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A walk along the Rue de la Loi

EU façades as front- and backstage of transnational legal practice

*Renske Vos**

I would like to invite you on a walk with me, to just show you what is there. This half-hour stroll is the same for all my fieldwork interviews,¹ it goes through the heart of the European quarter in Brussels along the Rue de la Loi, which literally translates as ‘the Street of the Law’.² Here, we find the homes of some prominent EU institutions, law giving and executing bodies of the EU.³ Their façades and the offices behind them are very much the front stage of the EU. This is the EU’s theatre of action. It is a space one might have expectations of. Yet at the same time, the real frontstage of the EU is elsewhere, as most people do not meet the EU here in Brussels, but rather encounter it in the media, in

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1 Renske Vos, *Europe and the Sea of Stories* (PhD thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, forthcoming). These interviews took place in the period July 2015–December 2016.

2 The political potential of street names has long been recognized. Note for example the US–China row over a bill to rename the street in front of the Chinese Embassy in Washington ‘Liu Xiaobo Plaza’ after the activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who passed away in July 2017. For a further history on the subject: Paul Dallison, ‘Street Fighting, Man!’ (*Politico* 3 August 2017) <http://www.politico.eu/article/street-fighting-man-brexit-eu-uk-negotiations/?utm_content=bufferf6d2c&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer> accessed 15 August 2017.

3 For the European Commission: DG European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR); DG Research and Innovation (RTD); DG International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO); DG Communication (COMM); DG European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO); DG Taxation and Customs Union (TAXUD); DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL); DG Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI); DG Economic and Financial Affairs (ECFIN), DG Trade (TRADE), the Representation of the European Commission to Belgium, as well as several Commission service departments housed in the Berlaymont building, plus the European External Action Service (EEAS), and three Council buildings. See also European Commission, ‘Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels’ <http://ec.europa.eu/oib/buildings_en.cfm> accessed 15 August 2017.

discussions, online, through the euro, in emblems, or in the absence of border controls across Europe. As a backstage, this street reveals an unchoreographed landscape of buildings that do not match. Ad hoc choices of marble, concrete, pillars, steps, steel, countless variations in windows and height, all right next to one another. As storytellers themselves and as part of a story being told, what do these buildings say about this front- and backstage of the EU? The premise of this chapter is that long before meeting anyone inside, the building has already started to speak.⁴ The method is to attempt to access this mostly tacit knowledge through attentiveness to my own responses as a visitor of this space, which I will therefore share with you.

The practice described in what follows is mine. My practice is to walk to meetings. Walking has been subject to increased academic attention, ‘namely: the *walk*, as an event; the *walker*, as a human subject; and, *walking*, as an embodied act’.⁵ Unintentionally, it has made me notice the façades I pass and reflect on what they facilitate, represent, or affirm. A part of Brussels has been flattened to make space for these buildings. As any organization, the EU would be hard pushed without any offices for meeting, reading, and writing. One official compared the relationship of officials to their building, with pet-owners, who in time start to resemble their pets.⁶ The need for these offices is obvious, yet at the same time our engagement with the spaces themselves is minimal. The Rue de la Loi is not a popular site for visitors. Likewise, the abundance of academic literature featuring the EU rarely accounts for its physicality. The merit of looking at the buildings along the Rue de la Loi is that as the EU itself builds and uses these structures, they both hold and say something about that EU.

A walk along the street of the law

We exit Brussels Central Train Station via an enclosed shopping mall. We cross the street, ascend more steps and take the shortcut through the Parc de Bruxelles. At the corner of the park we turn right into the Rue de la Loi. Suddenly,

4 Dvora Yanow, ‘Space Stories: Studying Museum Buildings as Organizational Spaces While Reflecting on Interpretive Methods and Their Narration’ (1998) 7(3) *Journal of Management Inquiry* 215.

5 Hayden Lorimer, ‘Walking: New Forms and Spaces for Studies of Pedestrianism’, in Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman (eds), *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (Ashgate 2011), 19. Walking as a social practice has been subject to increased academic study, notably among cultural geographers and social anthropologists. According to Lorimer, even constituting a ‘new walking studies’ focusing attention on ‘this most basic of human activities’, 19. See also Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (Verso 2002); Frédéric Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking* (trans. John Howe, Verso 2014); Joseph Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking* (New York University Press 2004); Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst, ‘Introduction’, in Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst (eds), *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot* (Ashgate 2008).

6 Conversation with EU official.

we encounter a densely chaotic crossroads, after which four roaring lanes of traffic rush our way, all in one direction, away from the Schuman roundabout at the top of this road.

We walk into the street hesitantly, somewhat overwhelmed by the sudden grey of the buildings, grey of the traffic, grey of the sky. On a map the street does not look like much, but when walking here it seems vast. We step in further, and then over your right shoulder we see a notice next to a door: 'Directorate General for Development and Cooperation, Europe Aid'. I recall here my initial surprise at first seeing that sign, how in that moment 'DEVCO' ceased to be an acronym on a policy paper and gained a physical presence. This was not just a building: it *is* the EU.

We look on again along the street, and after our eyes get used to the grey and set on the different buildings the impression that lasts is that these buildings are a very odd mix. The buildings consist of glass, sandstone, marble, steel, concrete. They are designed with all sorts of features: columns, steps, landings, outdoor escalators, yellow and orange blinds. They all have different numbers and sizes of windows, and every building is a different height. This street is not uniquely inhabited by EU institutions either, some of the others include: a telcom company (Belfius), a travel agency (Touring), a hotel (Thon), a sci-entology church (no. 91). There are no trees along the street, some of the sites along the street are undergoing construction, there are vague markings of a bicycle lane on the pavement. The colours of the buildings have faded and are blending in and contributing to this overall sense of grey.

The DEVCO building takes up a whole block. It even has its own tiles on the pavement right in front of the building. Steps along this front lead up to a landing from which a tall façade emerges. The building is clad in a combination of pink and grey marble tiles and enormous reflecting windows. On both sides of the façade rise two colossal arches. In the middle of the landing sits one set of revolving doors into the building. On the corner a small section of the building is dressed up as a shop. It is an information point, with windows that are covered with words printed in orange, yellow and red in all different fonts: 'climate action', 'poverty reduction', 'gender equality', 'democracy', 'water', 'human rights'. More words, but in a rainbow of different colours are printed along the downstairs windows of the rest of the building: 'inclusion', 'knowledge transfer', 'sustainable growth', 'culture', 'education', to name a few. In this way the building is literally throwing out statements of what DEVCO wishes itself and its projects to stand for or be associated with. The whole building appears like a statement of some sort – even if only by its sheer size. At the same time that statement is not amplified by the neighbours, who leave only a tight space around the building, and whose build and materials neither resonate nor contrast sharply with the DEVCO building, to lend the latter a distinct character. The unchoreographed appearance of the scene means the building blends into the grey of the messy streetscape.

ECHO (the Directorate for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection) further up and across the road, is marked by a poster campaign of African women and

children. Five such photographs the size of garage doors are lined up on street level. Above them are eight narrow stories of offices, marked by horizontal lanes of dark glass and concrete. This style spreads across multiple buildings in different kinds of concrete, interspersed by one different-looking building, with a different variation of windows – tall on street level, small and square higher up, all with bright blue window frames. The building seems to continue over into DG Agriculture, which occupies three different styles of building. Its outer two buildings are marked by yellow and orange blinds. On the side of the most eastern building, outdoor escalators lead up from the street below. Next to the entrance sits an empty bicycle rack, behind it a faded print stating: *‘L’agriculture, je t’aime!’* (I love agriculture!). The images seem to come from a different time. As though they are only still there because they have been forgotten about. The people on the street do not seem to notice the images much, nor do they pay any particular attention to the buildings. Their deliberate movements suggest a familiarity with a route, taken regularly enough for eyes to turn inward.

Towards the top of the road a series of newer buildings provide a sharp contrast, drawing more wandering eyes up. Up until now all EU buildings down the road have been housing different divisions of the Commission. It is a tried essay question to ask undergraduates whether the Council or Commission is more powerful. The idea being that in principle you could argue either way. Walking here, experiencing the vastness of the Commission buildings in contrast to ‘only’ three buildings for the Council, that argument seems very theoretical. Up here, these three distinctive newly built Council buildings stand on the right, even if two of the buildings are connected by a walk bridge some floors up. They face two also new buildings of the Commission in direct opposition. These buildings are crisp and modern, yet in line with their neighbours down the road they each have their very own style. In important contrast though, these buildings have started to communicate with one another, if in competition: the intricate, sophisticated interplay of slender wooden window panes of the Council’s Europa building in between the Council’s Justus Lipsius and Lex buildings,⁷ stoically facing the vast embrace of solid, non-transparent glass of the Commission’s Berlaymont building, built at an angle, looming towards it.

The straight line of the street has all along been drawing our eyes up to the Schuman roundabout and behind it, to the Schuman monument, celebrating Belgium’s independence. The roundabout provides a clearing from which we are surrounded by these sudden new buildings, providing a sort of break with the buildings downstream. The sudden change in architecture makes me aware that these are the glass and steel constructions that in hindsight I had expected from the start.

7 See also: European Council – Council of the European Union, ‘Council Buildings’ (*Consilium*) <<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/contact/address/council-buildings/europa-building>> accessed 15 August 2017.

Over the two years that I have walked up and down this street on visits to Brussels, the street has undergone some changes, which can be expected to continue. Lunch joints offering organic menus can now be found at the bottom of the Rue de la Loi in addition to around the rond point. Information points are newly opening up at places along the street. And as mentioned the newer buildings are distinctly more modern than their cousins down the road and they have been given their own names.⁸ The discussion here concentrates on buildings built from the 1950s to 1970s, when offices had to be effective and functional, an expression of brutalist architecture, especially popular with governmental and institutional clients. ‘Brutalism’ as a term is an adaptation of the French ‘béton brut’, ‘raw concrete’, the preferred choice of material of architects such as Le Corbusier.⁹ I focus on this older part of the street as the buildings here mesmerize me. And I wonder both what might account for these buildings and for my surprise.

A walking guide

What is a street? In its basic form, there is an obvious and simple order to a street, however many buildings are ‘facing a common open space’.¹⁰ But a street is also a public face, ‘not only a means of access, but an area for social expression’.¹¹ It is at the same time both a path and a place. It is a route to travel through and a space of first encounter. It is tempting to see descriptions of heavy one-way traffic or opaque office windows as metaphors of some sort. But the point needs to be stressed that these offices, these buildings, this architecture, this street, they are also really there.¹²

In terms of form, the street can be analysed through ‘a number of polar qualities, such as: straight or curved, long or short, wide or narrow’.¹³ Likewise, it can be seen ‘in terms of scale, proportion, contrast, rhythm or connections to other streets and squares’.¹⁴ As a social fact, a street can be studied in terms of ‘who owns, uses, and controls it; the purposes for which it was built, its

8 For a discussion on the newer buildings around the Schuman roundabout, see Renske Vos and Sofia Stolk ‘Law in Concrete: Institutional Architecture in Brussels and The Hague’ (forthcoming).

9 Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (Architectural Press 1966).

10 Cliff Moughtin, *Urban Design: Street and Square* (Routledge 2003) 130.

11 Moughtin (n 10) 130.

12 This loosely refers to Anne Orford, who praises description in arguing after Michel Foucault to turn to description as a method not to reveal what is hidden, but to make us see what is seen. She makes a point about the tangibility of things, and viewing them *as* things primarily, and only then as tropes of some sort. Anne Orford, ‘In Praise of Description’ (2012) 25 *Leiden Journal of International Law* 609, 623.

13 Moughtin (n 10) 133.

14 Moughtin (n 10) 133.

changing social and economic function'.¹⁵ In comparison with cities¹⁶ and squares,¹⁷ streets have received less detailed consideration. In some ways, it seems the street is seen as what remains after planning of individual properties is considered complete.¹⁸ Yet streets serve also to bind together the social order of a local urban community.¹⁹ In this sense, streets can be described as 'small universes', where the character of the distinct neighbourhood or town is presented to the visitor in condensed form.²⁰

Dvora Yanow suggests that:

Built spaces are at once storytellers and part of the story being told. As storytellers, they communicate values, beliefs, and feelings using vocabularies of construction materials and design elements. Space stories are told through those vocabularies rather than through literal language – although the messages of the materials and spatial codes may be confirmed or contradicted by written, oral, and nonverbal languages (e.g. agency or company literature, managers' speeches and acts). The vocabularies comprise a part of the methods through which organizational meanings are communicated. At the same time, spaces are settings for organizational acts. In their use, they become characters in these stories' plots. In this way, organizational spaces are both medium and message.²¹

I borrow from Yanow,²² as well as others,²³ in loosely using the anthropological practice of reflexivity. Like Yanow, I draw on self-observations – 'my feelings, responses, actions and understandings' – as they relate to the space I enter.²⁴ There is a realistic component to this – I am describing the street as I see it,

15 Moughtin (n 10) 131.

16 Janne Nijman, 'Renaissance of the City as Global Actor: The Role of Foreign Policy and International Law Practices in the Construction of Cities as Global Actors', in Andreas Fahrmeir, Gunther Hellmann and Miloš Vec (eds), *The Transformation of Foreign Policy: Drawing and Managing Boundaries from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford University Press 2016); Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (Verso 2006); Doug Saunders, *Arrival City: The Final Migration and Our Next World* (Knopf Canada 2010). Ricky Burdett, Deyan Sudjic and Omer Cavusoglu (eds), *Living in the Endless City* (Phaidon 2011).

17 Dorien Keizer (forthcoming); Moughtin (n 10).

18 Moughtin (n 10) 133.

19 Robert Gutman, 'The Street Generation', in Stanford Anderson (ed.), *On Streets* (MIT Press 1986) 250.

20 Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (Studio Vista 1971).

21 Yanow (n 4) 215.

22 Yanow (n 4) 215.

23 David Kennedy, 'Spring Break' (1985) 63(8) *Texas Law Review* 1377; Sarah Nouwen, "'As You Set Out for Ithaca": Practical, Epistemological, Ethical and Existential Questions about Socio-Legal Empirical Research in Conflict' (2014) 27(1) *Leiden Journal of International Law* 227.

24 Yanow (n 4) 223.

even if I stay out of a neutral or detached mode. I interpret meaning to an actor in this situation, and I stand in for that actor to some extent.²⁵ The aim is to derive provisional understandings about the meanings built spaces have. The method is to attempt to access this mostly tacit knowledge through attentiveness to my ‘cognitive, aesthetic, and behavioural responses’ as a visitor of this space.²⁶ Still, there is no denying that my responses will be specific. As someone who has never worked for the EU, but who has studied it for over a decade. As an occasional, rather than a frequent visitor. Someone, who is predominantly outside, but also sufficiently ‘in’ on the work that is done here. Someone, who grew up in a country, the Netherlands, which champions urban planning. And as someone with a great propensity, in fact a need, to stare into her coffee for hours, or worse, into space.

The premise as mentioned is that before meeting anyone inside the building, the building has already started to speak.²⁷ The stories of built spaces ‘comprise another forum through which identity and image are communicated to internal and external audiences’.²⁸ ‘Space design and use and the tensions between authored and constructed space stories may indicate important elements of organizational practice. (. . .) They comprise another context for the communication and interpretation of organizational meanings’.²⁹

The Rue de la Loi as storyteller

The Rue de la Loi embodies the history of a part of Brussels, flattened to make way for this series of buildings. Europeanization has had an enormous impact on the city of Brussels. From the 1950s onwards, the aristocratic Leopold Quarter (or European quarter) was gradually taken over by office developers celebrating the modern belief that demolishing old neighbourhoods and replacing them with modern buildings and infrastructure was the only solution to inner-city problems.³⁰ Indeed, the general geographic term ‘Brusselisation’³¹ refers to the destruction of vast parts of a pre-war city in order to put up

25 Yanow (n 4) 223, 234.

26 Yanow (n 4) 223, 234.

27 Yanow (n 4) 233.

28 Yanow (n 4) 233.

29 Yanow (n 4) 233. See also Nelson Goodman, ‘How Buildings Mean’ (1985) 11 *Critical Inquiry* 642; Dvora Yanow, *How Does a Policy Mean?: Interpreting Policy and Organizational Actions* (Georgetown University Press 1996).

30 Guy Baeten, ‘Old Élités in a New City: Restructuring the Leopold Quarter and the Europeanization of Brussels’ in Frank Moulaert, Arantxa Rodriguez, and Erik Swyngedouw (eds) *The Globalized City: Economic Restructuring and Social Polarization in European Cities* (Oxford University Press 2003) 125.

31 Katarzyna Romańczyk, ‘Transforming Brussels into an International City – Reflections on “Brusselization”’ (2012) 29 *Cities* 126.

predominantly concrete structures.³² Certainly not all the responsibility for these post-war modernization efforts befalls the EU. However, ten street blocks in the Leopold Quarter were effectively absorbed by EU-related building projects.³³ The Rue de la Loi runs through the centre of these.

A 2003 study found that the expansion of EU offices seems likely to continue in the future, even if it also mentions the suggestion by an interlocutor to limit the number of office buildings the EU uses, in order to enable the EU to occupy fewer but more ‘representative’ buildings, and facilitate better communications among its employees.³⁴ How realistic this suggestion is or was cannot be assessed here. The point to be stressed, however, is that the EU’s constant need for additional office space has led to the ‘ruthless and restless expansion of offices’³⁵ “into” the European quarter. And, that the ‘elite migrants’ or ‘urban nomads’ with their ‘seemingly transnational’ reach, i.e. the EU officials who are the principal users of the space have gained a command over this urban space that is apparently beyond the reach of the local population.³⁶ The point that I am trying to make is that the design and construction of the EU offices along the Rue de la Loi was consciously intended to result in buildings that look as they do. This enhances the link between what the buildings communicate, and regarding this as speaking *of* the EU.

Modifications in aesthetic production are prominently visible in the realm of architecture, simply because of the size of buildings in comparison to other works of art. In addition, buildings possess a certain permanence as ‘time capsules’ of architectural choices, due to the difficulty of drastically changing a building once it has been built. Jameson argues that in architecture formal criticism and analysis are made visible in (re)considerations of urban structures.³⁷ Architectural choices are tangible indicators of the prominent considerations of a given time. Brutist architecture with its tenets, effectiveness and functionality, is bound up with a certain idea of governance that is likewise functional and concrete.

The Rue de la Loi as a story being told

Why did I expect one grand concerted symphony of glass and steel? This question draws back to the remark in the introduction to this piece: the façades

32 Though the plans were never fully implemented, the dominant conviction seemed to have been of an urgent need for rational, orderly, and disciplinary urban design, and so three-quarters of the inner city of Brussels were declared ‘slum neighbourhoods’. See Baeten (n 30), as well as Evert Lagrou, ‘Brussels: Five Capitals in Search of a Place. The Citizens, the Planners and the Functions’ (2000) 51(1–2) *GeoJournal* 99.

33 Alex Papadopoulos, *Urban Regimes and Strategies: Building Europe’s Central Executive District in Brussels* (University of Chicago Press 1996).

34 Baeten (n 30) 135–136.

35 Baeten (n 30) 128.

36 Baeten (n 30) 128.

37 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press 1991).

along this street are both the front- *and* backstage of the EU. This opens up consecutive questions on what constitutes a front- or a backstage: Who builds a frontstage? Is a front- or backstage intentional? Does a frontstage need an audience? Is an empty stage still a frontstage? Does every backstage require a frontstage, and vice versa? Where do expectations regarding a front- or backstage come from? Who are these buildings for?

The notion of frontstage lends itself for taking another look at the idea of façade, which is especially pertinent in the context of buildings, which literally have façades. I suspect in principle a façade is something to uphold to an audience, and provides thus an opportunity to use as a display of a certain story to that audience. In the case of the Rue de la Loi such understanding leads to a curious sight. As a street, the building façades seem to absence a clear symbolic or coherent statement. Though incidental visitors are certainly tolerated, the street does not overly invite a visiting audience to whom to present itself.

Brussels is very much part of the increasing importance of cities as hubs, actors, and influencers of international law and international negotiations.³⁸ Indeed, for the EU the link between this global institution and its host-city is so intense that ‘Brussels’ has become synonymous with the EU in common parlance. Despite the prominent place of ‘Brussels’ in discussions regarding the EU, I was surprised to realize that I do not hold a visual image in my mind of what that EU in Brussels looks like. And I imagine by extension, that such a commonly held symbol –in the sense of what the Eiffel Tower is for Paris- is absent for most EU citizens.³⁹ Upon closer inspection, it seems that such absences are more common for the EU. For example, the windows and bridges on Euro bank notes – symbolizing openness and cooperation – are non-existent structures.⁴⁰ This appears to result from solving the conundrum of not favouring one country over another. It has long been known that commonly held founding myths and identity symbols are important, which is probably also why they are hard fought over.⁴¹ This tension is reflected in the buildings along

38 Luis Eslava, *Local Space, Global Life: The Everyday Operation of International Law and Development* (Cambridge University Press 2015); Janne Nijman, ‘The Future of the City and the International Law of the Future’, in Sam Muller et al. (eds), *Law of the Future and the Future of Law* (Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher 2011) 215–231; Nijman (n 16).

39 Laurent Vermeersch, ‘Is the EU’s New Council Building a Desperate Attempt to Change Its Image?’ (*Guardian* 30 January 2015, section Cities) <<http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jan/30/eu-new-council-building-brussels-change-image>> accessed 15 August 2017.

40 Nationale Bank van België, ‘De Mythe van Europa: De Basis van Een Nieuwe Reeks Eurobiljetten – Museum van de Nationale Bank van België’ <<http://www.nbbmuseum.be/nl/2013/04/banknotes.htm>> accessed 12 October 2016.

41 Raphael Hunsucker, ‘Aetiology; Archaeology, Memory; Monuments: Inventing Origins in Augustan Rome’ (*Academia*) <http://www.academia.edu/29882648/Aetiology_and_Archaeology_Memory_and_Monuments_Inventing_Origins_in_Augustan_Rome> accessed 18 January 2017; Robin Osborne, ‘Epilogue’, in Naoíse Mac Sweeney (ed.), *Foundation Myths in Ancient Societies: Dialogues and Discourses* (University of

the Rue de la Loi. The façade of the Council's Europa building is completely made up of recycled windows from all over Europe, but the result is distinctly un-transparent. DG Agriculture, is housed in a dilapidated concrete bunker, where the walls inside have allegedly not been repainted since it was built, and are discoloured by the smoke of cigarettes, which in the past could be lit inside.⁴² Still, this Commission's directorate receives the largest share of the EU budget.⁴³

This lack of visibility of the EU is odd, especially in comparison to other seats of government or international organizations. I can picture the Elysée, the Reichstag, the UN headquarters in an instance. These are all in their own way prominent buildings. The EU features centrally in my research, it stuns me that I did not hold a visual image of one of its most central sites.

If we return to the street as 'a small universe' in itself, we would expect it to present the character of the distinct neighbourhood to the visitor. If that street runs through the heart of a neighbourhood that is home to a cosmopolitan community centred around a cosmopolitan international organization, we might expect to find a 'clean, relaxed, air-conditioned, infrastructure-rich urbanism of the kind that is more familiar to the world than the context of its host country'.⁴⁴ The type of habitat which we find replicated around the world at sites⁴⁵ where sub-sets of 'transnational justice entrepreneurs'⁴⁶ stick together.⁴⁷

What stands out from the earlier sketch of the Rue de la Loi is the incoherence between the different buildings. What stands out is the sense that the individual buildings do not speak to one another. Perhaps it is strange to say

Pennsylvania Press 2015); Allan Cochrane, 'Making up Meanings in a Capital City: Power, Memory and Monuments in Berlin' (2006) 13 *European Urban and Regional Studies* 5.

42 Conversation with EU official.

43 The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) receives approximately 40% of the EU budget: European Commission, 'CAP Expenditure in the Total EU Expenditure' <https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/cap-post-2013/graphs/graph1_en.pdf> accessed 25 June 2018.

44 Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (Verso 2014), 67.

45 For an elegant examination of one of such sites, see also the chapter by Sarah-Jane Koulen in this volume (Chapter 7).

46 Tshepo Madlingozi 'On Transitional Justice Entrepreneurs and the Production of Victims' (2010) 2 *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 208. On the creation of an international community of representatives of a global public, see Immi Tallgren, 'The Voice of the International: Who is Speaking?' (2015) 13 *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 135; Luigi Corrias and Geoff Gordon, 'Judging in the Name of Humanity: International Criminal Tribunals and the Representation of a Global Public' (2015) 13 *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 97.

47 Easterling (n 44). Similarly, on 'sites occupied by this diverse group', see Nigel Eltringham, "'When We Walk Out, What Was It All About?": Views on New Beginnings from within the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda' (2014) 45 *Development and Change* 543.

that buildings are not speaking to one another. Maybe I can clarify this a little by referring to Washington. The buildings of the White House, the Supreme Court and the Congress clearly, intuitively, conceptually hang together. These are different buildings, which resonate with each other in colour, building style, material, shape and philosophy. Or, a more subtle example: the London City, made up of a collection of individually distinctive buildings sitting together as one grey-blue skyline, its structures rising as an island above the town. Or, with a literary illustration: ‘Sad hotels existed everywhere, to be sure, but the Dolphin was in a class of its own. The Dolphin Hotel was conceptually sorry.’⁴⁸ We all carry within ourselves images of sad hotels and dingy bars, of cheerless shopping malls, and dreary office spaces. Yet I daresay that the Rue de la Loi is in a league of its own.

The Rue de la Loi as front- and backstage of transnational legal practice

The recurring surprise at the façades of some very prominent EU institutions being somehow uncommunicative, dilapidated and confused relates to arguably the second most-often stated ambition of the EU, which is unity, its first being peace.⁴⁹ Importantly, unity is not the same as uniformity. However, the hotch-potch of buildings along the Rue de la Loi is diametrically at odds with the EU’s own ambition as an organization.

In that sense, there is an argument to be made that these façades more than a frontstage are the backstage of the EU. As backstage, messiness is allowed. Objects discarded for the moment can be kept out of the way, out of sight, as archive or as material to be used another day. For those who are attuned to life backstage, such objects do not distract, they have simply become part of the theatre. There is an unapologetic functionality to it, which you feel as you walk along this street, as you follow under a procession of EU flags: you glimpse an unusual lapse in pretence and you feel the real size and power of the EU. It is not glamorous, but that is also not the point: this is where we work. Indeed, some of that work may be better done behind the scenes, away from prying eyes. The EU can make a concession of apparent non-description. It might get more done by appearing non-circumspect.

Still, the vastness of offices spilling over into the buildings next door betrays something of the size of the project. The message that people are too busy to renovate their building tells something about the enormity of the work being done. There is also a real sense of power in not needing a fancy building.

48 Haruki Murakami, *Dance, Dance, Dance* (Vintage 1995).

49 EU Council, ‘The Rome Declaration’ (*Consilium* 25 March 2017) <<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/25-rome-declaration>> accessed 15 August 2017.

It underlines that there is no point to prove, that here it is known who the EU is regardless. And indeed it is interesting to contrast this with the newer buildings up road, even if these buildings down road when built were considered modern too. Being surrounded by this *béton brut*, all this raw concrete force – I was never more aware of the size and power of the EU, as the first time I walked up this street.

The conceptual change from a frontstage to a backstage is further aided by the overall absence of a visiting audience. In that light, much of my surprise at this physical encounter stems from not having visited the space before, be it in person or in my imagination. For a visitor, it is hard to enter this space. Informally, there is not much to set out for in this street if you do not have some specific goal. Formally, the whole architecture of this street is layered with security precautions, which serve to keep unfamiliar people out.

When moving through this space, an authority is being made tangible. It is hard to enter these buildings. Sometimes it is hard even to just walk past. I have been reprimanded and threatened with arrest for taking photographs. On days of Council Meetings, I have found myself convincing fully armed soldiers in my best French that I needed to attend a meeting, sidestepping roadblocks and barbed wire. The movement through the space is controlled in ways that exceed yet are best evidenced in the restricted access to buildings.⁵⁰ The security proceedings detail who belongs and who does not. The insider is marked by a badge carried visibly on their person. The outsider cannot just go in. One has been registered in advance, brings her passport, waits for her appointment to arrive at the reception, allows her body and belongings to be scanned by security, is escorted at all times by an official member of staff. And of course, and in keeping with this piece, the details of the security procedure are different for each building. Whether you are allowed to bring electronic devices in, whether you yourself or the receptionist write down your details, whether you receive a sticker or a card upon entry, there are countless minute variations on this theme.

These security measures are not without justification. This street is precisely so frontstage – or again so backstage – that it was chosen as the site of a terrorist attack on 22 March 2016 – the Maalbeek metro station is on the Rue de la Loi. These attacks struck not just in Europe, but in the physical heart of the EU. They struck not just European citizens, but officials travelling to work for the EU in the rush hour traffic. This is how the attackers showed not only that they know where the frontstage of Europe is, but also that they can access its backstage. In turn, their actions changed this EU backstage into a frontstage featuring on every front page.

⁵⁰ For a further investigation into the (in)tangible barriers to access, see also the chapter by Amin Parsa in this volume (Chapter 8).

Continuing our path

We have come to the Schuman roundabout at the top of the Rue de la Loi and look back down over the buildings we have passed on this walk. We see one straight line carved through the cityscape and all sorts of grey on its either side. The traffic rummages around us. We stand next to the entrance to the Schuman metro station, one stop up from Maalbeek and where some rumour the attacks were intended to have taken place. It is not an eerie spot for saying goodbye, most people passing us left and right seem to have long moved on and are busying themselves with newer thoughts. Perhaps I can recommend one of the cafés around the corner, or the Parc de Cinquantaire further up, for you to find some quiet or humdrum after making all these buildings speak or to just look around at where you are.

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