from various disciplines.

On the whole the experience in London was positive and led to the idea of linking the Summer School to the CIAM Congresses. Holding them both in the same place at the same time would permit greater interaction between the two initiatives and ensure the necessary solicitation from international architects. The main theme of the VIII CIAM (Hoddesdon, 1951) was “The Heart of the City,” but emphasis was also placed on advancing educational reform, to the extent that the Council confirmed the Commission as championed by Rogers. His strength in the CIAM is further attested by his appointment as vice president of the Commission on Architectural Education (Gropius was president; the Commission members included, among others, Van Eesteren, Giedion, Chermayeff, and Tyrwhitt).

Based on the *Rapport de la Troisième Commission* of the VII CIAM, it was evident that, despite increasing efforts, a difficult situation loomed as architects were being progressively marginalized from a creative vision toward a business-based practice. The report suggested that industrial society demanded a better understanding of social conditions and technical know-how as well as the ability to take on a full gamut of projects ranging from the design of an object to a regional plan. This, in turn, required close collaboration between disciplines and the importance of teamwork as well as appreciation for individual artistic research was emphasized. Taken together, all of this necessitated an in-depth revision of pedagogy. Education in the humanities, the sciences, and the arts had to be prerequisite to technical training, which would then provide direct experience in construction, followed by advanced specialized studies. Education had to be based on method; history had to be taught in such a way as to provide an understanding of the continuity of the human experience; the study of technology had to be integrated with that of other subjects and approached as research. To get past the technical or humanistic specializations of the day, it was also suggested that curricula be defined in such a way as to include shared coursework for artists, architects, and engineers. CIAM architects were asked to take appropriate measures to achieve all of these goals, including the CIAM Summer Schools. Rogers closed the Commission’s work with the following statement: “Unity of method and of approach, diversity of architectural

language represent the basis of architectural progress to-day. They are the guiding principles in architectural education.”¹⁴

When it became clear that it would be impossible to hold the CIAM Summer School in London, Rogers—in 1950—took on its legacy. Sharing the widespread concern on the pressing renewal of the CIAM (from a generational perspective as well), combined with the Council’s on-going attention to and role in architecture education, he went to Giedion expressing the willingness to continue the experience in Venice.

The VIII CIAM was entrusted to the by then prestigious Faculty of Architecture in Venice, where the Summer School was directed by CIAM architects Albini, Gardella, Rogers, and Samonà. The first Venice Summer School (1952) focused on the relationships between the island city, the mainland, and the region. The second (1953), picking up on a suggestion from the Venice Biennale, addressed the redesign of the national pavilions in the Giardini. The third (1954) clarified the reflections of the first, concentrating on the relationship between the city’s historical center and the mainland at the points in which the road/rail infrastructures meet the city.

The Venice Summer School was heir to a realistic, international, interdisciplinary vision that respected a cross-section of academic roles, as proposed by the CIAM commissions on educational reform and in keeping with the fundamentals of Rogers’ conception of teaching. It was an educational opportunity based on real contact with the city, a complex node of the dynamics of conservation and the modernization of urban structures and community life, two issues that had ran parallel throughout the CIAM. Yet the CIAM Summer School in Venice came to a close here, anticipating the end of the CIAM by just a few years. Though Ernesto N. Rogers’ contribution to renewing architecture education has been less examined than his teaching in Italy, it intertwines a web of assumptions that were to build a fertile international network of postwar relationships and happy ending to a life generously spent building the new architecture. Seeking the continuity of the Modern in Gropius’ method and Le Corbusier’s invention, and a tradition for the Contemporary in history but especially in society: “You have to load up on utopia and set yourself goals that aren’t verifiable in the passing moment, distant goals that are not immediately possible and seem mad. This is building tomorrow: dropping fertile seeds deep into earth’s furrows.”¹⁵

Notes

1. Ernesto N. Rogers was born in Trieste in 1909.
2. The BBPR or, if you like, the BBPR Studio was founded in 1932 after their graduation and included Gianluigi Banfi, Lodovico Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto N. Rogers.
3. Interned first in the Camp in Dagmersellen, Rogers took the *Fond Européen de Secour aux Etudiants* exams at Olten, competing for the position of teaching assistant in Architecture at the Geneva School of Architecture directed by Jean Tschumi. Placing *optimus*, he then moved to the Camp in Vevey and became a lecturer in Architecture and Urban Planning Theory at the *Camp d'internement universitaire de Lausanne* for three semesters, before returning to Italy in May 1945.
4. "Noi crediamo che non basti all'architetto il costruire, ma sentiamo il bisogno di dire, di esprimere, con la sintesi dell'opera nostra, oltre che la vita contingente, il pensiero e il carattere dell'epoca attuale." BBPR, *Presentazione ai progetti di laurea*, Rogers, Ernesto N., *Architettura misura e grandezza dell'uomo*, edited by S. Maffioletti, Il Poligrafo, Padua 2010, 112-3.
5. Ernesto N. Rogers was the editor of the magazine *Domus. La casa dell'uomo* from January 1946 to December 1947 (issues n° 205-223/5).
6. Ernesto N. Rogers was the editor of the magazine *Casabella-Continuità* from December 1953 to January 1965 (issues n° 199-294/5).
7. "L'architetto moderno sente che i suoi obiettivi sono sottomessi a un imperativo morale e fonda le radici della sua opera nel terreno fecondo dei valori umani. Come ogni poeta, l'architetto deve essere profeta e interprete della società in cui vive: forgiare una nuova misura artistica nella legge che gli impone la storia", Rogers, Ernesto N., "Problemi di metodo," Rogers, Ernesto N., *Architettura misura e grandezza dell'uomo*, cit., 243.
8. Architettura = funzione (Bellezza, Utilità)
9. "Lo chiamo pentagramma perché, invece di essere un decalogo di cose fisse, è un pentagramma, dove si può comporre qualunque musica, magari anche saltando una linea [perché] serve a tutte le musiche, consente nuove variazioni e nuove invenzioni a ogni opera", Rogers, Ernesto N., *Lezione*, 30.4.1965, "Corso di Storia dell'arte e Storia degli stili dell'architettura, a.a. 1964-65", *Il Pentagramma di Rogers*, edited by S. Maffioletti, Il Poligrafo, Padua 2009, 183.
10. "Schivo da qualsiasi atteggiamento autoritario, non mi esimo dall'esercitare la piena responsabilità che mi compete come docente e come guida", Rogers, Ernesto N., "Lezione La prigione: tema del corso 1966-67, 9.12.1966", S.M., *Una scuola di coscienza*, in *Ibidem*, 16.
11. Rogers was in Latin America from May 1948 to May 1949, visiting and teaching in Argentina, Peru, and Chile.
12. "La méthode est plus importante que l'information, elle doit s'appuyer sur l'intuition, l'analyse, le sens critique et la synthèse. La vie dans son évolution permanente est la source de toutes inspirations" Cf. VII CIAM, *Rapport de la Troisième Commission: Reforme de l'enseignement de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (gta Archiv/ETH Zürich).
13. "Nous avons une tâche si grande et grandiose en Europe." Letter from A. Roth to E.N. Rogers, 22.11.1949 (gta Archiv/ETH Zürich).
14. Cf. VIII CIAM, Report of Hoddesdon Conference CIAM 8 1951 (gta Archiv/ETH Zürich).
15. "Bisogna caricarsi di utopia e porsi anche quelle mete non verificabili al momento contingente, mete lontane che non hanno un'immediata attuazione possibile e sembrano follia. Questo è costruire domani: affondare nel solco della terra semi fecondi", Rogers, Ernesto N., "Elogio dell'architettura", *Casabella-Continuità*, n° 287, 1964.

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Figure 7. Ernesto N. Rogers, J. Lluís Sert and other participants at a lunch during the VII CIAM (Bergamo, 1947). gta/Archiv/ETH Zürich (42_AR_X_33).