

The seating arrangement at Helsjön, 2007  
Kersti Sandin Bülow

# Adjustable Spaces Without a Fit

A designer's reflection of Sven-Eric Liedman's lecture

Kersti Sandin Bülow

The irregular light of a thriftily bare fluorescent lamp spread across the beige-brown meeting room at the Helsingborg Study Center. It was November outside. Patterned curtains that had been chosen as "homelike" and window niches with hardy green plants decorated the room. Tables and chairs in the Nordic institutional style were carelessly placed in a traditional U-shaped formation. The furniture was made of beechwood and shiny steel that radiated technical construction rather than aesthetic sensitivity or ergonomic ambition.

By reading Liedman's text, we who participated are presumably transported mentally once again to the experience of the room at Helsingborg.

The room at Helsingborg is a space that is not affected by anyone; nor does it make demands. It is a neutral room where anything can happen, but is not allowed to happen. A room where the spoken word, presented under controlled, neutral conditions, stands in the center. But also a room that holds back and tones down the sensory perceptions of the participants. A room with a common denominator that doesn't fit anyone - an adaptable room without a fit.

In his lecture, Sven-Eric Liedman summarises the thoughts of linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt about endless learning. He also sketches a picture of the seminar room as a living library or a creative laboratory for unbounded learning and education.

But the rooms that greet today's students, teachers, and researchers at universities and colleges are just as neutrally and pragmatically managed as the room at Helsingborg. Is it lack of interest, habit, or a fear of ending up in an endless discussion about style and taste that shapes these, our shared spaces?

Where are the spatial intervals for unbounded dialogue that Liedman describes?

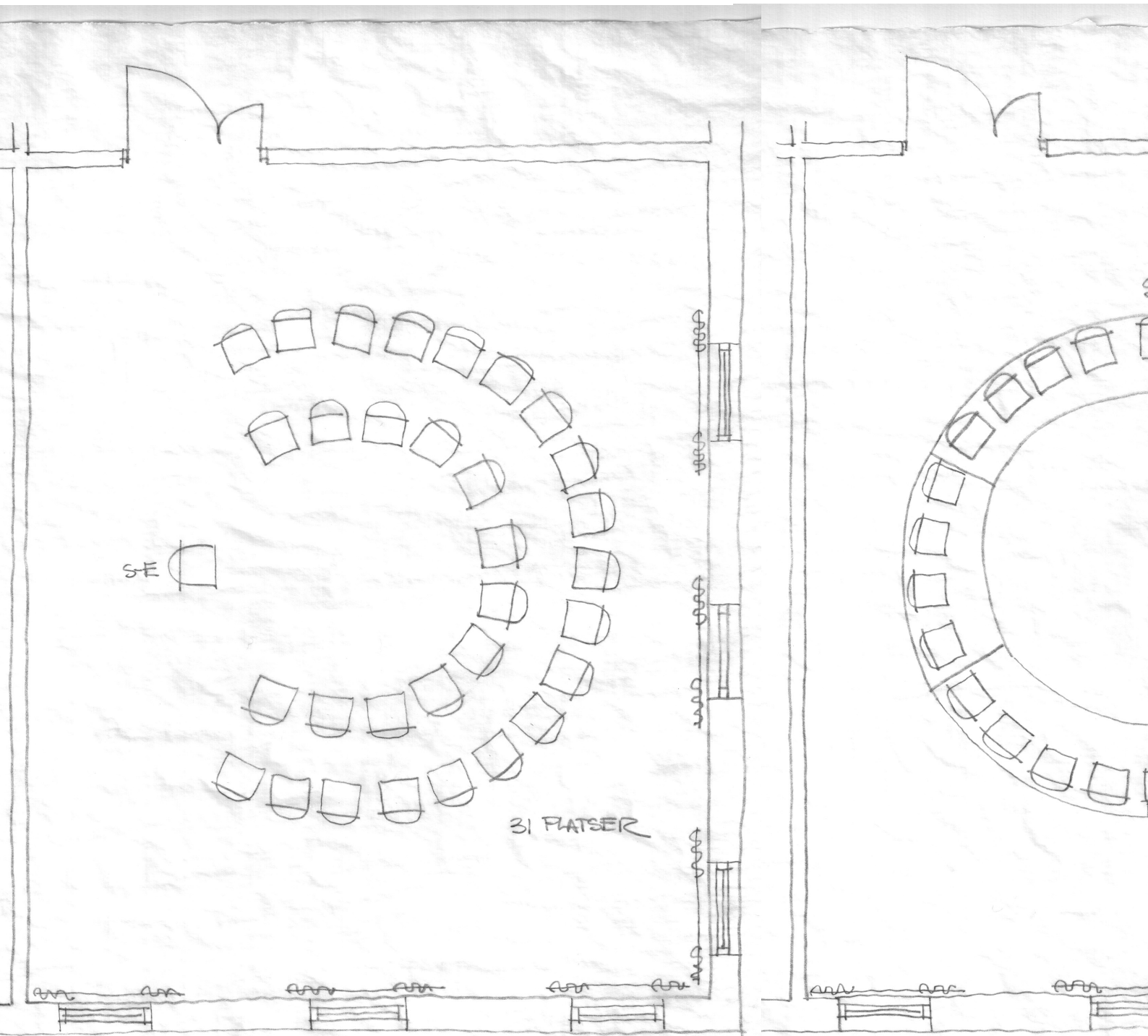
The following sketches show alternative seating solutions for the seminar room at Helsingborg.

*Translated by Sonia Wichmann*

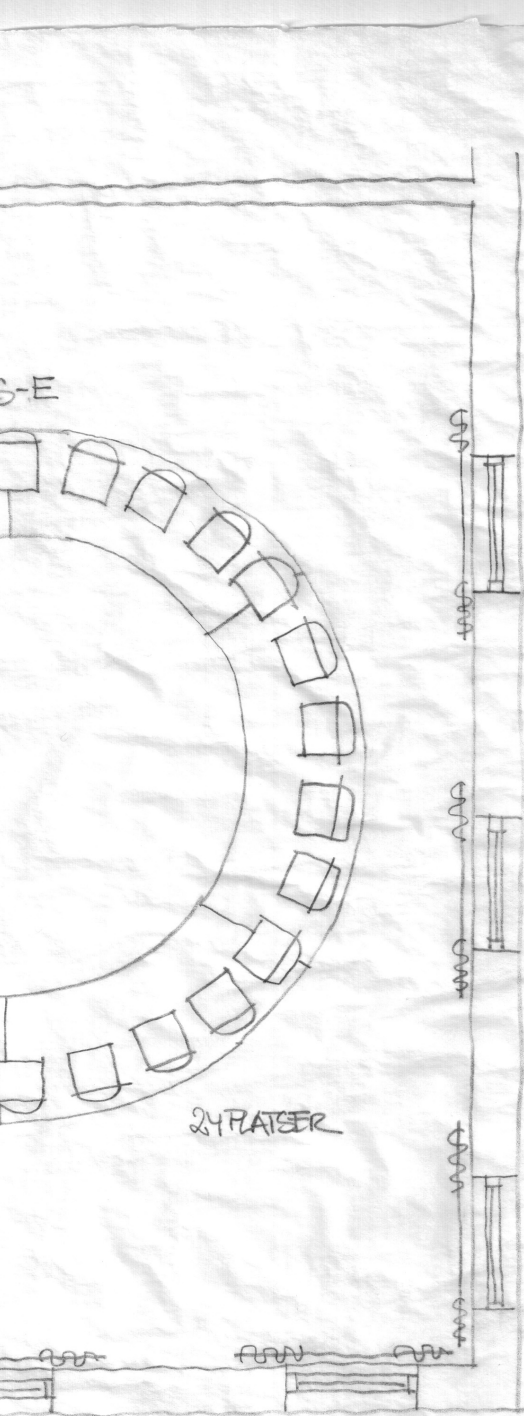
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Meetings at work: spatial intervals for unbounded dialogues is Kersti Sandin Bülow's doctoral project in the Design/Interior Architecture department at HDK - School of Design and Crafts at the University of Gothenburg. With theoretical studies within the humanities and social sciences, a platform for the development of new meeting concepts is being outlined. The aim of the project is to make visible the reigning norms within the field, as well as to develop awareness of the effect of space in various meeting situations. Through the formation of artifacts and spaces, different meeting concepts are analyzed and evaluated, with interviews and participatory observation.

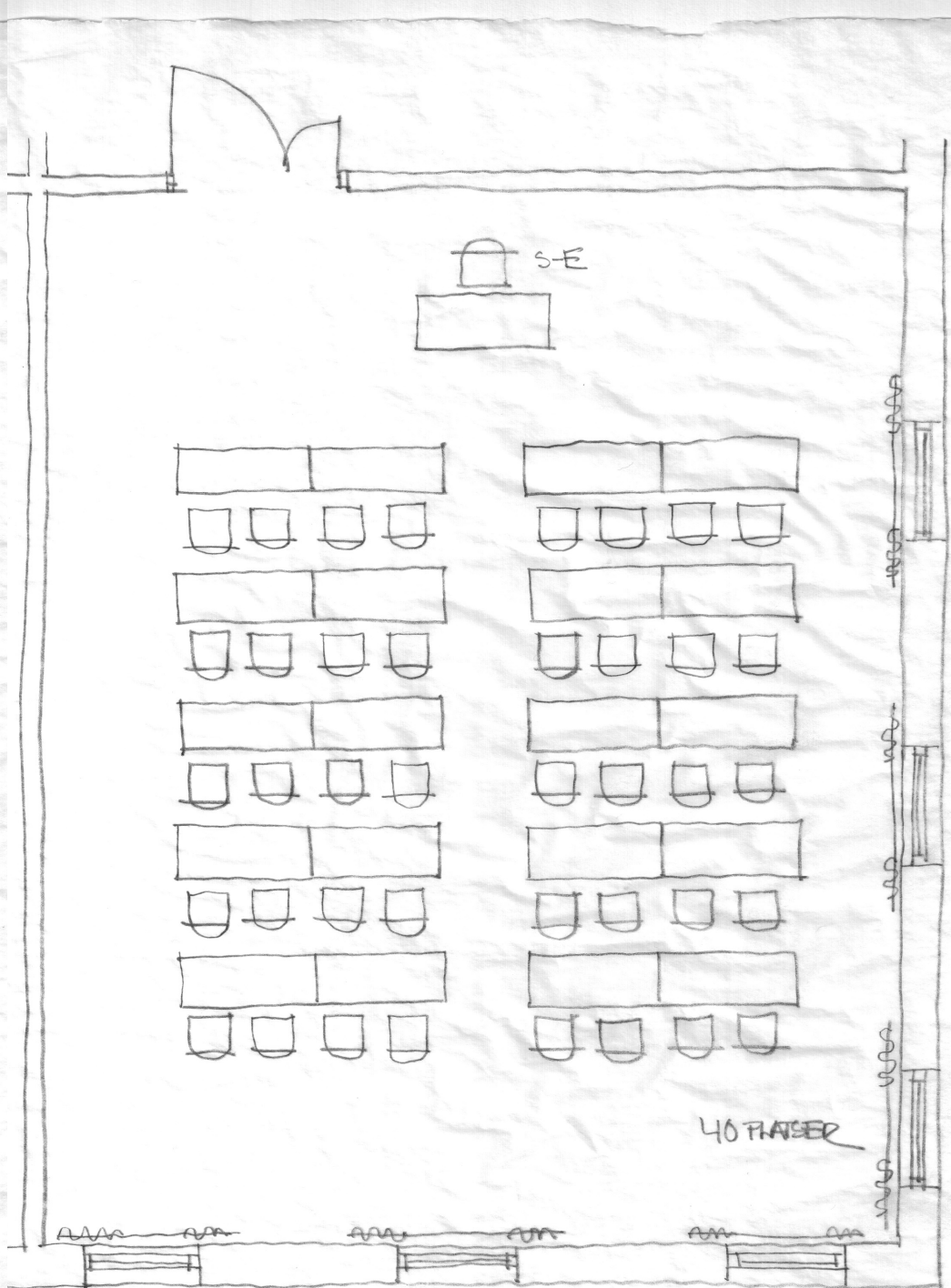
How should we have been seated at the seminar at Helsjön? My suggestion is that we all should have faced Sven-Eric Liedman, in a fan or circular seating arrangement without tables, close to and in full view of each other. Or for more energy we could have stood up while we were listening.



Fan seating



Circular seating



Traditional training seating