Paweł Michał Lewicki

EU-SPACE AND THE EUROCLASS

Modernity, Nationality and Lifestyle among Eurocrats in Brussels

[transcript] Culture and Social Practice
From:

Paweł Michał Lewicki

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How are prestige and power anchored in EU-Brussels? Which performances are valued and which are not? Pawel Lewicki’s ethnographic analysis gives an insight into how different understandings of modernity and class structures reproduce national performances and stereotypes among EU civil servants. Divisions permeate both political and private life and are not only visible on the map of the city, but also in lifestyles of people living and working in EU-Brussels. In such a cultural setting the strategies applied by newcomers to the EU are shown by Pawel Lewicki in an impressive way. He shows how their presence reveals deeper post-colonial and (post-)imperial dynamics at the heart of the Union.

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Introduction

This book should probably start with a story about my family. It should probably start with my grandmother’s stories of World War II in Warsaw and about postwar scarcity. Or it should start with my parents’ stories about the horseback riding rallies they coorganized in the sixties and seventies together with young intellectuals and the artistic bohemians of Wrocław. These rallies, on the one hand, reproduced images from American Western movies that for them represented freedom and the availability of clear ethical choices; on the other hand, they definitely and distinctly referenced the tradition of the Polish gentry’s horseback riding culture and its adoration by the Polish intelligentsia. These holidays stood for independence and entrepreneurialism (as opposed to the state organized, mass “employees’ holidays”, in Polish: wczasy pracownicze), for traditional male and female gender roles (as opposed to “unnatural” gender roles imposed by the “oppressive” communist state [see Keinz, 2008]) and an affinity with the values of what in Poland is broadly known as “the West”¹. My parents still meet with their old “horse friends” in summer and dress up “for fun” in the costumery of American Western movies. These meetings still have a distinctive feel, but they have lost their political significance and are more social and recreational in character than those in the sixties and seventies, when imitating the Polish gentry’s customs in times of ubiquitous “equality” had a social, cultural and political meaning.

This book should start with accounts of my parents’ journeys to the West, about their grape harvesting in France in the eighties when they drove their small Maluch

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¹ This term “the West” describes countries that stood beyond the “iron curtain” (looking from its eastern side!): democratic and wealthy. I do not aim to essentialize “the West” in this book, but rather show its cultural power. Thus, I use it within the frames of postcolonial theory that shows how some countries, particularly of Western Europe, developed in the course of colonization a powerful cultural discourse that is distributed around the World and that undergoes constant and various mutation in order to legitimize cultural domination and economic exploitation.
(Polish: toddler/little one – referring to the Fiat 126p, a small car, more or less equivalent to GDR’s Trabant – a car for the masses) across Europe to work for hard currency, and telling stories back home about cultivated France and the wonderful people they had met. In fact, at that time this practice was quite common among my parents’ friends. This grape harvesting gave them the opportunity to earn additional money without losing face – most of all towards themselves because grape harvesting was associated not with hard work in agriculture, but with wine, a beverage that has a distinctive status. When they returned to Poland after these journeys they told stories about encounters with “capitalist reality” and other experiences they had had in the West as visitors or labour migrants – all positive, spreading the aura of a “better world”. They brought home Western items: wine, French cheese, household utensils, clothes, and cans of French pâte, all of which evoked certain imaginations. For many Poles at that time and today, the West was and still is a “better place”, a place of clear and “normal” social and economic relations, civilized manners and developed technology. These accounts of their travels, similar to stories told by millions of Poles when they returned home from the West, stories told about “civility”, “normality”, stories and imaginations that came with commodities and consumer goods – it was all a narrative about the West, about a “promised land”, where everything was just better.

This book, hence, begins with imaginations about a better, “Western life” millions of Poles and those in other socialist countries shared (and still share) about the West (see also Vonderau, 2010). In most Polish households, the West was and is a better option than the East. In fact the West was the opposite of the East. The Round Table negotiations in 1989 that led to democratization and a market economy in Poland were seen, at least in the house in which I grew up, as a return to “normalcy” (see also Keinz, 2008). For many people in Poland at that time, it was a new beginning, a new opening offering the perspective of a bright future in their country. It was an opportunity to finally become like those in the West, to enjoy a life similar to theirs². The West has always been a fable among the Polish intelligentsia and intellectuals; it was and is an abstract aim, a target and a guarantee of being “civilized” and “modern”. After 1989 this became tangible in economical statistics, in articles of the left-liberal Gazeta Wyborcza praising the number of kilometres of newly-built highways in Poland, in new, Western lifestyles and consumption patterns, and in particular pedagogy about who and what is

² I remember my father at the beginning of 1990s, while driving our small Maluch around Warsaw, saying, while pointing at concrete housing blocks, that in 20 years we would witness their demolition. By that he meant that he gave us – that he gave Poland – 20 years to become “normal”, to reach a stage when people would no longer be living in these “cages” (a common description for flats in housing blocks), thus able to determine their future, “free” and wealthy. Needless to say: these blocks are still standing.
civilized and modern. These discourses translate into everyday conversations e.g. at
a dinner table or party, simultaneously creating class distinctions. For many others,
1989 was the beginning of life of poverty, insecurity, humiliation and degradation
(Buchowski, 2006).

This book is about imperial power and, in particular, about Western cultural
power that has deep roots in the colonial heritage of the West. It is a book about the
constant reproduction of “European man”: a “rational” and “modern” European in
EU Brussels who represents a set of deeply internalized cultural imaginations,
expectations and aspirations about “modernity” that seem natural and are taken for
granted among some cultural national representations in Brussels. It reveals how
allegedly modern and rational structures, procedures and their cultural settings
along with cultural processes taking place in the heart of the EU do not necessarily
reflect rational, knowledge-driven, plural and tolerant European self-understanding.
It shows widely recognized, socially and culturally relevant visual and other
markers of “Europeanness”. These markers are implicit and “obvious” among some
nationalities and reveal a constantly emerging and modal notion of European
modern purity (Latour, 1993). This book is also, however, about the internalization
of these visual and other markers of Europeanness and its implicit modernity. It
describes imaginations of a “civilized West” and desires for a modern Poland –
both embodied and lived in “the Heart of the Union” (Nugent, 2002) in EU
Brussels. This ethnography takes a magnifying glass to examine the cultural criteria
of belonging that are applied on an everyday basis among a group of people who
until recently called themselves “future Europeans”, among those who declare their
desire to “push the European project” further (Shore, 2000). It is a book about
belonging; belonging to an imagined, culturally superior and self-reproducing
“real” and “modern” Europe in the European Union.

I set out on my ethnographic journey to trace back imaginations (Appadurai,
1998), imaginations about the West, about the old member states (OMS) and
particularly the North-Western EU member states. Concomitantly, it is also an
ethnography of imaginations about the East, and the new member states (NMS).
These imaginations shape and persist in and through different forms of human
agency, in cultural practices, and among people living and working in Brussels,
working in the institutions of the enlarged European Union, and in me – an
ethnographer coming from the East. Lastly, it is an ethnography of imaginations
that possibly form policies on the EU level, imaginations “as constructed
landscapes of collective aspirations” and “an organized field of social practices”
(Appadurai, 1998). This book is about belonging to this imagined West, about
boundaries between embodied divisions that are constantly being reproduced and
challenged. It is about attempts to overcome these boundaries, and the
consequences of these attempts. Thus, this book is about cultural power and its
magnitude, it touches upon crucial questions about European society and, in the face of growing nationalism and xenophobia, about the future of an EU Europe.

Civil servants are rarely the object of common admiration, and EU civil servants in particular are under constant and recently growing critique – in some EU member states more then others (like in the UK or currently in the so-called new member states), but the general opinion around EU Europe is that there are too many of them, they are overpaid and bored, thus introducing new regulations and making the lives of Europeans more complicated. Paradoxically, this moaning about EU civil servants, as Herzfeld has shown on a different example (Herzfeld, 1992), is a practice producing accountability in relation to this bureaucracy. It also creates, however, among EU civil servants the feeling of being constantly under siege and of being not understood (“we are doing a good job here” is a view that I often encountered, see also Shore, 2000). This, in my opinion, leads to greater divisions between the world of politics, policies and bureaucrats in Brussels and their immediate (Brussels) and wider (European) context. However, these constant complaints on both sides preclude a broad and open (instead of one only among politicians and experts) discussion about what kind of European bureaucracy, and in fact, what kind of European government and governance we want in Europe. The increasing competencies transferred to the community level should naturally lead to growth in the bureaucracy. Meanwhile, there are plans that seek to reduce the number of civil servants by 5% by 2017. This leads to EU bureaucracy’s increased dependency on external sources of knowledge (often coming from lobbyists), and complicated procedures involving member states’ institutions, which in consequence dilute responsibilities. How does this relate to common and loud calls from throughout the EU for more transparency, democracy and accountability in EU decision-making processes?

This moaning about the EU bureaucracy and the feeling among EU civil servants of being under siege may explain partly why EU civil servants have created a cultural and symbolic space in Brussels (“a golden cage” as some of them would say), where, as I will show, particular ways of behaviour, gestures, language and lifestyle are seen as more European than others. My study raises similar questions to that of C. Shore (2000) about the existence of an “embryonic ‘European identity’” (ibid., p. 3) and its defining features, but I am posing this question 17 years later and after the biggest enlargement of the EU in its history. What dynamics has been set into motion in this international (some would probably describe it as “transnational”) space where, after the enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007, at least 27 nationalities work and live together (see also Busby,

3 In 2012, during the negotiations over a new EU budget, Great Britain demanded cuts in spending on EU administration, see: https://www.ft.com/content/9c5800d4-3266-11e2-a2f-00144feabdc0#axzz2HC4xbHai (last retrieved on 04.06.2017)
2013)? Which cultural and symbolic strategies and practices are seen as more powerful and legitimate than others? Is *engrenage* a unifying concept, as Shore found (2000), and do people in the EU-space “mesh together”, or is it rather a tool of power that in the guise of Foucault’s governmentality reshapes subjects in EU-space into those who act and perform according to legitimate rules, and those whose practices are considered illegitimate and are thus condemned to a situation of exclusion? Such a question evokes others about self-making and power extortion, about how governmentality affects subjects on the ground and informs everyday practices and procedures in EU-space that can potentially impact political decisions taken in the EU apparatus. Does European, objective and fact-driven policy making really represent neutrality, objective knowledge and non-nationality (see EC, 2002)? Thedvall has shown (Thedvall, 2006) how EU policy making is a matter of image management and the ability of a given member state to create a particular image while arguing with the use of “objective” and “neutral” numbers and statistical data (on modern and allegedly rational discourse see also Brown, 2008). At the source of this book lies the assumption that the decision-making processes in Brussels are also dependent on cultural criteria, on stereotypes and what they evoke, on performances of national representations, and classifications of these representations within EU-space. These practices and performances reflect the cultural struggles that are taking place within this space. In the following chapters, I scrutinize the powerful discourse and powerful cultural norms that are lived in this EU-space.

I have been to Brussels three times. The first and longest period was for eight months, between October 2007 and May 2008. My second field trip was for one month in March 2009 and the last one, in March 2011, was due to an assignment I had received from the Institute of European Ethnology at the Humboldt-University in Berlin to look into the social networks and negotiation strategies within the so-called biofuel policy cluster in Brussels. However, during the last stay I used the opportunity to meet my previous interviewees and generate additional research material for my own purposes.

The starting point and theoretical inspiration for my research came from Norbert Elias’ study “The Established and Outsiders” (1994) and from postcolonial theory. Elias is one of the first scholars to problematize the relationship between structures and the individual, placing more emphasis on the reproduction of structures through agency. His study of Winston Parva focuses exactly on everyday life, which I, at least at the beginning of my research, neglected. Therefore, I...

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4 I do not have a rational and good explanation for this. I suppose it was due to the training I had received as an ethnologist: fixation on interviews, fear of being biased and unobjective when doing observations, while interviews provide tangible “proof” that cannot be questioned.
initially remained more at the level of discourse; I couldn’t free myself from the textual aspect of culture and doing ethnography. With time something changed, particularly after I came back from field the first time. I cannot say exactly what it was; maybe it was in part the fear of having too little field material (most of which was later gone together with my stolen computer), which forced me to shift my focus to what I already had, but which I had classified as “obvious” – my memories and snapshots of situations in the field. At the time it seemed to me to be something that couldn’t be culturally significant and of anthropological value. A clear incentive was provided by a seminar in Lund that opened up new perspectives, drawing my attention to the autoethnographic approach, which resulted in my focusing on these unspectacular events in everyday life. I started to describe moments that were both significant and personal for me during my field research. I concentrated my attention on my body, on things I had done earlier, during and after the interview, on my memories and emotions in these moments. As Kohn writes: “Often it’s the least recorded, most unexpected personal moment or accident that becomes most viscerally remembered.” (Kohn, 2010, p. 186) So I wrote down everything I remembered and experienced. From there it was a small step to applying Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital and taste, whose application in my analysis I owe to my supervisor Wolfgang Kaschuba. Bourdieu provides tools to scrutinize these everyday practices and see in them hierarchies and power – something for which I was searching in my interviewees’ stories, and found in my notes and memories taken after the initial research phase, and, in the latter phase of field work, during my time of “being there”.

In what follows, I will reveal the cultural and symbolic rules and norms of what I call EU-space. I will show mechanisms of symbolic, powerful differentiation between EU civil servants, and the ways, means and forms by which hierarchies in this field are culturally reproduced. Thus, I will answer questions about how a hierarchy is symbolically reproduced in the everyday life of the European Commission’s civil servants, particularly between old and new member states of the EU. In describing these divisions, I will refer to the analytical concept of habitus and style, and define what criteria construct a legitimate, powerful habitus and lifestyle (which I call the Eurostyle) in EU-space in Brussels. In many aspects, EU-space resembles a transnational space where transnational processes are taking place (Ong, 1999); however I will show that it is rather an inter-national space, where practices and imaginations are quite site specific and localized, and the EU civil servants form a cosmopolitan, white middle class (Hannerz, 1990, 2004). In the following pages, I will look into how these concepts of habitus and style are locally intertwined and related to notions of nationality, modernity and class.
I. EU-space in Brussels: places, people, power

GOING TO BRUSSELS, ENTERING EU-SPACE

In Köln Hauptbahnhof I’m changing trains and boarding a brand-new type of Deutsche Bahn ICE, called “International”, heading to Brussels. A group of secondary school pupils with whom I’ve been travelling since Hannover on the previous train from Berlin is crowding into the same car. Inside most seats are taken, and I am glad to have a reservation. In front of me sits an elderly couple: based on their appearance (he wears a khaki jacket and a fuller; she a dark blue jacket with a colourful scarf) they both make a distinguished impression on me. They speak French. Are they coming back from a visit with their daughter’s family in Frankfurt? A businessman with a laptop on his lap sits across the aisle, and behind me a cheerful-looking woman with curly grey hair is sitting at the window next to a young man. As I found out later, eavesdropping on their conversation, she is a novelist who visited her friends in Munich and is now travelling back home to London. She is taking a train because she is afraid of flying, in spite of the inconvenience of having to change trains twice, in Frankfurt and in Brussels, in order to reach London. She says also that she likes to have the opportunity to look out at a moving landscape outside the train window, and I think, in an era of low cost airlines, she travels by train because she has a lot of time and money. I am the only person with a huge trolley bag, a 80 litre back pack on my back and a computer bag in my hand – with my luggage I have taken two seats and visibly do not fit into the environment of small, smart trolleys. I hear French, English, German, Flam/Dutch – it’s international. I’m going to Europe. A nice, warm female voice welcomes me on board the ICE international going to Bruxelles Midi/Brussel Zuid in each of the aforementioned languages. Soon I am rushing at a speed of 350 km/h and wondering if I’m still in Germany or already in Belgium – can I see a difference in the landscape? Are the meadows and houses different than in Germany? I feel as though I am in a space-time capsule that is taking me to a different world. I feel excited and attracted by the linguistic diversity surrounding me and coming from the speaker, the comfort and speed of travelling appeals to me,
and I am fascinated by the indifferent expressions on people’s faces – don’t they feel excited too? I somehow feel connected to those secondary school pupils with their enthusiasm expressed out loud in their conversations – “we’re going to Europe”, “we’re going to discover Europe”, “we’re going to the heart of the Union!” My field diary entry from that day says: “In any case, I have to remain a critic. I cannot let myself be enchanted by the wealth and multi-culti, particularly on a personal level. I cannot change and become arrogant.”

Getting off the train in Bruxelles Nord/Brussel Noord, I feel cheated: no shining, granite floors, no vast glass surfaces and iron fittings, but only shabby concrete roofs on each platform and old, beaming TV sets with an almost invisible schedule. So this is Europe? This looked like a scruffy train station in a midsized Polish city. I am running with my huge amount of luggage up and down the platform in search of a lift – which proves futile. There are no clear signs showing the way around, and with my rudimentary French I feel helpless. In order to reach my new house in the capital of Europe, I am, soaked in sweat, taking an overcrowded, shaky train to Bockstael station in Laken/Laeken – a rather poor, immigrant district in North-West Brussels, where the Belgian King has his seat. My accommodation is a tiny room (of approximately $7m^2$) in a typical three-storey Bruxellois house that has been adapted for renting rooms to students and stagiaires (trainees), usually in one of the EU institutions or EU related institutions. The amount I pay for these $7m^2$, the possibility to use a shared kitchen and a shared shower (which are located, thank God, on the same floor, not an obvious fact in houses of such type in Brussels) is almost the amount of the whole rent on my $40m^2$ one-room apartment in Berlin. My Brussels flatmates are two students, one from Ingolstadt, Germany, on an Erasmus exchange, the other is a Dutch medical student on an internship at one of the French-speaking hospitals in Brussels. She left after a month and was replaced by a British intern at the European Parliament whose contract lasted only three months, so I later witnessed his efforts to find another job. He found out then, his main asset was being an English native speaker. From the window of my kitchen, I have a view of the Atomium, and the seat of the Belgian King and the huge surrounding park are also within walking distance. I have chosen this place mainly due to the price, but also because of, as I thought, its relative proximity to the city centre. As I found out later, being 15 minutes by metro to the city centre, it was almost on the outskirts of Brussels (if I were to take a longer walk from the place where I lived, within ten minutes I would virtually walk out of Brussels). Despite the royal vicinity and the Laken/Laeken cathedral with the tombs of all the Belgian Kings and royal family (there were not so many of them, as Belgium is a rather young country), Laken/Laeken is a mixed housing area with typical three-storey buildings and industrial areas. In social terms it is a rather poor, immigrant district, inhabited by a nonwhite urban, poor population, especially
migrants particularly from North Africa, but also from Eastern Europe¹ (with Poles and Bulgarians leading), as well as white working-class and lower middle-class Belgians. On one hand, I was impressed by the racial diversity seen on the streets in Laken/Laeken and in Brussels in general (something I was not acquainted with from living in Berlin), on the other, compared to Berlin’s Neukölln, where I lived, I felt like I had been thrown into a different world of poor working-class migrants. Whereas in Neukölln white middle-class students and German white working class and nonwhite working/middle class with Turkish and Arabic backgrounds all lived side by side, in Laken/Laeken the residents were most of all the working-class poor, either white or nonwhite. Every time I entered the dark, smelly and scruffy corridors of the Bockstael metro station, I would look around and feel a bit anxious, watching out for rascals who would sometimes sit on benches yelling at each other. Perhaps my feelings in such situations, as in many other, similar situations I found myself in during fieldwork in Brussels, were hyphenated by my merely basic knowledge of French. When you get off the U-Bahn in Berlin Rathaus Neukölln or Herrmannplatz you would see similar scenes, but here in Laken/Laeken they felt odd, strange, unfamiliar. However, I have never before seen such visible class and social differences connected to skin colour as I experienced during my fieldwork in Brussels. In Laken/Laeken there were neither cafés nor pubs where one could go out in the evening to have a beer with people of my age and class, and it was a bit scary to walk down an empty street after sunset. Living in Laken/Laeken I felt degraded and excluded, thrown into a social context that was not mine, which was not familiar to me: a white middle-class or intelligentsia Pole. As it turned out later, Laken/Laeken, together with the whole of the West and the North-West Brussels was a “no-go” area for the fonctionnaires² of the EU. The only reason to go to Laken/Laeken was to go to the Heysel Stadium, Expo grounds or the Atomium³. If I wanted to go out for a coffee during the day, or a beer in the evening, I would

¹ According to frequent surveys carried out by the University of Brussels this is an area of the lowest yearly income in Brussels (between 11.400 and 15.000€ per year). Cf. http://www.observatbru.be/documents/graphics/rapport-pauvrete/barometre_social_2011.pdf (seen on 27.06.2012)

² This is a common, French description for EU civil servants.

³ One of my interviewees, a senior EU civil servant, claimed that this would change with the opening of the “European school” (for children of EU civil servants) in Laken/Laeken that should occur in the near future. In 2008, there were plans to open a new, fourth European School in Brussels (Brussel IV) due to capacity shortages in the previous three. In the end, the school was moved from its temporary address in Brekendael/Brekendaal, in the Forrest commune in the South of Brussels, to new venues in Laken/Laeken in summer 2012. (cf. http://laeken.eeb4.be/en/node/1, seen on 29.06.2012, see also www.eeb4.be and www.eursc.eu, seen on 04.05.2017)
have to go to the city centre and take either the metro or a long tram ride. My “European lifestyle”\(^4\) – something that I was acquainted with and used to from Berlin, was in the capital of Europe nonexistent. At least at the beginning of my research.

**POSITIONALITY**

Writing up this ethnography I realized how subjective and volatile my field is, how illusory my observations and experiences of “being there” were and how much they were shaped by the facts of who I was and where I came from. During the whole period of my research, I was trying desperately to objectivize and distance myself from the very personal experiences and observations I gathered and the situations I encountered while in the field in Brussels. Simultaneously I was absolutely aware of how my previous experiences, my life story, shaped my choice of topic for my research. Although I must admit that I was not aware at that time of how my skin colour and class impacted my research. While in the field, I was constantly in search of tangible evidence of discrimination against people from new member states (NMS) of the EU, searching for stories and situations that would reveal their (symbolic or factual) exclusion. This kind of research turned out to be very difficult, as my informants treated me as anything but a “safety valve” that would reveal to the public what they had experienced at the EU Commission\(^5\) – something I had been hoping for. Thus, I was unsatisfied with how my research was developing: about the people I had met, about my access to everyday life in EU institutions and to meetings (both of which I didn’t have), and about the things I was told during interviews. However, during my research in Brussels, my eyes and ears were open all the time and my ethnographic sensitivity and memory was constantly “on”. I recorded situations from my everyday life in EU Brussels in my memory. These memories, which I wrote down predominantly after my first research stay, were very personal, and I had not thought of them as something that could become an object of scientific scrutiny. These were only “my memories”. However, after I returned to Berlin, I started to worry about what I considered at that time to be my scarce field material. I began to write down my memories in more detail, and later noted my observations on subsequent, shorter field trips to

\(^4\) In my master’s thesis under the title: What Does it Mean to be European? Searching for European Identity among Students in Berlin, I asked my interviewees what a “European lifestyle” meant for them, and often heard that it was *Strassencafé*.

\(^5\) Henceforth also as just “the Commission”. EU institutions in Brussels were often called locally “the Institutions” and I frequently use this form further in the text. Similarly, for EU Parliament I often use just “the Parliament” or for EU Council just “the Council”.
Brussels. The descriptions of bodies, outfits, movements written down felt dull, plain and without any meaning. I was frustrated with my attempts to collect meaningful field material.

Finally, I became inspired by Billy Ehn’s text on autoethnographies (Ehn, 2011), which made me aware of both how to express issues and thoughts I found too personal and had not dared to elaborate on, and how to include personal experiences in the field as a part of a cultural analysis of the people I had studied (see also Ehn & Löfgren, 2010). Autoethnography and self-observation of my own body gave me the keys to a new analysis of those dull descriptions of body movements, gestures, outfits, spaces and places that I had seen and visited in Brussels. And suddenly these dull descriptions and memories acquired new meaning.

Autoethnography is also something that turned out to be productive due to the character of my field, which was hostile, hierarchical and hermetic. I was looking for answers on how to cope with the “wall” I had encountered in Brussels (I remember while being there that I thought my research was like licking candy through glass) and with the inaccessibility of the people, which rendered my efforts futile. As ethnography embraces new fields that are far from a traditional understanding of the discipline, and ethnographers can now be found in national banks, factories, detention institutions, laboratories and hospitals, and on national and other borders and in conflict zones, the question of how we do our fieldwork and how we gain access to it becomes more and more relevant. For instance McDowell (1998) remarks how she, doing interviews among industrial and commercial elites in London, shifted and adjusted to every new interview situation, including “playing dumb” with older men, acting “brusquely efficient” when interviewing older women, “sisterly” when interviewing women of her own age and status, and “superfast and well-informed” when talking to younger men (McDowell, 1998). I suppose in many instances research among elites forces us to make a research object out of ourselves and to observe how we enter these research fields, how we relate and accommodate ourselves to them, how we irritate the norms, and what accounts and what ethnographical knowledge these situations produce. But was it not always like this for ethnographers, no matter where they conducted their research and among whom? I guess reading Malinowski’s diary confirms this. I think that what has changed is that some of us – ethnographers – are in a way forced by our research fields to reach for these accounts, and we just tend to be more honest in our writing today.

Sitting in front of my computer and thinking about my fieldwork, I subconsciously resisted the idea of an ethnographer who is an objective translator, a person that “was there” and has to give an account of what he/she has seen. Most of all, I resisted the thought of writing a monograph, the idea of constructing on paper
(or rather on a computer screen) a nice, coherent world of the people I had studied and inflict this world with (fashionable) theories and concepts in order to show that I understood how “they” functioned, to legitimize my encounter and simultaneously veil the very personal accounts with the Other (I suppose I failed in this resistance). This is not how I experienced fieldwork and what the outcome of it is or was: it was a very personal, solitary, difficult and in no way linear process. Moreover, I was and am disappointed that in no monograph or ethnography did I find a comparison, a hint or description of similar experiences and accounts in the field. Did this mean that others had experienced ethnographic research as a linear process? As an objective, scientific observation that had a clear beginning and clear end, from A to Z, and in which the researcher was a transparent recorder of the studied “object”? After Writing Culture we know that we coproduce a text but where are the consequences of this? Where are these postcolonial/postimperial, postbloc and queer(ed) perspectives in ethnology that take into account the twists and turns in power relations in the field? Where are these books and texts about alternative epistemologies? Where is the Writing Culture debate – at least in Germany? Where are the real stories about the fieldwork (Marcus, 2006)? The “big names” and gurus of modern ethnology/anthropology very rarely address these issues, and although it is legitimate to write about them in separate articles on methods or discuss them in seminars, these issues only seldom find their way into a published book.

In what follows I respond to Sarah Pink’s call for more transparency in doing and writing ethnographies. In her book “Doing Sensory Ethnography” (Pink, 2009), while stressing her disappointment about “how little other ethnographers (whose work demonstrates so well the significance of the senses in culture and society) have written about the processes through which they came to these understandings”, she urges ethnographers to be more explicit “about the ways of experiencing and knowing that become central to their ethnographies, to share with others the senses of place they felt as they sought to occupy similar places to those of their research participants, and to acknowledge the processes through which their sensory knowing has become academic knowledge” (ibid., p. 2). After Writing Culture, we all know that we, our ethnographic self, coproduce the text, but we still tend to, in the final ethnography, conceal our often personal positions and experiences in the field. Why has Vassos Argyrou, a Cypriot PhD student in the UK, written an ethnography about the divisions evoked by modernity in Cyprus (Argyrou, 1996)? What are the (un-)conscious reasons for metropolitan ethnographers to study urban migrants in Western European capitals? Aren’t they trying to find an answer to questions about the condition of “their own” society and culture? Aren’t some of us studying the Other in order to get to know ourselves and
our “own culture” better? And aren’t our fields and topics chosen accordingly? If so, it means that the decision to conduct fieldwork in this or that place or on a given topic is in fact very personal (and simultaneously, along Bourdieu’s lines, cultural!) and our experience in this field is, consequently, very personal and personally experienced, as well. Why then do these experiences remain often invisible, in the form of a prologue or a footnote in our ethnographies?

What we, ethnographers, are talking and writing about, and what students are taught, is to construct a comprehensible and comprehensive world from A to Z of the people we have studied, infected with fashionable theories that legitimize (and veil) our very personal account of the Other. In my study, however, I define my positionality and refer to discussions about epistemology in ethnology (Haraway, 1988; Marcus, 1998). Positionality equals situated knowledge; this kind of knowledge shapes the knowledge I produced about the EU Europe in Brussels. Positionality not only contributes to the posing of questions on power relations in the field, and on their reproduction in a text, but also asks where the emotions are in “silent ethnographic knowledge”, where scattered knowledge and “irregular ethnographies” (see Ehn, 2011; O'Dell & Willim, 2011) are in a text.

I have made the positionality of the fieldworker, my positionality, explicit because I think it allows in this particular field of elitist, international bureaucracy for revelations about the cultural patterns and norms that are in force among the people I studied. Positionality in this case, and contrary to most research studies where it is problematized, serves not so much to acknowledge my own power, as to reveal the twists and turns in and of the fieldwork(er) and management of his own cultural resources and powers, and his frequent lack of power as a novice in the field. Positionality means giving an account of how our own social and cultural position influences the research and writing, but also how field subjectivity in relation to the field informs, and is informed by, our engagement and representation of the Other. I have done all this in order to demonstrate the powerful rules that are valid among the people I “studied”, in order to carry out a cultural analysis of the EU civil servants in Brussels. I am a white, middle-class (or intelligentsia) Pole. I have a certain family history and, using Bourdieu’s vocabulary, a certain habitus, and including my life story and friendships in the field, which all informs my field research, the kind of material I gather, how I present it and what I write about it.

My positionality in the field was parallel or even opposite to the big business elites and politicians. Such positionality is reflected in the research process and in the kind of material I gathered. Given the weak Polish network within EU-space it was difficult to access these business elites and policy actors (which in turn is a statement about these Polish networks in comparison to other, national networks in EU-space). However, while I became part of EU-space, I coshaped it and became an actor in the field. I was not a “player”; I was not explicitly playing the game for
cultural superiority (although I was doing it subconsciously – as I show in the last chapter), nor was I striving to climb the formal hierarchy in EU-space. I did not want to make a career in the EU apparatus although many of my interviewees assumed that I did. However, being an actor in the field, internalizing and adjusting to the prevalent local cultural codes and rules, and making my positionality and my experiences explicit, enabled me to show that this Europe in Brussels is anything but cosmopolitan and cosmopolitizing (Beck & Grande, 2007), a place where people “mesh together” (Shore, 2000). As Browns shows (2008), “cosmopolitization” is just another Western notion, and my work refers to Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge and Chakrabarty, who also critically reflect on the Western and colonial roots of the notion of cosmopolitanism:

Where once we conceived of the world order in terms of vying and competing political systems and ideological structures, today the neoliberal emphasis falls more on individualist aspirations and universalist norms. But this revenant late liberalism reveals, in a more exaggerated form, a struggle at the heart of liberal theory, where a genuine desire for equality as a universal norm is tethered to a tenacious ethnocentric provincialism in matters of cultural judgment and recognition […] the fetishization of liberal individualism has, in the past few years, created a cosmopolitan imaginary signified by the icons of singular personhood. (Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, & Chakrabarty, 2002, pp. 4-5)

They remark that the cosmopolitanism of today does not stem from the “virtues” of Rationality, Universality and Progress, nor is it embodied by the figure of the citizen of the world (ibid., p. 6), but rather today’s cosmopolitans are “the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism’s upward mobility, and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging” (ibid., p. 6). I would only add that these cosmopolitans are bereft of the imperial comfort of modern national belonging. On the following pages, through making my positionality explicit and scrutinizing the everyday life of Polish EU civil servants, I show that EU-space, although often perceived as “cosmopolitan” is neither permeated by a “desire for equality” nor the idea of “meshing together”. Making my positionality in text and in the field visible, and focusing on Poles in EU-space, I am following the idea of decentring Europe, (Adam et al., forthcoming); this idea is one of looking at the core of Europe from a postcolonial, postbloc perspective in order to reveal the operations of cultural power and to see through the mechanisms of how this allegedly modern, liberal and cosmopolitan Europe is produced and reproduced, how it is recentring (itself) and how it is recentred.
I suppose Brussels makes a rather rough impression on many visitors, not only those from NMS. However, my experiences show the kind of ideas many people share about the capital of Europe and reveal the image of modern and wealthy that an EU Europe has established, both in the past and today, among its citizens. In reality this “Europe” is more differentiated than the picture of itself it has successfully produced (Shore, 2000).

Brussels is one of the most multicultural and multiethnic cities in Europe. Over 50 per cent of its population has a migrant background, while half of its residents come from EU Europe. However, what is striking are the social, racial, ethnic and class divisions running across the city. While in the North and in the West of the city the majority of the population is poor, nonwhite and/or migrant or of migrant background, the East and South is dominated by members of the middle and upper-middle classes, the majority of whom are of white European origin. This racial-geographical division has been scattered by the arrival of migrants from NMS, adding more white people to areas inhabited traditionally by people from Africa. The enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007 also caused a price leap in real estate in Brussel’s districts that were until then not considered to be typically white, European middle class, for example, Schaarbeek/Schaerbeek or even Saint-Josse-ten-Noode/Sint-Joost-ten-Node. Brussels, according to Eurostat, belongs to one of the riches regions in the entire EU, but simultaneously during the time of my

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6 For detailed information, see footnote number one.
7 I use the terms “white” and “nonwhite” similarly to the way Richard Dyer does in his book White (1997) where he scrutinizes the production and representations of whiteness. Nonwhite is the opposite of white, which is “natural”. Dyer writes: “We may be on our way to genuine hybridity, multiplicity without (white) hegemony, and it may be where we want to get to – but we aren’t there yet, and we won’t get there until we see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule” (ibid., p. 4). Nonwhite in his understanding comprises it’s negation, “black”, but also “people of colour” and underscores the racial meaning of white (ibid., p. 11). He also remarks that whiteness has been more successful than class in unifying people over national cultural differences (ibid., p. 19). Moreover, he remarks that for the past two centuries North European whiteness as a cultural construct has been superior within European whiteness and its representation. As he writes, such understood, powerful “whiteness” for Eastern Europeans has only been assumed (ibid., p. 13) rather then being “natural” and “obvious” (for further discussion see also Ahmed, 2004).
8 See http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do (seen on 04.02.2017). Brussels in 2011 was on the third place after London-West with 580% of the EU
research, it was said that the Brussels’ commune Saint-Josse-ten-Noode/Sint-Joost-
ten-Node, which is located right next to the so-called European District, is the poorest commune in the whole of Belgium.

Hannerz (1980), Lefebvre (2007) and Soja (2000) claim that cultural and social space is produced in practices and through social relations among subjects in and with a space. The meaning of this space (and I would also say of these relations) becomes apparent in the production of space, in deep relationships that are continuously reproduced in space and that reproduce space itself (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 2007). Lefebvre in his book *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 2007) divides the process of production of space into three dimensions: perceived space, conceived space and lived space. To consider this triad is to think dialectically: it constitutes the self-production of subjects and the reproduction of society conjoining the individual and social processes involved in the production of space. Perceived space is an aspect of the production of space, which can be understood as the sensual exploration and experience of space by individuals. Consequently, the material aspect of the space we perceive plays a role here. Conceived space is thought space. It is knowledge, elements of which constitute the space itself. And lived space is experienced space in the everyday life of the subjects. These three elements or aspects of the production of space are complementary and relational, simultaneous and bonded in the constant exchange of their elements. To put it another way: practices and strategies involved in the production of space can be scrutinized in their material (perceived), representational, institutional and ideological (conceived) and affective-symbolic (lived) aspects (Kipfer, 2008).

Thus, following Lefebvre, I define space not as the surface of reproductive activity. Space is not just the staging of reproductive requirements. It is not just the physical and spatial aspect; it is part of the cast, a vital, productive element of the social and cultural and vice versa. I will show how this space, which I call EU-space, is produced and reproduced by EU civil servants and people working in NGOs, embassies, lobbies and other institutions involved in political processes at the EU level. Such space is simultaneously perceived, conceived and lived; it is produced in everyday life, but also in imaginations and discourses about space and in significations of this space – its reference to symbols (e.g. buildings that represent the EU as a whole). Such reproduced space however is irreducible to symbols and imaginary, because it is also produced and reshaped by social relations, while geographical/physical space produces the meanings of spatial representations in/of a social reality. Thus, in spaces and places, social relations become visible – in their reproduction. For Lefebvre the category of everyday life

GDP average (198% for the whole London) that was followed by Luxemburg, 311%, Brussels with 240% of the EU average GDP.
was crucial to the reproduction of space and for research on “urbanity” (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 2007). “Everydayness” points to the dynamic and practical aspects of space – and the fact that it is produced by subjects. On one hand, they appropriate space and establish themselves as subjects through spatial practice, on the other, their actions and their spatial practice become objectified in spatial structures.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s theory of production of space (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 2007) and inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), I have coined the notion of EU-space⁹, an imaginative social and cultural space comprised of EU civil servants and people working in institutions, lobbies, representations of the member states (so-called PermRep) and its regions. EU-space however has a tangible aspect: it is constantly reproduced by the people within it and becomes visible both in material space and in interactions and relations within this space and between the spatial, material and symbolic, imaginative aspects of European space in the capital of EU Europe. Such a stance on space allows us to see how social and physical space is reproduced in Brussels, how practices, subjects and spaces are configured in Brussels, and how places reveal the social relations and reflect the hierarchies within the city and within the EU bureaucratic apparatus. Each configuration of these practices and subjects produces a different kind of space (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 2007). Thus, the production of space, I argue, is conflated with the production of class, nationalities and hegemony within the EU bureaucracy and EU-space.

**MAKING IT TO THE OTHER SIDE: IXELLES/ElsenE**

Two days after my arrival in Brussels I am meeting my Dutch friend and his British partner whom I got to know during my Erasmus year in Berlin. We used to drink beer together and go to parties at the beginning of 2000s, when Berlin was still a “wild” city, unpenetrated by tourists and, ostensibly, by commerciality, and still filled with a breakthrough atmosphere. We would go to illegal parties taking place in hidden basements or closed down factories in Prenzlauer Berg – Berlin’s district that was at that time still full of students, but is now a district inhabited by the

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⁹ Dusan Sidjanski (2000), political scientist and adviser to the President of the EU Commission Jacques Delors has used the term “Eurosphere” to describe a “European leaders’ network” (p. 78). More recently A. Busby (2013), based on her research in the European Parliament, developed a term Brussels Bubble as an elite transnational space and a “physical, social and cultural context in which the CoPs [community of practice] are embedded and EP politics is practiced” (ibid., p. 107).
young, white German middle class. Now my Dutch friend is working in the European Parliament as an assistant to a MEP responsible for environmental policies, while his British partner is a lobbyist for one of the biggest human rights organizations worldwide. They came to Brussels in the mid 2000s and started with almost nothing. They chose Brussels because being from two different countries, they thought it was a good place to start: between the Netherlands and the UK, with many international organizations, institutions and branches of international companies having their seats here.

We set up our first meeting at Bourse/Beurs – the old stock exchange building, on Boulevard Anspach/Anspachlaan in the city centre – a popular place to start an evening before going out in the nearby, small quarter called St.Géry/St.Gorik, with its many bars and cafés full of young, French-speaking people. I remember we went into a quite posh looking bar. As I entered it, a vast space opened before my eyes, with shiny tables, modern spotlightning, peach-coloured walls, mirror surfaces at half level on the walls, wine glasses hanging above the bar. The interior was neither of an evening bar, where you go out for a beer, nor a restaurant or a typical place to have lunch in the afternoon. It supposedly should fulfil all these functions, but the place was now on Wednesday evening almost completely empty – the quiet made for good circumstances in which to have a conversation. Later I found out that this bar was an exception in this area. All the others were full of young people, particularly on weekends. These other bars reminded me more of those from Kreuzberg or Neukölln in Berlin, with slightly used and shaky wooden tables and chairs, and a menu and list of beverages written on a blackboard or on a wall. These places were filled in the evenings with young people drinking beer and talking, laughing in groups and listening to live, dynamic music played by young bands. These were the student bars and those for young adults not forced by living conditions to worry about covering their living costs. Later I would sometimes hang out in these bars with some of my Belgian friends. One of them was a social worker who currently lived on unemployment benefits while trying to find his way as a Director’s assistant and an actor in one of Brussels’ French-speaking theatres. I assume the majority in these bars was Belgian, as I heard people in groups speaking mostly French, but I also heard English, and Flam/Dutch, though only rarely. Such places, although favoured by some people working in EU institutions (stagiaires, young adults, often single – my friends) were not the usual places to go out for the majority of people working for the EU. These people would instead frequent places such as café Belga on Place Flagey/Flageyplein, where gym-fit studs with tattoos and studied haircuts would stand behind the bars swanking with self-confidence, and where EU employees, “internationals” or “expats”10, and young, white Belgians

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10 These two expressions are used locally to describe people coming from all over the world and living and working in Brussels in any kind of international organization, public
would meet. Alternatively, they would meet in small bars with a (post)modern interior design in Ixelles/Elsene (such as around Rue St Boniface/St.Bonifacestraat), places that for me were rather showy, e.g. places to see and be seen, with people dressed according to the current fashion, not what was seen on the street (e.g. a street-style as in St.Gery’s/St.Gorik’s bars), but as seen in fashion magazines, and usually featuring labels like Lacoste, Hilfiger, Ray-Ban and the like. These were the bars of the white middle class: the people there were neither dressed in luxury labels nor was there a particular shabbiness in their outfits, everyone looked somewhat individual, but still represented certain trends. I was often struck by the bourgeoisie interior of many of the places I entered during my fieldwork where people working in EU-space spent their time. I was not prepared for these spaces: I did not have a label outfit, my hair was not always done (although it shouldn’t look done), and with my worn out jeans and cheap sneakers, on many occasions I felt out of place. It was an impression that often accompanied me when I entered places in Brussels as part of my fieldwork. These were the places where EU civil servants would go, where I would see my interviewees and recognize people from the EU Commission. This boundary between me and “them”, visible in outfit, was always there, either because I transgressed it, or not. These feelings never diminished during my research and the feeling of being out of place was something that often accompanied me during the time when I – ostensibly – was not doing research and not holding interviews, but was just hanging around with friends who happened to work in EU institutions.

I had not seen this Dutch-British couple for six years, and during these six years our contact had been limited. However, we had common acquaintances from Berlin about whom we talked (who is doing what and where at the moment) about my research and about what they were doing now. They gave me some practical tips, such as where to buy a sim-card for my mobile phone and where a local English bookstore (Waterstones) was located. They also told me that they had some Polish friends, and that we all had to meet very soon so I would have the opportunity to meet them. The following week I was helping them move from a small flat at the end of one of the fancy streets in Ixelles/Elsene – a traditional white middle-class district with cafés, bakeries, ateliers, boutiques and shops with gadgets – something you can recognize from today’s Prenzlauer Berg’s Kollwitzstrasse, NY’s Williamsburg or London’s Notting Hill. They were moving to a bigger flat in a better-looking, bourgeoisie house two streets away. This was a popular, posh but not exclusive area in Brussels, close to Rue Bailli/Baljuwstraat and Place institution of their country of origin (embassies, representations of regions), or private sector like big international companies, etc. It reflects what Hannerz (1990) described as white middle-class cosmopolitans or Pollock et al. (2002, p. 10) see as the opposite of what they call “new and post-universalist cosmpolitanisms”.
Chatelain/Kasteleinsplein, where on weekends one could brunch in a café that put tables out on the street (Strassencafé) and go to a flea market, with narrow streets lined with bourgeois houses, dense city buildings, and no detached houses. In the area, there were fancy hotels and restaurants, a shopping street with expensive labels and shopping malls with fancy shops (Av. Louise/Louisalaan), one of the oldest socially and age-wise (but not racially) mixed bars (on the corner of Rue Bailli/Baljuwstraat; it later became one of my favourites in town) called Suprabailli, and other bars and cafés popular among students and the so-called creative milieus. My friends, apparently, after a few years in Brussels, were climbing socially and developing their careers; however during my last visit to Brussels in March 2011 they were already gone\(^1\), having settled down in one of their home-countries, though still working in contexts either connected to European policies or to development help/human rights. The new house they were moving into in Brussels had a huge bottle-green, wooden security door, in the hall the flooring was white marble, there were huge crystal mirrors on the walls, and the stairs were covered with bottle-green fitted carpet. Their three and a half room apartment with high ceilings and marble chimneys in each room had a big living room with a modern kitchenette and huge windows looking out onto a big terrace and calm, green backyard. One of the rooms was a dining room with a big, old table, and next to it was a bedroom with a walk-in wardrobe.

I remember on the day they were moving, I had to find out how to reach Ixelles/Elsene, the district on the opposite side of the city from Laken/Laeken. It turned out that there was a direct tram going there from where I lived. It took me 40 minutes to pass through the city centre, and while the tram was moving and people were getting on and off, I could sense I was going to a different world. This impression was amplified when I reached the beginning of Avenue Louise/Louizalaan, where the popular shopping area is found. Predominantly white, well-dressed, young people and couples with kids would enter the tram. I particularly remember one such couple with their son: both parents in their early forties, with fine leather jackets; he had on a light leather jacket, she a slim-fit black leather jacket; both with slim shoes made of thin leather, and both in shirts; she had long, brown loose hair – they looked relaxed, as if a moment ago they had come back from their vacation, and even though it was late afternoon and people were going home either from work or shopping, they weren’t holding anything in their hands; she had only her purse, while the boy had a backpack and was holding a skateboard in his hands. Through their handsome appearance and restrained attitude, they were attracting attention, and I think they were somehow aware of it (maybe their calm, self-distanced behaviour was visible in their not noticing these gazes?). She was slightly and attentively bent forward to listen to their son asking questions I did not

\(^1\) As my friend told me when they moved out: “Brussels’ time is over”.
understand. Perhaps they were going to their house at the end of Av. Louise/Louizalaan, where one of the few gated communities was located – close to a popular park, Bois de la Cambre/Ter Kamerenbos.

I got off the tram at the next stop and found my destination quite easily. After all the boxes with books, shoes and kitchen utensils were placed in the car, I helped lower the sofa on ropes from out of the window – I did not know at the time that this was a “very Dutch” way of handling a removal. During this removal, I met friends of friends, most of them from Holland, and all of them working in EU institutions or NGOs or consultancies dealing with EU policies. From that day on I have been to my friends’ home many times: to parties, dinners, drinks/beers, meeting people from all over Europe, people who were then, with greater or lesser enthusiasm or criticism, “building Europe” (Shore, 2000). They were all more or less my age – in their late twenties and early thirties – working on their professional careers, seriously engaged in what they were doing, friendly, interested and open. All of them were white heterosexuals – at least as far as I knew. I remember our relaxed and funny conversations, but also my astonishment when I asked what they did. I was surprised how such young people managed to be involved in quite heavy policy development. Brussels is full of young people pursuing their careers. It is a place that offers good opportunities to get experience in both an international context, most often for some reasonable money, and work experience in one of the numerous branches of international NGOs or public institutions. They were all somehow engaged in making the world a better place and Brussels, due to its saturation of public institutions and as a place for policy development, is a good place to start. These policies often impacted third, distant countries, due to both the sheer flow of commodities to and from EU Europe (as in the case of biofuel policy), and the flow of money in the form of development aid (which, as many anthropologists of development have shown, is always connected to ideology, see Escobar, 2012; Sampson, 2002; Wedel, 2001).

I met more and more people in Brussels. It is common in EU Brussels to go to somebody’s home for a party, to people you just do not know, but some of your friends know, or you know who they are but never got to know them personally. Private parties belong to a fixed element of social life in EU-space in Brussels. These parties were always, no matter where one worked, somehow connected to professional life. People would know each other from a previous workplace or because they currently worked together on a given policy or issue, or because they worked together lobbying the Commission (or any other EU institution) and shared the same views on a certain EU policy, or because they worked together in an EU

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12 Because in the Netherlands, in Flanders and in Brussels staircases in houses are often narrow and very steep, it is common that during the removal furniture are lowered (or elevated) on ropes from out of the window.
institution or were of the same nationality. Last time I was in Brussels in March 2011, I coincidentally met one of my interview partners on the street, close to the place I was staying – in Ixelles/Elsene – the same district were my Dutch-British friends used to live. She was working at one of the so-called green NGOs and told me that she was moving to a new, bigger flat a few blocks away, in Ixelles/Elsene, and that I should come to a housewarming party on the weekend, which I did. At this party there were people working at the Commission, at the EU Parliament and at the Committee of the Regions. There were also people working in the NGO where the host worked and in NGOs that were dealing with similar issues/policies or working together with the NGO where the host worked. Everyone was young (between 30 and 40) and spoke English; there were people from both from OMS and NMS, and we – I was making research on biofuels – were all somehow connected to environmental policy and shaping it at the EU level.

I remember it was a fancy-dress party because it was the Carnival season (though there is no pronounced tradition of fancy-dress Carnivals in Brussels), and the host opened the door with a mask on her face. In her invitation that she sent me via email, after we met on the street, she wrote that she came from “the most famous Slovenian carnival town of Ptuj, and I have not really celebrated it for three years, it is time to change this and put a fancy dress on”. Thus, guests were asked to disguise themselves as one of the NGOs (logos) represented in Brussels. The host had black and white make-up with big black ears made of paper stuck to her head and was dressed in black and white (representing the Panda bear logo of the WWF – World Wildlife Fund). There were others dressed as birds (representing Birdlife Europe) and a tree leaf (as another green NGO) and other, for me unrecognizable NGOs. There was also a Finnish man from the Commission who had on a black shirt and black trousers. He was my age, blond, rather tall and plump, and apparently, similar to me, without fancy dress on. I remember talking to him in a small group. We all laughed about what he should have worn and he was not the only person from the institutions at this party not in fancy dress. There were also people from the Committee of the Regions, from the EU Parliament (assistants of MEPs and permanent officials) and from the European Environment Agency. I went to this party and in contrast to the more official events, where people would wear smart outfits, and also in contrast to Polish parties, where the outfits are somehow very similar according to gender, and people generally look in a way that could be described as smart-casual, the crowd here was more mixed and the dress code apparently more légèr and diverse. Completing my field diary I noted:

They were different, they were all different from what I have known until now [on this field trip]. Or more similar to [Name] friends [one who was living in Brussels and working in the EP]: relaxed and talking a bit about the environment policies of the EU (I talked to this guy
from Finland) but in a different way from Poles: not giving one the impression one is ‘making big politics’, without making constant references to what this or that country’s ‘position’ is and considering the moral/historical/ideological stances of it, but staying very much grounded, close to the facts and considering or talking about how this or that country is close or far from the somehow implicitly common and obvious target: reduction of CO₂. This was a courteous conversation as per any other occasion during a dinner or social gathering in Berlin or Warsaw. There were some snacks on the table, very plain, and plenty of wine bottles, as each arrival would bring one with him/her. We drank from plastic cups. Even though I knew only the host, I didn’t feel strange or out of place. People talked and were curious. There was one guy from Poland – we were talking about bars in the city centre and about how ‘the Belgians’ are. Alcohol made the atmosphere even more relaxed and we talked about finding a partner in Brussels and the hermetic environment of the institutions, and about how ‘the Belgians’ are – both men and women – cold, unapproachable and bad sexual partners. This was all done in a polite, funny, ironic way (we didn’t treat seriously what we were talking about, but an implicit ‘truth’ was somewhere in these stories about ‘Belgians’, ‘Poles’ and ‘Finns’ I suppose…), telling their [their own] experiences and making jokes either about their own nationality (or about would-be or to-be partners), though we were all somehow convinced or believed that we were talking about the existing reality. This Pole is really somehow disapproving of Belgians.

At all these house parties, I had the feeling that everybody was welcome, everyone was interested and interesting, friendly, smiling and nice towards me. However, I also had the impression they were all from the same class and had more or less the same way of talking about nationality – regardless of their country of origin – ironic and (self-)distanced. They were all well educated (what I mean here is what is known in Germany as Allgemeinbildung or in Poland as ogólne wykształcenie – a feature of the middle class or intelligentsia, and a sound university education), spoke fluently at least one foreign language (it was almost always English; however they all spoke another foreign language, and if the host was e.g. Polish/Danish/Dutch, one could expect the majority would speak, respectively, Polish/Danish/Dutch) and shared similar values and lifestyles. At these parties, people would wear casual shirts with jeans and leather shoes; the more “alternative” version of dress, the one I had on, would be a t-shirt and sneakers. If someone had glasses, they were smart glasses with thin, delicate frames (no hipster thick-black frame glasses); no piercings and no visible tattoos (at least during the time of my research); clean, well-kept and well-groomed (hair always styled); rarely smokers and I never saw anyone heavily drunk (apart from my close friends). I once went to a party with my flat mate, a Brit younger than me from a working-class background, who was an intern at the EU Parliament and had piercings the whole length of both his ears. It was a party of stagiaires at the Commission and after we
were introduced by his acquaintance, a girl came up to us asking what we did professionally. Looking at my friend, she said: “I guess you’re not working at the Commission”. To my friend’s question “why?”, she replied: “because you have all those piercings”. This comment apparently hurt my friend. As we walked back home, he passionately reflected on it: “She just wanted to show me that she already knows what it’s like to be at the Commission”.

**FRACTURED ETHNOGRAPHIES: WHERE IS OUR FIELD AND WHEN DO WE DO FIELDWORK RESEARCH?**

I suppose anyone who has done research for extensive periods knows that it is not a linear and clearly reconstructable process. Writing ethnographies nowadays does not necessarily mean travelling overseas to a remote village in the Triobrands, Sudan (Nuers) or Algeria (Kabyles) for a pre-established period of time that is followed by the writing up phase at a desk at home. We may go to distant places, but after we come back we still gather information, pieces of articles; we go back to places we have been before (often not as a researcher anymore); we talk on the phone with people we know there; we exchange emails with them and contact them on Facebook; we have friends in the field and, last but not least, we tend to involve ourselves in the life of those communities we have studied – everything counts and everything is field material then. Doing ethnographies today, as Wilk (Wilk, 2011) notes, demands posing questions like: when do we do ethnography and when do we cease doing it? When are we in the field and when are we not? Doing ethnographies (often considered something that one cannot learn during a seminar at the university, only by doing) means engaging in unstable, varied and manifold relations with the field; it means blurring the boundary between “being there” and “home”. And I argue, between “us” and “them” or “me” and “them”. Thus, the division between “being there” and coming back to do the “analysis” and “writing up”, between “us” (or rather “I”) and “them” is not sharp or obvious.

What is then the definition of ethnography? Isn’t it a discipline distinguished by the constant balancing between intimacy and distance, between “being there” and “here”? Isn’t it in the end a written account of a person called an ethnographer, of his/her encounter with Others that produces knowledge that is specific for ethnography? Blurred boundaries between “being there” and being “home”, between doing ethnography and not doing it, between “me” and “them”, shows how much our own experience, our own stories about “being there” and about ourselves shape what we encounter in the field and what representation we produce of those Others we have studied. Blurred boundaries mean that “they” coshape the research (which most of us often refuse to acknowledge) and that the field has an immense
impact on what we think, feel and finally write. Why not then give an account of both sides of this blurred boundary? If ethnography is now a constant manoeuvring between intimacy and distance to the field, why not describe this process? But who are we writing about then? Them or ourselves? And then the question arises, how to describe the often indescribable: our feelings and the tacit, embodied knowledge we gain as ethnographers that enables us to see that someone, according to local rules, is acting awkward or embarrassing and another person is not? How then to problematize and disclose what Michael Herzfeld calls cultural intimacy (Herzfeld, 2005), which is often concealed behind little gestures and details in everyday life?

Describing these observations and the emotions that accompanied my research required strong autoanalytical work – both observations and emotions were strongly connected to these suppressed memories and “private” encounters in the field that I mentioned above and that I did not regard as field material. I think that doing ethnography is a difficult, absorbing process that involves a whole range of emotions, preconditions, assumptions and situations (that one is confronted with and has to adjust to quickly in order to resolve). It is in fact an extremely personal, solitary, emotional, sensory and bodily process. A process of constant awareness of the self and of the Other, of what is happening in and outside of “me” – a process of learning cultural intimacies and distancing oneself from them in order to understand and describe them. Ethnography then is not so much about big cultural events (as Durkheim would see it) or structures (as per Levi-Strauss), but explorations in everyday life knowledge. It means focusing on things that are uneventful, that are obvious and embodied, things that no one questions while “being there”– not even us, ethnographers. I suppose the role of an ethnographer is to recognize these innocuous things in Others’ everyday lives (and recognize also the changes in an ethnographer’s own body and mind while adjusting to the field we are studying) and give an account of them, describe those everyday life practices that create community and meaning. Our aim is also to describe those processes that accompany our research, the learning process of “local knowledge” – processes that we always experience and encounter while doing fieldwork, as we all are interested in the Other and want to gather rich material. But this, however, means that the blurred boundary between “us” and “them” is not an obstacle, is not something that is unanalytical, but rather we have to reconsider its consequences for the production of ethnographical knowledge and make of it an asset from which to gain research material – something that I have tried to do in this book.

In the following chapters I will constantly refer to my own experiences as “being there” and how I behaved as an actor in the field I studied: how I entered the field, how my research developed, how I approached and transgressed the symbolic boundaries and limits within EU-space, and how they were challenged by the people I met and studied. These are questions that help show cultural patterns,
enable cultural analysis, and help illustrate the symbolic structure of EU-space in Brussels. These questions helped me to structure my field material – during the research process and the disclosures in and from the field. I find particularly inspiring Sarah Pink and her “sensory ethnography” (2009) that “accounts for and expands this existing scholarship that rethought ethnography as gendered, embodied and more” (ibid., p. 10). She develops her argument based on the previous writings of such scholars as D. Howes (2003) and A. Coffey (1999) about the corporeal and sensory character of ethnographic research that is self-aware, reflexive and attends to the senses during all stages of the research: planning, reviewing, fieldwork, analysis and representational processes (Pink, 2009). Her account of and clarity (that she also takes from the works of David Howes (1991), and Paul Stoller (1989)) about ethnography’s reflexive and corporeal character – that ethnographic experiences are embodied, so that the researcher experiences and learns through his/her whole body – is what is specifically important for me here. She writes:

The experiencing, knowing and emplaced body is therefore central to the idea of a sensory ethnography. Ethnographic practice entails our multisensorial embodied engagements with others (perhaps through participation in activities, or exploring their understanding in part verbally) and with their social, material, discursive and sensory environments. It also requires us to reflect on these engagements, to conceptualize their meanings theoretically and to seek ways to communicate the relatedness of experiential and intellectual meanings to others. (Pink, 2009, pp. 25-26)

In not having easy access to the field or not being able to follow the people in all their contexts and environments, entering EU-space as an ethnographer requires becoming a subject of the rules and norms within it, rules and norms that adhere to the body (and bodily hexis), language(s) and social context(s). This account, along with the experience of living in EU Brussels, of “deep hanging out” among EU civil servants are the experiences that produced my field material. Moreover, in exercising sensory ethnographies, Pink acknowledges the significance of place both for the people studied and for the ethnographer, as sensory ethnography’s goal is to “seek to know places in other people’s worlds that are similar to the places and ways of knowing of those others. In attempting to achieve this, she or he [the

13 While being aware of these discussions in our discipline I still see, in line with Pink (2009), the need to make the research process, our experiences in the field and, what is probably most important, their outcome and consequence for what we write, more visible. Not making everything controllable and accountable in the guise of modernity, but rather, in a spirit of sharing the experiences and ideas that might push our understanding of making ethnography and the kind knowledge we produce.
ethnographer] would aim to come closer to understanding how those other people experience, remember and imagine” (Pink, 2009, p. 23). My research has been constantly bound to places that each had a different meaning and a different cultural and symbolical context in EU Brussels, where varying political and ideological powers and their interplay made them significant.

**Places and Hierarchies**

After attending numerous parties in Brussels I realized that the place of one’s employment, whether it was a particular DG of the Commission or other EU institution, or a political public institution in EU-space, had an impact on the way people spent their leisure time, where they lived and where they went out and, would distinguish them from, e.g. lobbyists working in the car industry or any other industry (the industry lobbyists I met were people over 45, mostly men, very often former EU civil servants). At that fancy-dress party, there were people from the Commission’s DG Environment, employees of so-called green NGOs and other EU institutions, but I would say that civil servants working in, for example, DG Transport or DG Energy would not establish more private contacts with people working for lobbies; they would not go to a party to one of the lobbyists’ flats in Ixelles’/Elsene’s Matongé\(^1^4\), but would rather meet in the more formal context of a conference organized by a lobby, or for a drink or to a meeting called a “discussion” or “panel” in one of the venues of the lobby or hotels in Brussels. I knew that this world existed, but to a large extent it remained unpenetrated by me – probably because these were areas strictly guarded against people from the outside world. But I also didn’t have friends working for big industry, nor in DGs dealing with policies that were of interest to big industry. For example, during my research on the biofuel cluster\(^1^5\) I was invited to a conference in Berlin organized by a lobby

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14 Matongé is part of Brussels’ district Ixelles/Elsene. It is known for large population of migrants from black Africa and/or white Belgian intellectuals.

15 By policy cluster I mean a network of EU institutional actors (EU Commission, EU Parliament, the Council, EU Agencies and Research Institutions), representatives of EU member states’ national governments (in most cases PermReps, but also people in the member states’ ministries following and handling given policies at the EU level) and representatives of civil society (industrial, business and trade associations, NGOs, etc.) who are stakeholders and negotiating partners in the political process of legislating and implementing EU policies. Such an understanding of policy development underscores the blurred boundaries between institutions and the private and public spheres in EU-space. See also next chapter “Struggles in EU-space over prestige and power”.

for the Brazilian sugarcane industry. The front page of the flyer of this conference, called Bioenergietag 2011, taking place in the venues of the Brazilian embassy in Berlin, stated: “Zukunft der Bioenergie: global, Europäisch, national, lokal. Potentiale, Stoffströme und öffentliche Akzeptanz, Zweite Konferenz des Netzwerks Bioenergie der Deutschen Umwelthilfe” (English: The Future of Bioenergy: global, European, national, local. Potentials, the flow of goods and public acceptance. The Second Conference on Network Bioenergy organised by German Environmental Aid). Conferences of such types were also organized in Brussels and by other lobbies, e.g. by ePure – a lobby representing producers of ethanol (e.g. http://www.epure.org/news/ILUC_Seminar1). For my friends working in DG RELEX and in other EU institutions in positions dealing with EU foreign policy and/or security policy, it would be the German Marshall Fund’s (GMF) Brussels Forum – a cyclical conference of high-ranking politicians and heads of states, analysts, etc., or events organized by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) scrutinizing and providing a forum for discussions about EU policies in one of the conference venues in the so-called EU District.

However, the party described above and the place where my Dutch-British friends lived was on the other side of the city, in the South-East, whereas I was living in the North-West. I would always have to think about how to get back home later in the evening. The night-bus service in Brussels runs only on weekends and a taxi was too expensive for me. Later, my life became a bit easier as my Dutch-British friends lent me a Dutch bicycle – a means of transportation that I was most comfortable with and used to from living in Berlin – a fact and item that helped me to retain my own identity in the process of my fieldwork. However, virtually all the people I got to know more closely during my time in Brussels lived in the same area and were somehow connected to EU institutions, either working for the EU or working in NGOs that lobbied EU institutions. These areas were either Ixelles/Elsene or Etterbeek, two districts adjacent to the European District. During my first research stay in Brussels, a Polish friend who was working at an AD post at one of the Commission’s prestigious DGs, moved from St. Gilles/St. Gillis to a big, four-room apartment on a street close to where my Dutch-British friends lived. His apartment looked similar to that of my friends’: it was in an old, well-kept house directly in Rue Bailli/Baljuwstraat. The kitchen was small but fully equipped, there was a dining room, living room with a TV set, marble chimneys, two bedrooms and a small garden in the backyard. As a young Polish civil servant, he had more Ikea furniture than my friends, who had brought some of theirs from Holland as donations from parents or friends. All the flats that I visited of people working at EU institutions were located in these two districts (although, of course, 16 ILUC in this link stands for a controversial issue of indirect land use changes leading to increases of GHG emissions caused by biofuel crops, link seen on 10.07.2012.)
this does not mean that all EU civil servants live solely in these two districts). These are the areas where the Belgian white middle class lives and generally junior AD fonctionnaires at EU institutions. I was also told that Ixelles/Elsene was traditionally favoured by French and Italians working at the EU (one of the Italian Directors I interviewed lived with his family in a flat in Ixelles/Elsene) and some areas of Ixelles/Elsene, particularly those around Matongé (a quarter known for its high population of people from Sub-Saharan Africa), were populated by Belgian artists and, as my network showed, single people working in international NGOs lobbying EU institutions. Older EU civil servants (over 50), higher in the hierarchy and from OMS, preferred to live with their families in detached or semi-detached houses in residential areas of Woluwe-St.Pierre/St.Pieters or Woluwe-St.Lambert/St.Lambrechts, in Kraainem/Crainhem or Wezembeek-Oppem (outside Brussels Region), Stockel/Stokkel, or in the district of Auderghem/Oudergem – all in the East or South-East. This is what one Irish, outgoing senior civil servant at the Director level told me:

Pawel Lewicki (PL): Where do you live in Brussels?
Answer (A): It’s called Kraainem, it’s in the suburbs.
PL: Ah, ok, yeah. ten minutes from here…
A: If you leave late enough in the evening, yes.
PL: And in the morning?
A: Probably, I would say 20 minutes in the morning, coming in.
PL: What…? Why have you decided to live there?
A: Well it was by chance, we found a house there, when we moved to Brussels first. It just happened to be available at a price that we could afford. And we liked very much living there so we bought a house there. [as she said it was ‘in the eighties’ – PL]
PL: I’ve heard that there are a lot of Germans in the area.
A: There are a lot of Germans there, yes.
PL: Because of the school, is that correct?
A: Yeah, probably. But there are a lot of other nationalities there. But what I mean is, I like to live there because it’s the convenience. I can be at work very quickly and I don’t have to come in to town precisely for the shopping, for my shopping. I can do it on the spot in the incentives [?], in the shopping [centres] there are cinemas, never mind the congress towns and shops in here [in the city centre].
PL: What else do you like about the place?
A: Well, I like the… it’s a pleasant suburban atmosphere with nice gardens and so on. And it’s very convenient also to the airport and to the ring when you want to get away, and I do it a lot.
PL: Are there a lot of [EU] civil servants living there?
A: I suppose there are, yes.
But you don’t know them?
A: I don’t know them or my husband is there who is Flemish. And therefore a lot of our contacts would be with Belgian nationals and his family. We go almost every week to them. And I go home a lot to Ireland so…

Kraainem/Grainhem is a commune East of the Brussels city centre, outside the Capital Region (thus in Flanders), close to Brussels ring and Zaventem Airport. It is, as my interviewee says, a suburban, calm, white middle-class area with detached and semi-detached houses or villas often built out of red brick, with shutters and calm gardens around them. It shows however that many of the civil servants live there (and many of my older interviewees from OMS in higher positions would live in that area or in neighbouring Wezembeek-Oppem) and that one of its’ assets is the ease of getting away from Brussels. The fact that this person had a lot of friends among Belgians was rather exceptional in EU-space; however this was because of her spouse, who turned out to be a Belgian politician.

However, one of my Polish interviewees, a Director, grade AD14, who lived in Woluwe-St. Pierre/St. Pieters – one of the “good” white middle-class districts where a lot of senior civil servants from OMS lived, made me aware how places of residence are firmly connected to hierarchy within the EU apparatus. This is what he said:

Pawel Lewicki (PL): Coming back to the issue of the district where you live: are there a lot of Poles living in that area?
Answer (A): Too short… well you know, I live there since December, I live there since December [the interview was in April 2008] and home is my rare hotel. The more so because when I’m back before eight – then I’m happy. And there is almost no week when I’m not away for two or three days. So this is my… when I have time, I go to visit my wife [she lived in a capital of one of EU member states]. I don’t know. Cars are parked in garages [so he can’t see car plates], those standing on the street are… it’s a bit further. Sometimes I see a Polish car plate, but my impression is that these people don’t live there. There are loads of Poles in Brussels.
PL: A lot. Way more then in Berlin.
A: From Bialystok (laugh) [Bialystok is a mid-sized city in North-East Poland, the city itself and the region around it – Podlasie – is the homeland for many Poles working in the low-paid service sector in Brussels].
PL: Yes, I just realized that.
A: But I think, I think there [where he lives] aren’t many, I think there aren’t many Poles living there. And this is painful. I bear a huge grudge against the Polish government… Polish governments. This is, of course, mine, my long-term knowledge… I am mad, I always have been mad at Poland because… EIT, don’t know whether you have followed this issue, they
were about to establish an Institute, technological institute in Poland and we lost another opportunity\textsuperscript{17}.

PL: It was about to be established in Wroclaw, right?

A: Yes. For any other nationality it is just unthinkable, how there is zero interest… we are just very, very provincial. The Polish government doesn’t care about… promoting Poland and struggling to place as many civil servants as possible so that they remain connected [networked]. You know, how can it be that I am here… I am a senior civil servant of the Commission and this happens to Poland very rarely. Lately I received an email, an email from the Polish PermRep to senior Polish civil servants at the Commission. And there were about nine, maybe twelve names on the address list. There aren’t that many of us here. There is one DDG and maybe nine or ten Directors.

This interview passage, apart from the lack of interest from the Polish government to place people in senior posts at the Commission, reveals how a place of residence is automatically associated with the hierarchy and nationality of a given person. The outrage of this person about the low number of Polish residents in the area he lives in shows how the boundaries between professional and public life are blurred and how (supposedly) private choices carry meaning in your professional life. Moreover, it reveals that the place where you live marks your place in the formal and symbolic hierarchy in EU-space, and the spontaneous complaint about the Polish government makes it apparent – because there are few Poles in the district where he lives – there is a low number of Poles in senior positions in the EU apparatus. This example shows how real space reflects social space.

An AST fonctionnaire from Finland who lived in the EU District but close to the border of Schaarbeek/Schaerbeek, a commune that does not have a clear status in terms of being a “good” district (because some areas of Schaarbeek/Schaerbeek were populated by poor, nonwhite migrants) told me the following:

Paweł Lewicki (PL): But do you know… why I am asking that? It is because somebody told me that there is a huge informal hierarchy within the Commission, which is based on the way you look, the way you live and what car you drive.

Answer (A): Of course, if you take people that live in Schaarbeek, which is not a good commune, ok, it depends on where in Schaarbeek, you can see that it’s mostly poor people, but you know, that’s… when you live in… Ixelles, that’s… people there are very […], they have a very strong idea where you should live. Because it’s really cool and you know,

\textsuperscript{17} EIT is the European Institute for Innovation and Technology, which is an agency of the European Union. It was established in 2008 and in the process of its establishment there has been a struggle among EU member states as to where its seat should be. The Institute was finally placed in Budapest but in the run for hosting EIT one of the short-listed cities was Wroclaw.
fashionable. Ukkle also, but that’s really like more for people with family. Then you have a lot of Scandinavians living out in Waterloo and around Waterloo.

She is showing me that that the place of residence has, apart from material status, a symbolic meaning (cool and fashionable places). However, her “of course” points to the fact that such criteria are also relevant in EU-space, and the longer I was in Brussels the more clear it appeared to me. What both these passages reveal is that in Brussels’ EU context there are areas traditionally ascribed to particular nationalities: Germans would ostensibly live in suburban communes (in Flanders) Kraainem/Crainhem and Wezembeek-Oppem (due to the German school in the latter commune), Swedes would live in Waterloo (I was told by one Swede that it “reminds me a bit of a Swedish town”), Brits in Tervuren – both Swedes and Brits also outside Brussels and predominantly in single/detached houses. Brussels’ South, districts of Forrest/Vorst and Uccle/Ukkle, were supposedly occupied by French and British senior civil servants. All of these areas and communes belong to middle-class and upper-middle-class areas, particularly the latter with semi-detached and detached houses. The Poles I interviewed, who worked in lower AD posts, would either buy or rent flats somewhere in Schaarbeek/Schaerbeek, in Etterbeek or Ixelles/Elsene, and rarely in one of the Woluwes. The three Polish Directors I interviewed lived in one of these more established districts: one in Auderghem/Oudergem, the other in Uccle/Ukkle. A third quoted above, rented a semi-detached house in Woluwe-St.Pierre/St.Pieters and told me not without some pride in his voice that his immediate neighbour was his German colleague, a Director in the same DG. Some of my interviewees, AD fonctionnaires from Poland who had moved to Brussels with their families and settled down, bought houses outside of Brussels in the surrounding communes in Flanders, or in further communes along the train lines going out from Schuman station (where the main building of the Commission and the Council is located). The communes along these train lines had a different status when it came to prestige depending, usually, on their proximity to Brussels. The price of real estate, which went up significantly just before the May 1st, 2004, was an indicator here. The thin strip of Flemish communes separating the Brussels Capital Region from Wallonia to its South were during the time of my research already very expensive, even for EU civil servants. Thus, Poles would buy houses in Wallonia’s communes South-East of Brussels and generally in the South or in the East of Brussels. I spoke only to one AST civil servant from the UK who was living the North of Brussels with her Flemish partner, and no one with whom I spoke lived West of Brussels. These examples show that places and bodies, as Bourdieu notes, are conjoined with social class (Bourdieu, 2010), but in EU-space these social classes are also often conjoined with
nationalities, as the previously mentioned German, British and Swedish districts show. I will expand on this issue later.

Both the EU institutions that were the main focus of my research, and the abovementioned areas where EU civil servants lived, were on the opposite side of town from where I lived. However, as I was considering my research more in terms of getting into EU institutions, as I imagined it, strolling along the corridors of EU institutions, conducting interviews and gathering data on policy making, I did not seriously consider moving to Ixelles/Elsene or Etterbeek, or any other district where EU civil servants traditionally lived. I felt a bit excluded from the social life, but also reluctant to spend time searching for a new place to live (which is difficult in Brussels), and afraid of the high prices in these two districts. Last but not least: I did not find it relevant for my research to move to one of these areas. I would rather see it in terms of living close to my friends, and thus congruent with my own identity as a white, middle-class European, somehow privileged, on scholarship and researching EU Commission civil servants – a group widely seen and self-perceived as a political elite. On the other hand, I also did not belong to the fashionably dressed people in café Belga in Place Flagey/Flageyplein, or to the modern shiny bars in Ixelles/Elsene and calm streets of both Woluwes. However, I did not want to be excluded, did not want to go back alone at night to a “no-go area”.

**Etterbeek and both Woluwes**

A few days after I helped the Dutch-British couple to move to a new flat, I met their Polish friends. One of them was working at the EU Parliament; the other was looking for a way into EU institutions, simultaneously studying European Studies at the Brussels’ Free University. We all meet, again, in St. Gery/St. Gorik, in one of the popular bars, where a young live band is performing. I quickly find a common language with my new Polish friends and that evening we laugh, dance and get drunk at one of Brussels’ hip parties. We met several times, also at dinners, and as
my Polish friend rented out a room that was about to be free, she asked me whether I would like to move in. She lived in Etterbeek, right next to metro station Montgomery at the end of Av. De Tervueren/Tervurenlaan, where lots of embassies are located. The idea of living merely two metro stations from Schuman, where the headquarters of the Commission is located (in Berlaymont building) and close to the Council (Justus Lipsius building), the Parc du Cinquantenaire/Jubelpark that divided the European District from the housing area of Etterbeek and both Woluwes (Woluwe-St.Pierre/St.Pieters and Woluwe St.Lambert/St.Lambrechts), and Rue des Tongres/Tongerenstraat and Av. Des Celtes/Keltenlaan, where popular bars, bakeries and shops are and where the urban life is pulsing – was very tempting to me. It appealed to me to move into a bigger room for similar money, with a “normal” life and two cats instead of constantly changing students and stagiaires, and to live with two people I liked and had a common language with, to be close to places where you could hang out in the evening, close to the park where one could jog and compete with your fellow joggers instead of running alone on empty park paths around the royal palace in Laken/Laeken. My friend, who actually did not have to convince me to move in, said: “here you will have civilization”. After I moved in, I only once went back to Laken/Laeken, and only because my cousin was visiting and we went there to see the Atomium.

The spot where I lived in Etterbeek was right on the border between Etterbeek and two Woluwes: Woluwe-St.Pierre/St.Pieters and Woluwe-St.Lambert/St.Lamberchts, both residential areas. On their outskirts to the East and to the South they border the Flemish communes of Wezembeek-Oppem, Tervuren and the Brussels districts of Auderghem/Oudergem and Watermael-Boitsfort/Watermaal-Bosvoorde. The deeper one would go in these directions, the less dense the buildings and the more greenery. In Woluwe-St.Pierre/St.Pieters, between two- or three-storey houses and in calm or even sleepy streets was one of the posh sports clubs called Aspria Royal La Rasante. I learned about its existence from a member of one of the Commissioner’s Cabinets, after I asked this person whether there is a Commission’s sports club that he/she would go to. He/she said: “Yes, there is this one club, what’s the name of it? La Rasante? People have tried to convince me to go there and sign in, but I don’t really have time for such a thing”. I was told about Aspria La Rasante during my first field trip in Brussels, but went there only on my second trip, because I had heard about it many times and knew that some of the senior civil servants would go there. Royal La Rasante was opened in 2005 (it’s a country club) as a branch of the Aspria sports club in Rue d’Industrie/Nijverheidsstraat in the heart of the EU District. During the time of my research, La Rasante’s predecessor, the Aspria in the EU District, was very popular among EU
civil servants and was even called DG Aspria. I went to both of them, pretending to
be a freshly employed civil servant of the Commission. La Rasante is placed on a
plot of land within a whole quarter surrounded by two- to three-storey houses. It
has five tennis courts that are available for members, and many of my interviewees
in AD posts, both from OMS and NMS would play tennis. Its entrance is not
directly from the street, but from a short, curved cobbled street leading to it, and
only a stone sign with cut out golden letters reveals the existence of the club in this
place. I remember how odd I felt walking down this short cobbled street and when I
saw a camera pointed towards me. As I approached the entrance, I started to
wonder if they would even let me in seeing that I just walked in and had not driven
in a car (this small street leading to the entrance had the function of removing it
from the eyes of mortals). The entrance hall was, to my surprise, quite small but
maintained in the style of a British country club, with sofas, green walls and some
certificates and diplomas on the wall. However, it gave way to a big light reception
hall with a big club label hanging behind the receptionist. There were tables with
armchairs next to big, Venetian windows, and I recognized bonsai trees in large
standing flowerpots. I told the receptionist that I would like to become a member,
and after a few minutes a young man welcomed me and gave me a tour around the
club’s venues, later telling me about the membership conditions, as we sat back at
the table. I was offered a drink and then asked how I learned about the existence of
this club and the name of this person because, “here everybody knows each other”
and “we attach great value to the fact that people feel well here and like to spend
time here among friends and with their families”. I told him that I was a freshly
employed EC civil servant and that I had heard about the club from a friend at
work. He was surprised when I gave him my email and it was not a Commission’s
email on an EC domain (ending with @ec.europa.eu). I was dressed in my dark
Boss jeans, shirt and black jacket, but maybe he sensed something because it was
early afternoon, and I should have been, as a Commission’s civil servant, sitting in
my office. The venue had two big fitness studios, a wellness area, big indoor pool,
and restaurant, and because it was already warm outside, between the building and
tennis courts, dark wooden teak tables stood under big white umbrellas. At this time
of day, the club was rather empty – the atmosphere was calm and relaxed. After I
learned the many different membership options (with the cheapest being 137€ a
month), and after assurances that I would consider it and talk to my wife about it
(sic!), I walked out the way I came in.

The Aspria Club, or the DG Aspria, in the EU District was located in a modern
office building. It had a big fitness area, spa, restaurant, wellness area, massage and
a whole range of classes including aqua-aerobics (the class program read: Aqua-
Latino, Aqua Wake-up, Aqua-Pregnancy or Body Art). From what I could hear
from my friends working in EU-space, it was a place preferred by singles working
at the Commission or at EU institutions. However, one of my interviewees, a Dutch Head of Unit (HoU) in his mid-forties, who had a working-class background and who happened to also be an instructor of a combat sport, and, as he claimed, went to fitness every day, detested Aspria and said that he did not want to “watch my colleagues’ fat, old bodies”. Thus, he went to Passage, a cheaper club of a much smaller size – belonging at that time to the British chain Fitness First, and as I heard, with more mixed (non-EU) public and “normal” Belgians coming in. This club was more crowded during lunch breaks, and its facilities were more simple\(^\text{19}\), its interiors rather plain in comparison to the modern, shiny surfaces of Aspria. However, this club was also popular among EU civil servants, but it was a place where one would go solely to do sports as it did not offer wellness and massage, nor a restaurant or bar. I was lucky to be a member of Fitness First in Berlin, so with my member card I could work out also in Passage in Brussels. Particularly during the lunch hours there would be a lot of people from EU institutions, a fact that I could determine by the visibility of their “badges” (EU civil servants’ ID) and conversations in languages other than French (Dutch, German, English, Italian). Similarly to one of the Directors at the Commission who told me that it would be difficult for him/her to tell others that he lived in St.Josse/St.Joost (the poorest, migrants’ commune in Brussels), it would also probably be difficult for a Director to confess that he/she was a member of Passage and not Aspria. Despite the differences, both of these clubs were frequently attended by EU civil servants, and both Aspria and Passage were located in what is called the EU District\(^\text{20}\).

**THE EUROPEAN DISTRICT**

**From Trône/Troon metro station to Place Lux**

On my first day in the European District\(^\text{21}\), three days after my arrival in Brussels, I am standing on the corner of Rue du Luxembourg/Luxemburgstraat and Av. des

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19 As I received a tour from a young and talkative sales man in Aspria in the EU District, he presented to me at that time the newest technical achievement in fitness – a vibrating platform that caused reduction of fat tissue without sweating and physical effort. Passage sports club, obviously, did not possess such a fantastic device.

20 The Commission also had its own kind of country club in Overijse, outside Brussels, allegedly with tennis courts. I was not able to see the place – entrance was allowed only to people with a Commission badge.

21 The so-called European District or EU District lies within Brussels’ three municipalities: Etterbeek, Ixelles/Elsene and St. Josse-ten-Noode/St. Joost-ten-Node, all of them East of
Arts/Kunstlaan with my gaze facing Rue du Luxembourg/Luxemburgstraat towards the arch of the Gare Luxembourg/Luxemburg train station and the European Parliament behind it. At my back is Av. Des Artes/Kunstlaan, a big ring street circling the city centre, with many tunnels and four lanes in each direction. This wide street marks Brussels’ city centre and, to its South-East, the European District. There is a major bus stop with connections to the metro station on this corner and people rushing between the buses and the metro. As I walk down Rue du Luxembourg/Luxemburgstraat towards Place du Luxembourg/Luxemburgplein (called Place Lux by EU civil servants), I pass people in smart outfits carrying briefcases. One of my notes in my field diary says:

It’s like in Warsaw here, everyone is in a hurry, not noticing their fellow men and women or any other people in their surroundings, impersonal space, grey office buildings, loads of cars and car traffic on Av. Des Artes/Kunstlaan, people dressed well but not like in Frankfurt or London – you can see that they are civil servants, not bankers. Lots of young people, of that ‘future Europeans’ type, probably making a career in connection with EU policies. Many have trolley cases/suitcases and travel bags – they probably came to Brussels for just a day or two. Buildings in this street are a total mixture of establishments from the sixties and seventies. Regardless of their age, most of them with a coffee-with-milk-colour or grey facades. There are also 19th century old and narrow houses, typical for the Brussels bourgeois, and face-lifted office buildings from the sixties to the eighties with lots of smooth glass, shiny metal and stone frontages. This space does not invite one to contemplate it, nor to enjoy it, it’s a space that you pass in hurry. Everyone rushes through the streets, those with cases are usually alone, and others sometimes in mixed couples or small groups, walking fast and discussing issues. In general everybody is on the move here. Tourists are easily spotted, as well as anybody walking slowly. There are some salad and sandwich bars, where you order and pay at the counter. They look modern: they have shiny pastel and smooth interiors, typical fast-food bars that could easily be in Berlin, Warsaw or Amsterdam. I spot one pizzeria with nonwhites behind the counter looking similar to Neukölln’s Turkish bars. There are two fancy restaurants in this street, one in a hotel. Walking into one of them I saw only people in smart outfits and with papers and laptops on the table (it was late morning) – they apparently had an appointment there. In this district you don’t see people walking their dogs or wandering or people with shopping bags. I saw a group of teenagers kicking a ball on the city centre. It is an area demarcated to the East by Parc Cinquantenaire/Jubelpark, to the North, more or less, by the administrative border between the districts of Etterbeek and St. Josse-ten-Noode/St. Joost-ten-Node, to the West by Av. Des Arts/Wetlaan, and to the South by Chaussee de Wavre/Waversesteenweg. These limits are not to be found on any map, but are based both on how this space is experienced and perceived by EU civil servants and on the location of EU institutions and distances between residential and office areas.
Square de Meeûs/De Meeûssquare [a square halfway between Av. Des Artes/Kunstlaan and Place Lux] – playing between trees on a small green lawn with their ball flying over the street and banging against pedestrians. They clearly disrupted the usual state of things in this place, provoking either smiles or angry glances on passers-by’s faces.

**Exploring the limits in and of the field**

While in my ethnography the key to producing descriptions came with or through autoethnography, the answers to my questions on cultural norms in EU-space emerged thanks to connections between symbols and practices, snapshots, observations and interviews, facts and figures, and places and people that all-in-all made the culture of EU civil servants understandable. It was this “analytical alchemy” (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010, p. 219) that helped me to make connections and to understand the cultural logic in and of the field I was studying. However, it was oppositions (adopted from Bourdieu) and contrasts in phenomena and encounters that helped to reveal the hierarchies between different cultural orders, and shed meaning both on the body movements expressed and gestures and words spoken in particular contexts and moments. Oppositions assume that there are two sides to things and phenomena, that there is one or another way of doing things, and that there is something that divides them. These boundaries or limits permeated the whole of my research. Scrutinizing the limits and boundaries of practices and bodies (including my own practices and my own body), approaching them and sometimes transgressing them, proved to be very productive for cultural analysis.

The evolving process of my field research required overcoming limits and boundaries, and accommodating the realities I sought to understand – a process that is intrinsic to any ethnographic research. I found these limits and boundaries on many different levels: in spaces and in (my) interactions, on bodies and in language (use). What is most important however is that approaching and/or transgressing these boundaries reveals the cultural logic and hierarchies of and in a given cultural space. I argue that this approaching and transgressing is visible on bodies and in practices, including my own, as well as in emotions and interactions in/with the field (Pink, 2009). During my fieldwork, I had to transgress boundaries very often on many different levels, and in different spaces and interactions. However, approaching and transgressing boundaries in the field between “us” and “them” (or me and “them”) occurs either consciously or unconsciously. In many cases, this lack of consciousness became apparent to me only months after I returned from the field.

I suppose anyone who has conducted research is aware of the feelings and emotions the people we want to study evoke in us. I do not have clear advice on how to cope with these emotions. But are we really aware of the different strategies
we use in the field – consciously or unconsciously performed as opposed to performative? Are we aware of our, the ethnographer’s, bodily hexis, gestures and language use, and the type and form of questions we ask at particular moments? The longer I was in Brussels, the worse I felt about myself, the more I felt that I was “selling” myself, trying to, subconsciously, present myself from my best side, presumably in a way appreciated by my counterparts, in hope of gaining more access and relevant information. I am fairly sure that my attempts were carefully observed and assessed, and that they either opened or closed doors.

Once I was invited to a dinner with a person I did not know – a Polish AD civil servant at EC. I received this invitation thanks to Polish networks in EU-space. Our mutual acquaintance admitted that being invited to the dinner would help me progress with my research. I do not know how well people really knew and understood what I was doing, but I always explained to them and was open about it when somebody asked. But at this particular party nobody asked. The guests were mostly Polish, and apart from myself and one Polish woman working at a Dutch university, they were all employees of EU institutions. I remember I was sitting next to a Swedish man in his mid-thirties, as far as I remember he and the host were colleagues in the DG Environment. Eating a Polish schab\(^22\) I was annoyed by the courteous conversations, by discussions that I’ve been part of or heard 1000 times before: about how do you do this or that in Poland or France or anywhere else, how do you cook this, or what are the traditions, what are we eating right now, and where does it come from and so on. I was annoyed by this small talk. I probably expected it to be more about the EU and its policies, about working at EU institutions in general, and I expected that at least one person would ask me what I was doing. But maybe they already knew? At one point, I asked the Swede sitting next to me what kind of books he reads or had read recently. He looked at me and ironically shot out of the blue (drawing everybody’s attention to me and revealing that they all knew what I was doing): “So this is what you’re asking people? And then writing ‘EU civil servants read this and that book’”. With this he somehow embarrassed and exposed me, which was probably his aim. He showed me that he was aware of what I was doing and through his irony sent a message: You will not gain any relevant information from me. Maybe it was also his defence strategy?

I remember I was struck by the shallowness of this social event, but also by the courtesy displayed, and the friendliness of the people. I was wondering whether my presence affected their interactions: did they always act like this, and my question “out of the box” simply evoked a defensive reaction? Or was it a game they, I

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22 Schab is a Polish dish consisting of baked pork tenderloin stuffed with dry plum or apricot. During the period of state socialism in Poland, it was considered a delicacy that was served only on special occasions because of the difficulty of obtaining a pork tenderloin on the market.
assume, all knew well? To me, the Swede’s question shows that in EU-space one has to be self-aware and careful all the time. Still sitting at the table, I asked a Polish AST working in RELEX (a fact that I learned only later) what she was doing, and she replied in an angry tone: “I don’t talk about work at the table!” It was apparent that there was a line between me and “them”, an invisible boundary that some would defend in more concealed ways, and others more explicitly. They may have been flattered by the fact that sitting at the table was an “anthropologist” who was there to undertake a research about them, but they were also a bit afraid or not sure how to cope with this. It also showed an anthropologist’s typical experience doing research among elites: there is a courteous, nice and friendly atmosphere as long as you do not ask questions. Later, after dessert was served and the table was moved to the side in order to make room for dancing, I saw and heard the AST woman speaking with my friend in a corner about work – they were employed in the same DG and knew each other well (both belonged to the “first wave” of Poles at the Commission). After that, while sitting on a couch, this same AST woman was much friendlier – she talked with me and told me how disappointed she was with her job and that she was considering going back to Poland, but was afraid of being labelled as a loser there. This however was the last attempt at conversation initiated during that evening “from the other side”, the last attempt to overcome the invisible barrier between myself and “them”, though the evening lasted till early morning, and I followed everybody to a club located in a villa in a posh area of Brussels. After that evening, every time I saw the AST woman, she pretended not to know me – something that I experienced very often during my field research.

From the outset of my field research, such experiences as an ethnographer and actor in the field denoted the rules in EU-space: they indicated my status as an outsider and the means for defending the limits of being “in” vs. “out”. I remember once sitting in front of my interview partner in DG RELEX, a young British man in a fine suit speaking Oxford English. When I asked him questions he would answer them either very briefly or very literally, using either one or two words, using the kind of language he was familiar with: informative but impersonal. After a while, seeing my anger and nervous smile, he would just smile back, or rather answer my question with a smile fixed on his face. I guess we both knew that we were playing a game, one in which I was not setting the rules and where the winner was already known.

Being an actor in the field means going through a cultural process of learning the rules and norms described above. It means learning the symbolic codes that

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23 “First wave” was a local expression used among Poles for those who came to the Commission right after the enlargement. This expression was also used in conversations about earlier enlargements and their consequences for the EU administration.
govern the culturally stiff space of norms that is the political elite space of EU Brussels. It means a process of adapting to and disturbing the rules and norms, as well as internalizing them, often unconsciously, as our engagement with the field and self-definition as an ethnographer remain unquestioned there – in order to gather material that is as rich as possible. Once while conducting an interview during working hours in the Commission’s building at the beginning of my first research round, I approached and learned the boundary between “me” and “them” by, unintentionally, breaking the rules of acceptable language. During an interview, I asked one of the French Directors in DG SANCO about “intransparent decision procedures” referring to a book by Derk Jan Epping\(^\text{24}\) (Epping, 2007). I was almost thrown out of the office, with the Director saying: “Pawel! This is the level of Bild Zeitung” (my interviewee was French), but I do not know whether this was in reference to my question or to the book. I think I posed this question because I wanted to see how far I could go. However, in this case, the limit was set, and it took me a long time to calm the situation down. Only some of my interview partners allowed a critique of the Commission or the EU as a whole/as an idea, or of the social and cultural relations within EU institutions. As a rule, these were people who were more established within the bureaucratic apparatus (and in higher positions); however, they did not belong to the oldest generation I talked to. The Alte Garde (old guards/old school) – as one of my German interview partners called them – were people who had joined the Commission at the beginning of the seventies and were now on a pension or shortly due to retire – only indirectly showed a more differentiated picture of EU institutions. Nonetheless, almost all of my interviewees were aware of the consequences of every word they said, and thus were very careful (the distinction between higher and lower positions in the hierarchy usually corresponded with how visibly they would express their caution and self-awareness), although they often gave me the impression that their enthusiasm and identification with the “European Idea” (either in the moment of our conversation, or in stories about their early years at the Commission) and with their employer were sincere.

**Place Lux**

Walking down Rue du Luxembourg/Luxemburgstraat I reach Place Lux, where there are popular bars, cafés and restaurants. Once it gets warm in spring, on sunny

\(^{24}\) Derk Jan Epping, a former member of the Dutch Cabinet (of Commissioner Frederik Bolkestein for Internal Market and Services) in Romano Prodi’s Commission, published a sarcastic book under the title *Life of a European Mandarin: Inside the Commission*. The book was published in late 2007, so just after my arrival in Brussels. While very amusing, it casts the Commission’s administration in a rather negative light.
days tables are put out on the pavement. They are constantly occupied by mostly young people from the EU Parliament, the Commission or neighbouring offices. Every Thursday, no matter the weather, these bars are filled with young people (in their early twenties to late thirties) from the early afternoon on. It is a sign that at the EU Parliament the weekend has started – the MEPs have gone to their constituencies in the member states, and there are no meetings scheduled for Friday. The bars on the north side of the square (O’Farrels, Le Pullman and two others, there is one big bar on the south side, but it never gets as crowded as those on the north side) get filled mostly with MEP’s assistants and stagiaires working in EU institutions, but also with people working in NGOs and lobbies, and young EC/EP civil servants. In the warm months they sit outside, together with the tourists, in their smart outfits (jackets off) and with thick black sunglasses on their noses. Towards the evening, the crowd grows, and people stand outside with drinks in their hands while loud music blares from the speakers. Last time I was in Brussels in March 2011, the number of partygoers had grown significantly, so that tents, beer distributors and provisional bars, standing tables and heaters, were placed outside bars in order to service the crowd. Large amounts of expensive alcohol are consumed, and what was going on inside the bar reminded me of a party in a club rather than drinks after work. I was told by my friends working at the Parliament that some of the young civil servants and assistants of the MEPs would finish their work earlier on Thursday, go back home and change into suits or into an evening outfit just for the occasion of “Place Lux Thursdays” – to impress the people there. Some of these young EC/EP civil servants would still be wearing a badge (EU civil servant’s ID) as a sign of status. Badges from the Commission have more prestige than those from the Parliament, and in this context, those from the Commission are more rare. I was also told that people came here to find a job – buying drinks and trying to “sell” themselves, getting acquainted with someone who could possibly give them a job, exchanging cards. One of my friends

25 Exchanging business cards was a common habit in EU-space. I had my own with the Humboldt-Universität logo and would hand them out anytime I found it appropriate or someone offered me his/hers card. Once, relatively early in my research, I apparently upset the card exchanging rule in EU-space. I had an appointment for an interview with the person responsible for training at the Commission in DG ADMIN. The first thing he did was to hand me his card and I refused to take it, because I did not find it necessary and at this particular moment I did not have my own card to give in reciprocity. The person was very surprised and asked me whether I wouldn’t be looking for a job in an EU institution. When I replied that I was there to do research and was not considering working for the EU now or in the future, he placed a card in front of me and said: “You never know what the future will bring you”. In a sense, saying: take it, you might need it. He made the reciprocal rule of card giving in the EU-space visible, and through his
working at the Parliament told me that he/she had been often offered a drink or a beer by total strangers, who asked what he/she did. These people, as he/she would find out later, worked for lobbies. After a chat, one would offer him/her a card and expect to receive one, as a sign of acquaintance. My friend also told me that now, after knowing what might happen, he/she refuses to accept a beer or any kind of contact from people he/she does not know. These stories were told with some confusion and pity for people who wanted to find a job in EU institutions “so desperately” or who wanted to lobby even in a bar where people come to relax after work. In my field diary, I note:

I was about to go to Place Lux with [Polish woman], but she again backed out at the last moment. Typical. She knew that I want to go there due to my research and that I don’t want to go there alone. But I went there and hung around like Schluck Wasser in der Kurve [I used a German phrase in my field diary that means more or less to stand like a bump on a log]. I hate this place and these arrogant people. It’s not that they are arrogant in any specific or explicit way, but the way they look at you, the way they assess your outfit, your outlook, is just totally aggressive. And just because I am alone there they just make you feel like an idiot, like a loser, like someone who is out of this whole context (network?). They probably think that I’m ‘a beginner’, or do they think I came there to look for a job? I thought I would just puke on these guys at the bar – both the assholes who ordered and pushed me aside and the assholes behind the bar who served these guys probably just because they were ordering loads of expensive drinks and I, with my outfit, was assessed as being good for just one beer. What am I there for?!?! Why do I have to be put and put myself in such a position?

Place Lux on Thursdays has another social function – it is a place to flirt and a place to find a (usually heterosexual) hook up. What is interesting: the local gossip says that young women from NMS are particularly keen on guys from OMS working at the Commission, and there was a condescending undertone in these rumours told by some men from OMS and some women from NMS (those who were more experienced in EU-space).

In EU Brussels these “Place Lux Thursday” evenings and parties are labelled “attractive” and the “place to be” by young people who are relatively new in EU-space. Many times I was asked whether I would go to Place Lux on Thursday, hence whether I would be part of that event and society. And I must admit I could see excitement on people’s faces in these bars, probably because of the many languages spoken (although English and French were most common) and the international composition of the crowd, the alcohol flowing and the crowd of “fancy” people, who I found all to look more or less the same (boring). Somehow gesture and words reinforced his status that I somehow depreciated by refusing to take the card and saying that I did not want to work for the EU.
they all stood in small groups, knowing each other, probably from the Commission or the Parliament or some other workplace in EU-space. I suppose this is how they expected and imagined Europe – meeting people from all over the continent, trying out their language abilities and showing them to others, comparing their occupations and statuses, looking at each other and comparing outfits – thus, reinforcing and shaping their European (middle-class) identities. Place Lux is for young people working in EU-space a place to be, a place where one is seen and where one makes him/herself visible and important. They would also call it “networking”. I note in my field diary: “In my Berlin outfit: blue H&M jacket made of thin material, worn out jeans and sneakers, I visibly do not fit into the crowd; they still either wear suits and even evening dresses, very chic, women often with long, loose hair; hanging on the walls are flat screen pictures attacking me with Fashion TV”. However, there were also EU civil servants and MEP’s assistants who already found it “terrible” to attend these events. More experienced people in EU-space, who have lived in Brussels longer, would distance themselves from Place Lux Thursdays (unless they were single), citing the implicit sexual and freshman character of these parties as their reason. Or they would go to the less sexual and freshman in character (than Ralphs and LePullman) Irish pub O’Farrels on the corner of Place Lux and Av. De Treves/Trierstraat, were there was rarely a crowd and the public was more mixed in age. However, this “terrible” referred to the (hetero)sexual character of Place Lux Thursdays and had a distinctive meaning: we don’t go there, we don’t do it this way. The distinctive character of this statement was particularly clear when it came from women from NMS (as if they wanted to contradict the local gossip about “easy” NMS women), but also from OMS men – “I don’t belong to this group. I am no longer a freshman” was the implicit message when talking about Place Lux. Older EU civil servants, those in AD posts, found Place Lux either embarrassing (mortifying) (also because of the age of the people there) or did not have any clue what was going on there (unless they had grown up children living in Brussels).

While Place Lux in EU Brussels functions for some as a fancy place to go on Thursday nights (and a pleasant place to have a coffee during the day); there are various boundaries that cut through its social and symbolic space: these mark both those who feel privileged and those (including me) who do not (want to) feel privileged – both facts were visible in people’s outfits, the bars where they spent time, what people would say about Others, given the amount and type of alcohol consumed, and in their outfits and in the visibility of their “networks”, in short, in the way these spaces were produced (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 2007). The boundaries in Place Lux demonstrate a distinction in Bourdieu’s meaning and social strata. These were visible in both what people would say about sexualized bars vs. “nonsexual” pubs or disinterest of senior EU civil servants towards events
in Place Lux, and also in small differences in meaning assigned to places that were side by side (Why are there crowds in one bar/pub, while the one next door is empty or inside are different people?) and the people in them. These boundaries are visible between those inside EU institutions and those who are outside – with the latter identified as self-humiliating. It is a place where boundaries are produced between newcomers to EU Brussels and those who are more established, and also those who distance themselves from the ways of the young posh consumers at Place Lux. It is a place where the social application of attributes and forms of capital are visible (such as the badge), and where social statuses are compared and confirmed. These were based on e.g. age and experience in EU-space as natural status factors, but also on ways of spending free time (those at Place Lux vs. those who do not go there) and place of employment (EC vs. EP). Last but not least, it is a place where European identities are shaped, identities that are remarkably similar to those of the metropolitan white middle class. The space and its production reveal social and cultural divisions, and, as I will show more specifically below, it also reproduces these relations.

**Entering the EU Parliament**

The symbolic boundaries criss-crossing the EU District are also visible in the production of space surrounding Place Lux. Whereas Place Lux itself is a lively area surrounded by old Bruxelleois bourgeois houses, with cafés, bars and restaurants; it has a posh, play-area status (during the day it has the atmosphere of pulsating urban life; however, this is only during the week) for juniors in EU-space. Right in front of the Parliament there is a huge, stone-covered elongated space in the shadow of the enormous glass walls of the EU Parliament buildings. This is Lefebvre’s “conceived space”, which was initially designed by architects to symbolize Europe, but the “lived space”, the lived experience of this space is rather scarce here. It is always windy there, and even though there are benches along the walls, you rarely see anyone sitting on them. On warm days in the evening, kids from surrounding, rather poor parts of Ixelles/Elsene ride their skateboards or rollerblades. But the everyday picture shows people, often crouched because of the strong wind, crossing the space between Place Lux and the entrance to the EU Parliament as quickly as possible. Only when a group of school children, pupils or students is making noise or fooling about, is there more life in this space –

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26 The buildings of the EU Parliament are the Paul Henri Spaak building (which houses the debating chamber) and the Altiero Spinelli building. Their construction was finished in 1997. Their extensions along Rue de Treves and above the train tracks are buildings named Brandt (after Willi Brandt) and Antall (after Jozsef Antall), and were finished in 2008.
something that counters the usual impersonality, emptiness and *tristesse*. The size of the buildings and the vast stone area make people seem very small in contrast with vivid Place Lux. The EU Parliament buildings and their surroundings resemble the reality of an American downtown with the headquarters of big, global companies, rather than a parliament in a European capital. In front of the Altiero Spinelli building, at the front entrance to Place Lux, there are usually people either waiting for someone or smoking cigarettes, hunched on cold, windy and rainy days. Whereas the entrance from Place Lux is a big portico made of glass and metal, with steps leading to a pair of revolving doors under a huge arch above which often hangs a huge banner on current EU policy, in Rue Wierz/Wierzstraat the entrance is much smaller (this is the entrance for visitors) and placed under an arcade and a bridge joining two buildings of the EP: the Altiero Spinelli building and the Paul Henri Spaak building. On this side of the building, the lobby is decent; it has a light-coloured hall with a security check, reception and guards. The ceilings are much lower than in the lobby in the front, which has a clearly representative role. The latter is a vast space open to the roof, and as you walk in there are long, gently rising stairs covered with light carpet – it gives you the impression of openness, of breathing room. Standing at the front entrance, you can see deep into the building. However, it also communicates power. When you enter the building from this side, you have to walk through this open, light space (and climb stairs, even if they rise only slightly) in order to reach the area containing offices and a huge inner patio. This entrance, although “representative”, is inaccessible to mortals – you can use it only if you have a badge (though, as a visitor, you can walk out of the building here). Hence, the boundaries between Place Lux, the urban life and the Parliament building is marked by this stone, windy, empty space and the inaccessible entrance from the front. The way in for the public is from the back, with security guards, photos saved in a special database, and visitor’s IDs. *Demos* is detached from *cratos*, and one can see this in the design of this public space. Even if there are demonstrations in front of the EU Parliament in Brussels (its official seat is in Strassbourg), the majority of people would gather on Place Lux, practically in front of the train station, rather than in front of the Parliament building itself.

I have been to the EP building only twice, on both occasions visiting friends who worked there. It is certainly a space filled with symbolic meaning, whose production was conceptualized in the offices of architects and politicians. In the corridors and in the representative area there are displays of “gifts” from member states to the Parliament. The Polish gift is a copy of the painting of the Holy Mary from a sanctuary in Częstochowa, and many corridors have their own names, e.g. Sacharov, Churchill or Solidarność. On my first visit, I was given a tour around the building, from the top levels of which one has a wonderful view of Brussels. My companion and I went for lunch in the Parliament canteen. As a person from the
outside world, I actually was not allowed to be in the canteen during lunchtime. But my friend, as an insider, first tried to smuggle me through the side entrance, which was guarded by a security guard checking EPs’ badges, and when this did not work out, he/she asked his/her friend to lend me a badge. With this borrowed badge (with a picture of a woman on it!), I went in. After we ate lunch, we went to an area of the canteen where armchairs and coffee tables stand in order to have coffee. I was introduced to a Polish assistant of a Polish MEP. He asked me whether I was a (Polish) journalist, since if that was the case he would not talk to me, and actually would ask me to leave as I should not be in this place. When he learned that I was researching civil servants in EU institutions and particularly the power relations after the enlargement (this is what I told him) at a German university, he felt obliged to explain his behaviour to me and said that “those journalists” stick their noses everywhere and write unbelievable things about the life of EU civil servants in Brussels. He was defending “his” space against intruders and acted on his power, but he also made apparent that there are more legitimate intruders such as myself, a researcher with the symbolic capital of Humboldt-University, and less legitimate ones, such as Polish journalists. I encroached the social and physical boundaries and was about to be put back in place/order; however, my symbolic capital turned out to be of value in this particular place. I suppose the fact that I was accompanied by a non-Polish friend who had brought me into the Parliament also made a difference – my prestige was higher than if I had appeared there with a person from Poland. It was more difficult to intimidate me in front of someone who was a non-Pole and from an OMS. In that canteen, by coincidence, I also met an assistant of another Polish MEP, who I had been advised to contact by one of the Polish gatekeepers (a former high-ranking Polish official, who was now working in another EU institution). I talked with the assistant about arranging a meeting and having an interview with the MEP, but she gently but firmly refused to set up an appointment, and offered her own time and knowledge as an interview partner instead. At first I tried to persist with my attempt to meet the MEP, but after a while I ran out of arguments and realized that she was playing her role of gatekeeper very well.

Brussels is full of boundaries between the public and the political; the limits for those not involved in the decision-making process are carefully guarded, and the more closely you approach the areas where decisions are taken, the harder it is to access them. Likewise, the boundaries between the private and public in EU-space, as I will show below in more detail, are blurred, which points to the fact that this

27 Access to the canteen of the European Parliament is limited to holders of an EP badge (civil servant’s ID) in order to, allegedly, stop the flow of EU civil servants from other buildings and institutions who would literally take places and food intended for people working at the Parliament.
space and the limits within it are constantly being actively produced. Areas where (officially) political decisions are taken are physically and symbolically guarded, and during the whole of my research many of them remained out of my reach. Even though my research often generated curiosity and interest, and a kind of liking, it also evoked fear and uncertainty, most often among Poles in EU-space. On my second field trip in 2009, I tried to take part in weekly meetings in three Units of the Commission, in, respectively, DG RELEX, DG EAC, DG REGIO. I even had a letter of recommendation from the President of the EP Jerzy Buzek, but as it became apparent, this was not a sufficient argument for the HoU to let me into these meetings.

The centre: Rond-Point Schuman and surroundings

Within the European District, Rond-Point Schuman is a central point of power. It is here where Berlaymont stands (in Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200, called Berlaymonster by the British press) – the Commission’s headquarters where Commissioners hold their meetings (the internal expression for these meetings is the/le College) and their Cabinets have their offices (along with, inter alia, the offices of SJ, SG, DG COMM and DG HR). Across from Berlaymont is Justus Lipsius building, which, during the time of my research, housed the Secretariat of the Council and where meetings of member states’ ministers, committees and working groups, as well as the Council of the European Union, took place. Behind the huge Justus Lipsius building, which occupies a whole street quarter, in Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat stands the house of both Committees (Committee of the Regions and the Social and Economic Committee28), and further on, beyond Parc Léopold/Leopoldspark, there is the Espace Leopold/Leopoldruimte, with the buildings of the European Parliament, with the aforementioned Place du Luxembourg/Luxemburgplein in front of it. If one looks from Rond-Point Schuman/Schumanplein down the long and bright alley of Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat, on the right side behind Berlaymont stands the refurbished and modern Charlemagne building housing the prestigious DGs of the RELEX Family29 (during the time of my research there was no EEAS).

Berlaymont was built between 1963 and 1967, and from the beginning it was intended to house the Commission. In 1991, the Commission suddenly moved out because of asbestos leakage, and refurbishing works did not begin until 1996, when

28 Two advisory bodies to the EU Commission and to the Council established by the Treaty of Rome (1958) and the Treaty of Maastricht (Committee of the Regions) (1992).
29 The RELEX family were the DGs that, before the establishment of the EEAS, dealt with relations with third countries and comprised of: DG RELEX, DG TRADE, DG ELARG, DG DEV, DG AIDCO, ECHO.
a final agreement between the Belgian State and the Commission was reached. The Commission moved back into Berlaymont in May 2004 after hasty completion of construction works\textsuperscript{30}. Berlaymont is a 13 storey building that has the form of a four-arm star. Its façade is covered with intelligent glass blinds (that adjust their angle according to the sunlight – resulting in energy savings) and light beige gables that give the building a light appearance. It is slightly removed from the axis of Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat, and in comparison to the huge and heavy Justus Lipsius opposite, Berlaymont makes a decent and friendly impression. Unlike any other area around EU buildings in the European District, there is even a tiny lawn next to the building surrounded with vast spaces covered with stone. There is a permanent exhibition on the history of Berlaymont and on the EU on display on the Rue Archimède/Archimedesstraat (east) side. In contrast to the surroundings of other European Commission’s buildings, the Schuman area and Berlaymont, with their numerous pedestrians speaking virtually every EU language, and with small cafés and restaurants in old, typical Bruxelloise bourgeois houses (Rue Archimede/Archimedesstraat, Rue Franklin/Franklinstraat and Rue Stevin/Stevinsstraat with the famous Irish pub Kitty O’Shea’s) has more of a normal, vivid urban-space look and feel than the rest of the European District, which is rather pedestrian free. The entrance to Berlaymont is situated in the western wing. Next to the entrance, to the left, stands a row of masts with characteristic blue EU flags – something that is reproduced in almost every TV transmission on the EU Commission.

Behind the glass walls and glass sliding doors (often covered with banners advertising EU policies or programmes) leading to the lobby of Berlaymont, there is a high, spacious and light-filled reception hall that gives an impression of transparency and openness. Apart from the personnel at reception, and a few expectants sitting in black armchairs next to vast glass walls, the people here are in constant motion. This space is filled with the constant beeping of the security gate, the x-ray machine and the rumble of plastic boxes on rollers – a sound that you hear at airports. The light beige stone flooring and light wooden walls provide a background for the dark-coloured suits and skirts that dominate among people in this space.

Out of all the EU Commission’s buildings, Berlaymont stands out in size and its common area on the ground floor\textsuperscript{31}. Next to a vast reception area constantly crossed

\textsuperscript{30} In 2006, an environmental NGO revealed that on the 13th floor of Berlaymont, where the Commissioners meet, the construction material consists of uncertified timber from Indonesian rainforest.

\textsuperscript{31} A bit comparable in size and design is the lobby of Madou Tower, which reopened after refurbishment in 2006 as the seat – at least during the time of my research – of Commission DGs (EAC, DIGIT, COMM, IAS) and the Executive Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation.
by civil servants to and from the entrance, there is, beyond the security check, a
canteen for 900 people, a so-called press zone with two conference rooms and a so-
called “Spokesperson’s zone”. It is from here that most of the media coverage and
press conferences of spokespersons are broadcast. Commissioners appear at press
conferences only on special occasions. Along with the canteen, there is a cafeteria,
several major Belgian bank cash machines, and a pictorial guide of all the
Commission’s Presidents – from Walter Hallstein to Jose Manuel Barosso –
hanging in a hall. All of these spaces give the impression of openness, although this
does not mean they are all open. Sliding gates that one opens with a badge or
sliding glass doors mark restricted areas (though, one must remark, these are gates
and glass doors, not walls and full doors). The halls are bright, the interior in
general is full of light, as the roof in many parts is made of glass, but here and there
one comes across a barrier in the form of a gate. Within the overall ground floor
area, there are pictograms that inform you about the location of different facilities.
In general, this space reminds me of an airport: security checks, sliding glass doors
and gates, restricted areas, direction signs, people rushing in smart outfits and with
briefcases. There is even a kiosk with newspapers, magazines, postcards and the
international press (selling however only two daily newspapers from NMS). There
is a special entrance for the press, and along with a cafeteria and restaurant for
civil servants and visitors, there is a cafeteria with limited access, where only some
civil servants holding a special badge are admitted (I went there once with a
Member of a Cabinet). The entire ground floor of Berlaymont is clearly a
representative space, a space conceived rather than lived. Accept in cafeteria, rarely
does anyone sit on the numerous armchairs that are located beyond the security
check, where only civil servants and their visitors are allowed. Berlaymont is a
meeting place for the European Commission’s civil servants, particularly during
lunch in a local canteen, rather then for meetings with people from outside of EU
institutions, which take place in the surrounding restaurants, bars and cafés. Even
those from Charlemagne – a neighbouring building of the Commission that also has
a big canteen – come for lunch to Berlaymont. There is a whole lunch culture at EU
institutions, and whenever I mentioned that I was going for lunch to Berlaymont,
people from EU institutions were interested to know who I was meeting there.

On the ground floor in the centre of the building, at the point where the arms of
the star cross and behind glass doors that one opens with an EC civil servant’s
badge, there are eight smart elevators connecting levels from the garage to the top,
13th floor. To be able to reach level nine and above, one has to have a Cabinet
Member’s badge. The office space above the ninth floor looks different than that of
e.g. the SG located on lower levels. The difference is most visible in the wooden-
like panels and paintings hanging on walls, and the fact that the offices are not like

32 I was not able to see the press room because a special press accreditation is required.
cells with monocoloured grey panels on the walls, as on the lower levels. On the 13th floor of Berlaymont, there is a restaurant for Commissioners and senior bureaucrats for meetings on special occasions (its name is La Convivalite).

Opposite to Berlaymont, on the other side of Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat, stands the Justus Lipsius building housing – at the time of my research – the secretariat of the Council. Beside it, there is another building of the Council called “Europe” – currently under construction. I have only been once inside Justus Lipsius, and the EU civil servants sometimes called it “the pink granite fortress”. This local name reflects the accessibility of its venues both physically and politically. The Secretariat’s staff of around 2500 people is, compared to the political responsibilities and prerogatives of the Council, a rather small institution. Justus Lipsius is well known for its huge patio/hall, which one has to pass before entering the part of the building that houses the offices. It is in this hall that Czech artist David Cerny exhibited his installation “Entropa” at the beginning of the Czech Presidency in the EU Council (second half of 2009) – an installation that depicted stereotypical images of member states and caused many discussions in EU-space and around Europe in general. What was mostly discussed was the demand of the Bulgarian government to cover its image, which showed a squat toilet – in many parts of Europe called a “Turkish toilet”. However, the demand to veil it was mocked in EU-space, and the Bulgarians were deemed oversensitive and not able to understand irony (without a flair) – a clearly negative attribute in EU-space (on irony and cultural intimacy see Herzfeld, 2002; Herzfeld, 2004).

Right next to Berlaymont is the Charlemagne Building. The internal hierarchies within the Commission are often reflected in the spatial deployment of the buildings and in the interior design of particular DGs. Thus the building that houses the RELEX family is situated close to Rond-Point Schuman/Schumanplein. Charlemagne is now a modern building with a glass façade and dark-grey stone interior that has been profoundly refurbished. Similar to the Parliament building, it more closely resembles the headquarters of a big international company than a spacious and sometimes pompous modern government building – the one I know for example is in the Hague (where they are, on one hand, stately, and, on the other hand, communicate modernity through their (post)modern, progressive design). Here the space is marked by a conservative, though in no way outdated, design: dark stone and shining surfaces, lots of semi-reflective dark glass, spotlights and dark metal details – the interior and exterior demonstrate transparency, seriousness and power – it is modern but without extravagance; it can be compared to Berlin’s Auswärtiges Amt am Werderschen Markt, rather than with the Sony Center in Potsdamer Platz (the latter, in my opinion, has more similarities to government buildings in the nearby The Hague). In the foyer (which is bigger and higher than in most other EU buildings) and corridors, almost everybody is wearing a suit or skirt
and/or smart jackets in dark colours, and long, classic winter coats (I can sometimes spot an older German senior civil servant through his rather large posture, his loose, classic wool coat, often in olive green – reminiscent of a Bavarian Herrenmantel – or a long, wide overcoat with an indentation, and not one of those modern, slim-fit coats with buttons in the front or other additions). There are exceptions to this monochrome landscape, created by women with their neckerchiefs or more colourful outfits, but in general, the clothes worn here speak about authority and seriousness. Even the person at reception was wearing a suit and not a sweater with the security company’s logo, as is the case in other EC buildings (except Berlaymont). Once you have registered at reception, you have to go through security control like at an airport (because of the competencies of some of the DGs situated here and similar to neighbouring Berlaymont), and after the secretary picks you up, you are then catapulted, in a dark, stony and shiny elevator, to the proper floor of this three-wing, 15-storey building. I have been to this building many times, but I have also seen many offices of civil servants in other DGs. And there are differences, mostly linked with its place on the map of Brussels, the year of a given building’s construction, its interior design and the density of the offices rooms/people working there. For example, the office of a DDG in DG SANCO looks different from the office of a DDG in RELEX in Charlemagne. The former is smaller, has no view on Brussels, and is in an older building than the latter, which is spacious, lit with big windows with a view of Justus Lipsius house (the Council) and the EU Parliament. In the office of a DDG in RELEX, you see a couch, or at least armchairs, around a coffee table; in the office of a DDG in SANCO there is space only for a desk and a small meeting table. However, the rule that power is visible in space is not so obvious, as some DGs also have quite new buildings (e.g. a rather less prestigious DG Education and Culture in the newly-refurbished Madou Tower, where the offices of HoU or DDG are much bigger, lighter and more modern in comparison to those in older buildings). There are many different reasons for where a DG is placed: it is an effect of political bargaining, EC housing policy and negotiations with the Brussels government and Belgian government, as it hosts the Commission in Brussels.

While the Schuman area is the centre of the EU District (Justus Lipsius, Berlaymont, Charlemagne, restaurants and bars), where the saturation of white collars and the rush is visible to the naked eye; going several dozen meters down the Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat and passing by Charlemagne, on the right side one comes to the building of the DG AGRI (number 130), Directorate General of the Commission responsible for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and spending of 40 per cent of the EU budget. Though it is the one of the biggest DGs of the Commission (after the DG Translation) with the biggest budget and close to Brussels’ EU centre, its venue is a building from the eighties, with a grey,
unpolished stone façade and relatively small windows compared to the wide glass and polished stone surfaces of Berlaymont or Charlemagne. One of many entrances to the building, the one for visitors, is on its corner, under a low and stuffy arcade of this square-cut building. Its lobby from the eighties, with a low ceiling with heavy metal and enamel beige panels and dimmed, fluorescent light, creates a bit of an impression that time has stopped here. Only colourful banners, covering whole windows stuck to glass, which show fields, sheaves of straw and breeding animals and with a single inscription “Agriculture” reveal that we are not in the late eighties or early nineties. DG AGRI resides in two further buildings of a similar architecture and character. Once while I waited for an appointment in the lobby, I could see people coming in and out and moving around in the building. The support staff often passed by with carriage and paper, the corridors are narrow and the floor is covered with a well-trodden carpet.

Depending on the competencies of a given DG, in order to enter its offices, one would have to go through a security check. This was the case e.g. in Charlemagne, where DG TRADE, DG ELARG and DG RELEX’s (now EEAS) crisis task force was located. The same holds true for DG JLS in Rue Luxembourg/Luxemburgstraat (now DG Home and DG Justice) and Berlaymont. The Commission was constantly concerned about the so-called badge – a civil servant’s ID in the form of a plastic card with a magnetic stripe and photo, most often hanging on a blue band around the civil servant’s neck. One can open gates at the entrance to some modernized or refurbished buildings with this badge. Otherwise, one had to show it to the security guard. An EC civil servant is obliged to carry it in the Commission’s buildings during working hours, and it gives him/her entrance to most EC buildings. The EC badge, as mentioned earlier, was a status symbol in the EU District. Despite the Commission’s multiple warnings that it should not be on display while outside the Commission’s venues, some of its civil servants would wear it on the streets. A badge was often in a plastic seal and hanging on a blue key belt that often had the inscription or logo of a DG or, when in other colours, of the presidency (that revealed either the place of employment or the nationality of the holder, e.g. a civil servant from Ireland having a key belt of the Irish presidency to the Council). Some people would not wear a badge at all, and some of them, when leaving the office, would put it in the front pocket of their shirt, which still made them recognizable as the Commission’s civil servants. As described above, a badge had a clear status symbol among younger civil servants of the Commission during Thursday evenings at Place Lux.

Within the European District I distinguish three spatial axes of political power connected to the EU Commission; I see it, as did my informants, as the symbolically most prestigious actor within EU-space in Brussels. One of these axes runs from Schuman along both sides of Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat towards the West.
This is the area where, during the time of my research, the “heavy” Commission’s DGs were seated (DG TRADE, DG RELEX, and DG COMP). DG MARKT and DG TAXU) were placed in buildings in one of the short streets perpendicular to Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat, called Rue de Spa/Spastraat. Other prestigious DGs in EU-space, such as DG COMP, DG MARKT and DG TAXUD, were seated in Rue Joseph II/Jozef-II Straat, which runs parallel to Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat. The other axis runs from Schuman to the South-East, towards the venues of the EU Parliament, where DG ENER in Rue De Mot/De Motstraat and DG ENTR (now DG GROW) in Breydel house and in Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 100 were seated. The third axis is along Rue du Luxembourg/Luxemburgstraat, where at one end the Parliament is seated and along which DG HOME, DG JUST, DG TAXUD and on Square de Meeus/De Meeussquare other DGs are housed33. On these three axes and around them (around Schuman, Place du Luxembourg/Luxemburgplein or in their vicinity) most of the DGs of the Commission are seated as well as the core institutions and actors in EU-space (stakeholders and most PermReps). The political life of the EU takes place along those axes and in the EU District in general. The area is deserted in the evenings and during weekends, whereas weekday lunchtime is the only period when you see life on the streets of this district (apart from rushing cars). These axes and their surroundings (directly parallel or perpendicular streets) are the daily routes of EU civil servants. Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat and Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat, two main streets in the European District, are almost like highways, each with four lanes and speeding cars, incredible noise and air pollution. When you see people on these two streets, they are either lost, on their way to their office or heading to a meeting or business lunch towards Berlaymont or the DG Environment, where there are big canteens. There are usually few pedestrians in the European District in general, except in Place du Luxembourg/Luxemburgplein and Rue du Luxembourg/Luxemburgstraat, which connect the Trône/Troon metro station and the European Parliament or the Schuman area, where there are small, fast food bars and restaurants. On parallel and perpendicular streets along these axes, there are also bars and cafés, where EU civil servants have their lunches or where they fetch their takeaway sandwiches. Lunchtime causes sudden movement on the streets of the EU District, as people head to business meetings, and meetings with friends and acquaintances. I never took part in any of these business lunches, but I knew they were taking place usually somewhere within this area (people would talk about it). I saw my interviewees in bars and restaurants, but also while talking and walking on the streets in this area. Sometimes, from gestures and serious, concentrated faces, I

33 Some of the Commission’s DGs were seated outside the EU District in an office area called Geneve (in rue Geneve) and in the so-called Beaulieu (av. de Beaulieu) office area: e.g. DG ECFIN, DG ENV and now DG CLIMA.
could sense these were important conversations. There is a whole lunch culture within EU institutions, such as when you meet people from within EU institutions in order to exchange information (in higher level posts) or eat with your friends in your own language (in lower level posts). Thus, I single out these axes of power due not only to the institutional and political power involved, but also due to the character of the interactions taking place within and along these axes. Last but not least—these were the axes that I had to move along as an actor in the field, as an ethnographer following the life of EU civil servants and somehow, in the end, coproducing this EU-space.

In the centre of EU-space, in the Schuman area, there are numerous bars, cafés and restaurants that have a different status to those on Place Lux. One of them is La Fontaine, on the corner of Rue Archimede/Archimedesstraat and Rue Stevin/Stevinstraat. From its windows one can see the Berlaymont and observe the busy traffic on the corner of Rue Archimede/Archimedesstraat and Rue Stevin/Stevinstraat. Next to La Fontaine is the popular Irish pub Hairy Canary, and for reasons that I was not able to determine, Irish pubs in this area are very popular among EC civil servants. One of my interviewees from Ireland to each of my questions about her pastime activities would answer that she spends time at Kitty O’Shea’s—a another Irish pub in one of the side streets of Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat next to Berlaymont. However, these places are visited by different people than those on Place Lux. My Irish AST interviewee with lengthy experience in EU Brussels is only one example. It is the proximity to the Council (Justus Lipsius), Berlaymont, Charlemagne and other Commission DGs that is significant here and determines the level of prestige—people from these buildings would come to the abovementioned places for a drink or dinner after work. This is also the place where I interviewed a senior German civil servant working in the Secretariat of the Council and holding one of the top positions in its hierarchy. He has spent over 30 years in Brussels and gave the impression (in the conversation he was actually very keen on giving me this impression) that he knew every corner of both EU institutions and the city. We set up a meeting in La Fontaine during the lunch hour—at his suggestion. The place’s interior was a mixture of dark wood and shiny metal fittings. There were leather armchairs and leather upholstery on the chairs; there were dark wood tables and halogen lamps inside. This was not a worn out dark wood like that in the Irish pub on Place Lux, but new, polished, shiny hardwood. The waitress had a white, well-ironed apron, and as it was the lunch hour, there was cutlery on each table. I arrived to the meeting earlier, as I wanted to avoid the usual situation when I hurry and show up still engaged with the thought about whether I was late this time or not. And I must admit that I knew I could not

34 The name Kitty O’Shea’s made its way to a wider public after J.M. Barroso met there over a beer with charity musician Bob Geldof on March 18th, 2009.
be late – this was one of my gatekeepers and a person high up in the Council’s administrative hierarchy. I sat down at one of the tables by the window, and behind me two men in suits were sitting opposite each other. What drew my attention was that one was explaining something eagerly to the other with a serious face. The place, despite the lunch hour, was quite empty. I did not have a recorder, only my A4 notebook. Just a few minutes after I sat down at the table, not yet having managed to order anything, my interview partner arrived. He was a tall man in a graphite jacket, white shirt, black trousers and no tie. Apparently the waitress knew him, and greeted him in a friendly manner. I was a bit surprised: his outfit was not the newest or chicest. He was smiling and seemed relaxed: he sat at the table with his legs crossed on one side and his arms spread on the arms of the chair. Unlike one of the Polish Directors at the Commission (who was about the same age and same level) he asked me questions about exactly where I was from and how long I was going to stay in Brussels – he showed interest. I could see that he was relaxed, but I also sensed his habit of being the one to determine the topic of conversation, of how long he would speak and about what. He gave me dozens of tips about where to go and where Germans meet, whom to contact and how, what topics I could address. What he said about newcomers to the EU was rather negative, with condescending sympathy. He claimed that all enlargements brought more or less the same outcomes: the newcomers would underscore their uniqueness, want to create a revolution in the EU’s institutions, and claim that their functioning needed to be improved, but after some time this would end up achieving nothing – as allegedly was the case with the Scandinavians. He called it “newcomers’ syndrome”.

One other time, on the opposite side of the street, in another bar called Le Franklin I met one of the Polish junior AD civil servants in his early thirties. This place had a lively crowd that was a mixture of white, middle-aged (in their fifties and sixties) Bruxellois from the poorer side of St.Josse/St.Joost, spending time over a beer and playing darts. I was dressed in my jeans and a shirt, but without a jacket, and my interview partner was in a suit as he was coming directly from the office. I actually suggested we meet in Le Fontaine, but he convinced me (somewhat to my surprise) to meet in Le Franklin – a place I had never been before. Did he not dare to go to La Fontaine? Another time on the other end of Rue Franklin/Franklinstraat, at the back of Charlemagne building, I met a German senior civil servant from DG AGRI for an interview in the Old Hack Pub. This place’s interior was rather small and cozy with wooden tables squeezed next to each other and a small bar. It seemed that people met here for a beer and dinner after work. The customers were in their mid-forties and up, smartly dressed, laughing and chatting, they looked more serious than those youngsters at Place Lux, although it was clearly these were after-work meetings and they were relaxed.
In the area of Rond-Point Schuman these popular Irish pubs organize pub quizzes. I went to such a pub quiz several times, and it was obviously a form of after-work entertainment during the week (for civil servants or people working in EU-space). These usually took place on Tuesdays and, in the end, were a more sophisticated and calmer (one or two beers instead of drinks and/or heavy drinking in general) equivalent of Place Lux Thursday for more established (people more experienced in EU-space – this was my impression) and older civil servants. From the patrons’ outfits, I could see that some of the participants came straight from the office, some, such as my friends, went home to have dinner and then came out again to the European District (I once went to a pub quiz in Place Flagey/Flageyplein in Ixelles/Elsene) to one of these Irish pubs. I was told that there are people who constantly and regularly come to this or that pub quiz and teams, always comprised of the same people/friends, would take part. The composition of a team was crucial, as there were questions ranging from popular culture to maths and physics. In a pub quiz you have to show your knowledge and wit, but you can also compare it with others. Thus, this activity was a more sophisticated, cultivated and middle-class practice of status comparison than the one that took place in Place Lux. General knowledge (in German it is called Allgemeinbildung) on as many topics as possible was until recently an entry criteria into the EU civil service (checked during a concour). It is seen as valuable and is valued in EU-space. Thus, the more questions you can answer during a pub quiz, the higher your status. The competition was always strong and there was always a large number of teams (up to 15). English native speakers were valued as teammates because questions were read in sometimes incomprehensible Irish English. I was happy to join these pub quizzes, as I usually had nothing to do in the evenings during the week. My field diary notes, however:

This is such middle-class entertainment, when you have the opportunity to compare the knowledge and clarity of thought (in Polish inteligencja) of others. It is an occasion to compare statuses based on knowledge and skills that are exactly so precious in this environment. Plus you can always meet someone and talk in between – about life but often about work, as your teammates often work with you. Or you can show yourself as a good companion and a funny person – someone to be liked […]

The blurred lines between work and nonwork are visible again. Yet, there is a clear difference between such activity compared to Place Lux Thursdays, where it was more outlook, money and consumption that marked your status. Here belonging was marked by competition based on knowledge and skills, cleverness and reflex – virtues worshiped by the middle class (Willis, 1983).
But apart from these pubs, bars, lunch-bars and restaurants, the space around Schuman was produced by civil servants in their offices, in the offices of representatives of big industry either from within the EU or from third countries, and in the offices of the biggest PR agencies. These remained mostly unpenetrated by me.

The Schuman area has a more professional, more serious and representative status than Place Lux. It is here where senior and older civil servants, those more experienced in EU-space, would go out for a drink after work or for a (business) lunch. It is an area populated by civil servants who are more settled in Brussels, of people working in more prestigious DGs of the Commission, and simultaneously more relaxed and less inclined to show off their status through consumption. Through their more self-distanced outlook and relaxed body gestures, they emanated more experience and social grace than the young people in Place Lux (Bourdieu, 2010).

In EU-space the gradation of power is marked by the accessibility of different areas, both in terms of security measures and social accessibility. However, the areas of pastime, dwelling and work are closely connected, and the symbolical boundaries dividing them are very thin and often unclearly marked, as the Place Lux example shows. These spaces are produced by European Union civil servants joined by their common employer, though differences in hierarchy are visible in the architecture and design, though not particularly in spatial distances, as differences can be concentrated in a small physical space. Thus, the spaces where EU civil servants live and work are cross-cut by many different symbolic boundaries: a restaurant on one side of the street may have a completely different status to the one opposite, one bar might be crowded, whereas the one next door is either empty or occupied by a distinctive clientele. While the divisions within the European District generally reflect generational and formal hierarchical divisions, in the differences between place of residence, divisions in economical capital are visible that are often connected to origin (OMS/NMS) and, again, positions in the formal hierarchy. Despite these class divisions, which are similar to the differences described by Bourdieu between bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie (2010), EU-space is a space of the white, European middle class, sharing more or less similar values and lifestyles, where the NMS have the status of the petit bourgeoisie and live in less prestigious districts. Differences in the production of space were marked both by age and experience in EU-space, and by nationality, as a form of capital that was conjoined with one’s symbolic and material status – this last issue I will discuss in the chapter on the Euroclass.

In EU-space you do not see many people of colour in suits and skirt suits, but only dressed as service staff. Whites working in EU-space, one has the impression, are all certain about what “European values” are: tolerance, equality, human rights,
social liberal, rather than conservative liberal. EU-space is produced and lived separately from the local Belgian and Brussels context; EU civil servants spend their time in such places as Aspria and live in calm, sleepy suburban districts, sending their kids to European schools, commuting back and forth to the EU District and to the airport. Only rarely do they produce the social space of Brussels, usually only taking advantage of the infrastructure, of the high-culture settings (Opera in Bozar, museums), that the city has to offer and praising its connection to London, Amsterdam, Paris and the size of the Brussels Zavantem Airport and the number of connections it offers. They rarely engage in the political and local social life of the Bruxellois/es in ways other then consumption.

In EU-space there are divisions between young and old civil servants, between those with long years of experience in service (living in both Woluwes) and those who were inexperienced, both from old and new member states living in Ixelles/Elsene and Etterbeek. But as I will show below, EU-space is also produced in differences between OMS and NMS people, between those belonging to Euroclass and those who do not. These differences are particularly visible in the place of residence.

In EU-space places are marking class and mark one’s place in the local hierarchy (that is very often connected to formal hierarchy within the apparatus). Places to live and for use in the context of one’s everyday life, pastimes and professional life, construct bodies that are also placed in the hierarchy (conferences, brunches, lunches, cocktails, events, etc.). Places and bodies are connected in EU-space; they have to be congruent, similar to the division that Bourdieu describes:

In contrast to ‘bourgeois’ theatre, the opera or exhibitions (not to mention premieres and gala nights), which are the occasion or pretext for social ceremonies enabling a select audience to demonstrate and experience its membership of high society in obedience to the integrating and distinguishing rhythms of the ‘society’ calendar, the art museum admits anyone (who has the necessary cultural capital) at any moment, without any constraints as regards dress, thus providing none of the social gratifications associated with great ‘social’ occasions. (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 269)

This is the reason why some places were crowded in Place Lux and others empty, why for those dealing with EU external policies it is important to go to the GMF conference, and why some would rather go out in the Schuman area after work than around Place Lux. Thus, the inscribed social order is becoming visible in the spatial settings, in practices and bodies in particular places. Places are important insofar as they indicate your class, ambitions and place in networks, and how you manage these networks. Places shape bodies, the kind of bodies you see in these places.