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Title:

Brussels: Tracing the Agglomeration

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Abstract:

The paper explores Brussels and its past territorial makings while, at the same time, explaining the methodological implications of micro-empirical work. It draws on recent academic endeavours such as environmental history, political ecology and the Los Angeles School. It highlights the intricate power-relationships of actors and matters in the shaping of a city. But it has also a very clear connexion with the interactionnist Chicago School and the work of AMO, with the organic as well as the generic city, which, both, emphasise the thickness and undetermined character of social relationships, of urban patterns and of the more systemic workings of a city. The paper will thus show how empirical tracings, based on archival research, allow to unveil the macro and to discover, i.e. to follow step by step, the vectors of urban unity without using any theoretical or historical shortcuts.

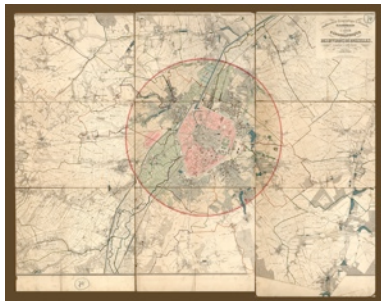
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Tracing the agglomeration

To agglomerate or why tracing matters

During the 19th Century, in Belgium and neighbouring countries, people and houses were said to be “agglomerated” (Zitouni, 2010, 58-60; see also Capizzi, forthcoming) if they clung to one another and were so closely knitted together as to make up urban texture or what was then called the city’s extensions. More particularly, in 1840, Brussels’ first extended frontier was traced on so-called “vacant” (id., 58) or non-agglomerated land, circumventing the cluttered houses and peoples. It crossed agricultural land and split scattered farms only and thus, as seen from the city’s perspective, it went through land containing none of the “worthwhile settlements” (ibid.). It didn’t cut across citizens’ gatherings and therefore protected their statutory unity as well as their cohesive internal peace: neighbours would receive equal treatment. Furthermore, being a perfect circle, the result of an arithmetic formula, the new frontier was bound to represent the general interest and could not be accused of partiality. Although one may criticise these biases today, one must also acknowledge that all these considerations - which were written by the road inspector who traced the frontier and which were approved by the Minister of Interior who ordered the frontier - were more than justified. Changing the quality of the land, belonging or not to the capital and its future, had far-reaching consequences.



Caption 1 : General alignment map of the outskirts (*Plan général d'alignement des faubourgs*) drawn by the road inspector Charles Vanderstraeten in 1840. Archives of the City of Brussels, Series Plan of Brussels (*Fond des Plans de Bruxelles*), n° 58 till 61.

First, the circle paved the way for municipal unity and the annexation of rural land. The neighbouring boroughs would share the city’s privileges, including duty-free sales, but also endorse the city’s huge debts. Indeed, in 1795, the French regime had financially weakened the City of Brussels by severing its ties to the hinterland. As is visually suggested on the map, the pink core was on its own, financially or otherwise; it was surrounded by independent rural municipalities. Only the urban duty, the octroi, was still levied on the goods entering the (pink) city. This leads us to the second consequence: by tracing the new frontier, the State - i.e. the inspector and the Minister - had found a way of extending the octroi’s reach. All goods entering the circle would be taxed; broadening the circle of consumption would increase income for the city. Finally, and this last con-

sequence is often overseen, the *way of developing the land* would change. Since 1836, agglomerated land was subjected to the principle of the general alignment maps. All throughout the country, lands of gathering people and cluttered houses had to provide the Minister with some articulate views on road development before they could build or change any of their roads. Of all three consequences, none but the last actually happened. Annexation was rejected by Parliament in 1854. The octroi was abolished in 1860. But the way of developing the land, by means of general alignments, was implemented. It qualified the insides of the circle. It changed the nature of the land. Agglomerated land had to plan ahead; its road pattern had to provide for further connections; and this says something about the nature of the modern city or, to be more precise, about the nature of the city-to-be. Let's look at this in more detail.

The difference between the insides and the outsides of the circle cannot be explained in terms of urbanity or rurality. Technically, constitutionally, all land that was located outside the pink core was rural and would remain so. The urban-rural divide had been set by the Constitution and unless the latter was amended, unless the boroughs were added to the legal list of cities, unless annexation was accepted in Parliament, no new frontier - whatever its impartiality - could bring about the urban status. In other words, legal urbanity was scarce. But so was physical urbanity! The agglomerated parts were not *that* clustered... In 1836, as we already know, a new territorial quality sneaked into the codes. The legislators added a few words to the Municipal Laws regarding road development and stated that not only cities but also “the agglomerated parts of rural land” (id., 30) were subjected to the principle of the general alignment maps. The Brussels' circle used these added words, created an inner territorial quality, by circumventing all so-called agglomerated parts. And it gets better. In 1844, a new law on urban roads strengthened the territorial quality by turning it into a more-than-physical, i.e. virtual and processual, characteristic. Agglomerated-ness became the tendency of the land or the quality of the city-to-be; it highlighted its verbal rather than its nounal character¹. According to the law, heightened road protection would be granted to cities or to the agglomerated parts which were “labeled as such” (id., 158), labeled as being agglomerate, by local and State authorities. No other physical quality than the labelling was required. The definition was purely performative. If no clustering was to be seen yet, it would surely come about! By 1846, the entire circle was thus labeled. Rural authorities all wanted more road protection, i.e. more demolition rights vis-à-vis illegal construction granted by the new road law, and therefore accepted to be linked to the city's future. The agglomeration was established and ready to grow.

To trace the makings of a city is to leaf through every single stage of the city's mutation without using - or at least trying not to use - historical and theoretical shortcuts. Such tracing allows for enhanced materialism or virtualised empiricism. The agglomeration was much more than the clustering of houses and people. The inner circle disclosed many more levels of reality which were at once more technical, influential, effective and power-related than any physical clustering

¹ The process of turning agglomerated-ness into mere tendency was started in 1844 and fully accomplished by 1874. Here, I've put the emphasis on the starting-point whereas in my book I've put the emphasis on the moment of accomplishment, tackled by the third chapter. 1874 will be talked about later on in the article.

might ever suggest. Tracing a city thus requires a sense of in-betweenness: the choice between legal or physical urbanity, rhetorical considerations or labelling practices, idealist or materialist interpretations, must be left aside in order to travel through all kinds of physicality, many levels of reality, going from the labelling of land to the tracing of frontiers, from the adding of a few words to the granting of protection. One must embrace categorical impurity and account for all actions which propel the city's transformation, whatever their expressive nature may be. Power to shape the city, then, becomes highly concatenated and often moves in slant ways; territorial qualities, then, take many unpredictable forms. For instance, rural municipalities established the future city *sideways*, aiming for demolition rights rather than for urban integration; agglomerated-ness could not be seen on the ground, yet it was effective as it established developmental ways which guaranteed an open and articulate road pattern and which involved auto-declared tendencies to future clustering. In other words, such tracings do not claim the return to basic empiricism or factual realism. Rather, they call for empirical accounts which are fuelled with ontological virtuality and nurtured with a lot of imaginative side-tracking so that new levels of reality, new kinds of in-betweenness, such as the developmental ways, may be disclosed.

At this point, little is known about the developmental ways. The article will set this straight as soon as two additional remarks are made. First, in order to disclose a new level of reality, the empirical case must be granted a high degree of otherness. The case has its own logics; its mysteries should not be fathomed too quickly; it fares best by literal transcriptions first. For proof, the pictures below show the agglomerated land as it was labeled by local authorities and accepted by the State from the 1840's till the turn of the Century. There's hardly any houses to be seen, not to speak of clusters! One could be tempted to conclude that there's been a setup, a lie, a scam or, at best, some elegant sophistry on the part of the authorities. Labelling might be defined as mere legal varnishing. But let's not forget that one's own cosmos is not the measure of all things². Taking *that* into account, one can take another stance and accept the enigma of the pictures: they say it's agglomerated but to us it looks like it isn't... Bit by bit, the empirical tracings will then unfold the composite nature of 19th-Century agglomerates. They will grasp urban physicality in its virtual, in-between, stages. Moving from these enigmatic pictures to the Brussels' circle, from Belgian laws to municipal discussions, the analysis then shows how a rather common word - the agglomerate - crossed over with legal dispositions and helped qualifying an unusual, proto-urban, territory around Brussels. The point, then, is this: empirical tracings must be wary of ethnocentricity and ana-chronicity. They must go by the principle of cosmic incommensurability if they want to show any new level of reality at all.

² On the incommensurability of worlds or what I've called cosmoeses - drawing on the French "univers" - see Bruno Latour 1993 (more particularly the part on "Irreductions") and Bruno Latour 2005 (more particularly the first two "Sources of uncertainty"). More generally, see Bruno Latour & Emilie Hermant 1998, and how their partial accounts or "plans" connect incommensurable worlds that, all together, through variegated concatenations, make the city of Paris. See also my review of their work written in 2004. All are listed in the paper's references.



Caption 2: Details of Overall Map of Anderlecht Municipality (*Plan d'ensemble d'Anderlecht*), annexed to Municipal Council's meeting of 28 December 1905, on the application of the road law of 1844 and its light amendment in 1897. Source: State Archives in Brussels, Series of the Provincial Government of Brabant, Department 12, File 53, *Implementation of the law of 1st February 1844, 1864-'65, 1905-'06*.

Second, the disclosed level of reality is not a mere discovery of facts. It is not the import, into our own epochal cosmos, of a then-existing or elsewhere-residing reality which had been forgotten or simply ignored. To put it more plainly: none of the actors themselves talked of “developmental ways”! Of course, they strategised, codified, virtualised, invented and labeled, and they were very well aware of creating a new territory at the time. But the two words are of my own making. They are the bifocals of the empirical tracings. They belong to the shared lenses of case and researcher, induced by the former, framed by the latter in order to strengthen, yet again, the inner cohesion of all empirical detail while nurturing today’s epochal cosmos. Such sharing is essential to the tracings’ accomplishment. For a start, it is important to acknowledge our share in the disclosed reality for otherwise we cannot be made accountable for it. Indeed, it is our responsibility to find a focus, a sense-giver, which makes the case’s tale intelligent and full of new articulations, i.e. new possibilities for local action today. Then again, we should do so without adding grand words too easily or too gratuitously. For theory and grand interpretation kill the articulations. For instance, had the facts been called by their Aristotelian or by their Marxist names, had they been interpreted to be instances of territorial entelechy or signs of pervasive class struggles, these facts would never have been able to reveal how labelling practices outwitted constitutional divides, how territorial unity prevailed although annexation failed, how the urban extension was connected to the granting of demolition rights, and so on and so forth. The actual agency outstrips theory. So, to sum up, rather than hiding behind the actors themselves or sheltering inside ready-made explanations, empirical tracings offer a chance to experiment with minimal sense-givers or unexpected focuses so as to unfold new composite natures.

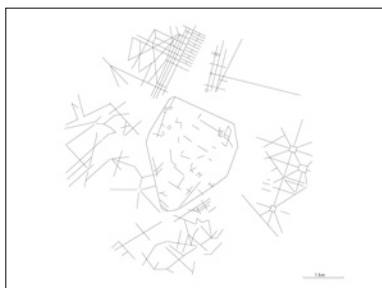
Dotted lines or the locus of description

Let's take a closer look at the labelling pictures above: their visual detail furthers the analysis of 19th-Century agglomerates and, henceforth, of coeval developmental ways. Indeed, the zoom shows the outskirts of Brussels and what is now known to be the capital's Western limit. It thus strengthens the idea of urban unity being created by performative labelling practices. And labelling it is! Notice how all houses - little black blocks - are emphatically redrawn. Apparently, in the absence of actual clustering, the initial presences had to be proven and flagged. Even for future territorial tendencies, such drawing seemed required. In other words, the tagged blocks backed up the red tainting or, inversely, future urbanity leaned on those few scattered houses. Moreover, as we already know, the red land is no marker for municipal annexation and no promise for future constitutional change, but neither is it just red or mere wishful heralding. Rather, it has a thick compo-
sure involving the few added words and the Municipal Code of 1836, the capital's extension and the reasoning behind the circle of 1840, the agglomerate's performative definition and the labelling introduced by the road law of 1844, the ensuing declarations of clustering tendencies, the increased demolition rights and all further labelling which occurred in Brussels' vicinity till the turn of the Century. The red taint brings those wider entanglements upon the land; it ushers the rural boroughs into the legal and tactical cobweb of Brussels' future. Having stated this, acknowledging the thickness, the city's extension could then be told as one long labelling tale. That is, if the next step, from labelling to building, from few to many houses, were seen to be a short and automatic one... But there's nothing of the sort. Empirical tracings accept little brevity and automaticity. Instead, we'll have to plunge deeper into the case's cosmos; we'll have to reach out for a new layer of articulations which lies folded in the enigmatic 19th-Century agglomerates.

In the epochal eyes of the Minister's officer who drew the blocks, the land was more than red. Technically, visually, the houses were set upon a surface which was streaked with dotted lines and which could be seen on other maps traveling through those same officers' hands. This calls for some positional accuracy. The officer worked in Department 12 or what I call the locus of description, i.e. the position or the coordinates from which this tale of the agglomerates is told. Indeed, looking for traces of the circle's implementation, rummaging through local archives, I soon came across the Governor's documents or more precisely the past records of Department B, afterwards called Department 12, created in 1828 and disbanded in 1972. The Governor was appointed by the Minister in order to protect national prerogatives at the provincial level, in this case at the Provincial Administration of Brabant. Department 12 was part of this Administration and looked after roads. It checked the tracing and opening of new roads, the adjustment and transformation of old ones, the replacement of unfitted ones and the suppression of dead-end streets, as well as the adequacy of squares, roundabouts, corners and so on. It had its likes in the other Belgian provinces and, together, they were in charge of roads in a relatively small portion of the country: the urban municipalities and the exceptional zones such as the agglomerated parts of the rural land or the inspected areas - we'll come back to those - or, later on, after the First World War, the areas of re-

construction. This is to say that the Governor's archive is an excellent locus of description for it is narrow and focused, it is procedural thus compulsory, and it is set at the heart of the urbanisation process. In Department 12, centimetres and metres were discussed, curbs and lay-outs were decided upon, and all these physical makings left traces in the office's paper-trail.

Letters, proceedings, decrees, laws, maps and technical requirements ran back and forth between Ministers, Governors, civil servants, inspectors, mayors and landowners, so as to allow road improvement in the capital's immediate surroundings. They reveal that the Brussels' circle was initially objected to. Mayors and landowners did not dispute the circle's reach, nor did they claim any outsider's position, but they blamed the frontier for implementing new developmental ways. They attacked the Minister and the inspector for fixing the logics of road connectivity - and thus of land lotting - once and for all. *De facto*, a closer look at the circle's map unveils the presence of very subtle dotted lines, as shown below. The entire circle was dotted and would remain so for decades to come. According to the road inspector, though, these dotted lines had "no material analogy whatsoever" (id., 64) with plain lines or with existing or planned-for entities. They did not have to be built but rather defined a minimal road economy and purely functional pattern. What's more, said the Minister and the Governor, the dotted lines made do with a rather simple and passive rule of ubiquity. The State was playing with the idea that development could and would leap from any place within the circle and that urban growth would evolve along scattered impulses rather than in a concentric manner. That is why it wanted to provide every single spot of the circle with some preliminary growth instructions. The dots would be dormant, latent, waiting for some building initiative to be activated. They would guide the initiative and offer it a sense of overall orientation without impeding its freedom. In other words, the gridlock's constraint would be restricted. The new developmental ways would support liberal fashion. It didn't take long for mayors and landowners alike to realise that the dotted lines were propitious to them. Around Brussels, circumstantial speculation soon gave way to prospective and State-supported speculation.



Caption 3 : Drawing of the dotted lines which figure on the General Alignment Map of 1840 (see Caption 1). Source: Benedikte Zitouni, *Agglomérer. Une anatomie de l'extension bruxelloise (1828-1915)*, Bruxelles, Academic and Scientific Press & VUBPress, 2010, p. 66. Image produced by Tristan Boniver.



Caption 4 : Three zooms of General Alignment Map of 1840 and its dotted lines. Source: Benedikte Zitouni, *Agglomérer. Une anatomie de l'extension bruxelloise (1828-1915)*, Bruxelles, Academic and Scientific Press & VUBPress, 2010, pp. 142-144.

Dotted lines are part of 19th-Century agglomerates. They should not be interpreted as early instances of town-planning: none of the neighbourhoods were built as predicted by the dots; extension maps had none of the powers which were later granted to development maps; or, stated differently, dotted planning was more deliberative and flexible than modern planning would ever be, albeit in limited circles. Instead, the dotted lines should be understood to be the result of a local territorial experiment. They responded to a delicate and typically Belgian situation where, constitutionally, municipalities had all planning and building prerogatives: local authorities were not subjected to State's rule and could afford to offer but very vague considerations on future road development. The State *had* to be astute! And this is what happened. Along the meanders of collective technocratic invention, inside the Minister's offices, the plain tool of road alignment was slowly diverted from its usual role in order to establish overall coordination in rural land. Dotted lines or

“general alignments” no longer fixed the streets, as road alignments used to do, but determined the ways in which the capital would expand. Civil servants, then, learned the acrobatic art of future-making. First, they learned to prepare each initiative, each point of the circle, to face many possible futures at once. They learned to assess growth several plots and some distance ahead, on every side, so as to define open-ended adjustments for houses which were built. Furthermore, they learned to distinguish between two kinds of future. On the one hand, in a single street or neighbourhood, future was self-fulfilling; it needed each landlord to act according to a given aim and it required from civil servants that they go and negotiate on the ground. On the other hand, when planning parks or racecourses for instance, civil servants faced a transcendent future, one that was imposed by the passage of time, one that required them to get ahead of the bourgeoisie’s mood, to gauge collective trends and to probe nascent behaviour.

Last but not least, civil servants learned to spot houses which turned their back on the future. These houses were isolated, surrounded by private land and distanced from the road, in no way involved with future clustering. Conversely, there were houses that were just as isolated but geared towards the future: adjacent to roads, they had party walls, reinforced foundations, levelled grounds and other features which allowed future investors to build alongside them. Civil servants recommended such adjustments and looked for them. Most likely, on the maps shown above, the blocks were cluster-friendly. By all means, to agglomerate had become a highly technical matter. It involved both dots and blocks. It meant enabling each point of the circle to trigger new extensions and it meant the seriality of construction by means of material adjustments. Morally, technically, then, to agglomerate meant to favour the urbanisation process. Anyone who did not want to partake in the collective endeavour - be he Liberal or Catholic, bourgeois or noble (proletarians and farmers did not even enter the picture) - was disqualified as representing mere individual interests or, at best, passé nostalgia. Division and blindness were part of the agglomerate’s composite nature. They were defined by its internal logics. Or, to put it differently, the agglomerate’s morality was a self-expressive and purposeful one: principles of good and bad behaviour proceeded from minimal growth codes and serial adjustments; defining adverse or cooperative houses was needed in order to tag cluster-friendly territory in rather empty land. It all holds together. Legal bindings and labelling mechanics, outwitted constitutions and subdued municipalities, strengthened demolition rights and overall orientation patterns, reinforced foundations and self-fulfilling futures, passive ubiquity and active seriality, all these empirical ingredients make up the 19th-Century agglomerate’s enfolded nature.

But why bring it on today? Does the agglomerate’s complexity make it necessarily interesting? Moreover, has all been said about its composite nature when the links between various kinds of physicality have been established? Not as yet. In their final stages, by gaining precision and diving still deeper into the paper-trail, the empirical tracings disclose what’s driving the agglomerate. Reaching their utmost degree of detailed particularity, they reveal the stakes of 19th-Century territoriality and show why the latter might matter to our own epochal cosmos today. This seems para-

doxical - general meanings surging from excessive zooming - but it isn't if one considers that articulations, not contents, nor zeitgeist, hold the possibility for power and for action, then and now. Being articulate, discovering their and fostering our articulateness, requires further zooming. So far, we've identified a paper-trail which, incidentally, is quite a common basis for empirical tracings. For paper transactions are characteristic of modern society; they rise as soon as collective actions are taken; they abound when procedures are involved, as is the case in this and many territorial endeavours (Gardey, 2008). Following such a trail involves reading general alignment maps as well as parliamentary debates; analysing accounts of ground-levelling as well as reflections on self-fulfilling prophecies; deciphering coded controversies as well as constitutional hierarchies. Hence, positing the locus of description means delving the social density of collective action, where no academic speciality is sovereign, and it means accepting the action's hybrid as well as its self-expressive and thus *partial* character. Indeed, Department 12 handled one territorial layer only, that of the agglomeration. It was oblivious to most experiences of its time, social and other, and aimed one target only: to gather houses and streets in an orderly manner. Its blindness doesn't disappear by adding historical context to it but, rather, must be traded with sharpened sightedness. The paper-trail reveals what it means to produce future-gear urban fabric. It tells more about State surveillance and it offers articulations, for present-day considerations, on rescaled city-making.

Gripping territoriality or the strategic tale

On the ground, Department 12 accomplished innumerable changes. Besides serialising houses, aligning façades and levelling land-lots, it connected various existing lanes and growing clusters; it straightened and widened old routes; it shifted planned-for streets and bent the outlines; it allotted pavement-stones and defined various cuts; it rounded corners and sized up sidewalks; it hardened paths and curbed brooks; but to name a few of its typical files, transporting detailed and circumstantial changes to the ground. In other words, the agglomeration was made by ad hoc adjustment and local negotiation. Rather than building on tabula rasa, the Department reshaped the landscape step by step. It detected any physical change that was intended on the ground and tuned it up, curbed the landowner's and municipality's project, in order to guarantee traffic fluidity and further investment. Indeed, State's requirements were no other, no bigger, no smaller, than fluidity and profitability. State surveillance was established by a single operator, Department 12, which served these requirements, which took care of road files until approved by Royal Decree and which therefore acted as a compulsory point of transit for the entire procedural trail. That is how the State controlled the expansion of its capital: by gripping it. Let's dissect this further.

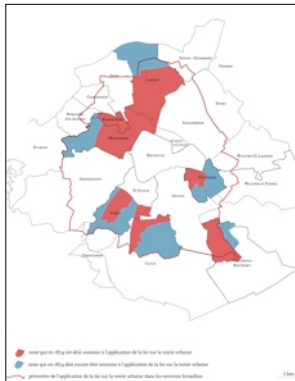
All road files came from municipalities who, because they were urban or set in exceptional zones, could not apply directly for a Decree and had to pass through the Governor's office before reaching other levels of executive power. Establishing that single difference, between passing or not passing through the office, allowed the State - i.e. the Ministry of interior sided by the Governor,

his civil servants and the road inspector - to turn the construction sites to its advantage. The State gripped the urbanisation process by squeezing into a procedure from which it had first, constitutionally, been excluded. For as long as the Ministry stayed at one end of the line, where local initiatives were either approved or rejected by Decree, little room was left for adjustment and negotiation. However, as soon as the two ministerial appointees - i.e. the Governor and the inspector - entered the game, right in the middle of the procedural trail, correspondence could start running back to the municipalities and landowners, back and forth, forth and back, carrying suggestions until the State's desires were met. Only then did the files reach the Ministry for final approval. And there's more: this interlocking points towards the road inspector and makes us wonder. What exactly was *his* role? How did *he* enter the constellation ?

Like all other protagonists, the inspector appeared sideways. He was appointed by the Minister in 1837 in order to replace a commission of 1828 meant to inspect the orderliness of buildings in the capital's surroundings. Rumour had it that, this time, unlike 1828, an inspection-zone was given to the new appointee, but it took several years before such a zone was officially established. In 1844, when the law on county commissioners - i.e. Governors' aides in rural affairs - was passed, the Minister saw fit to include the inspector as a special kind of commissioner, one who would look after roads around Brussels, in a radius of 3.000 metres off the City Hall. The circle of 1840 had that exact same measure. So, in fact, it had paved the way for the inspection-zone and, vice versa, from now on, it was inspected as well as dotted. The Minister's move had three other clever consequences. It bound the inspector to the road law which was passed that same year and included him in legal issues concerning demolition rights. It related the inspector to the Governor and joined their forces. Last but not least, it charged the inspector with commissioner's field duties, i.e. rural surveillance trips and regular face to face contact with municipal authorities. Henceforth, the road inspector became the State's ground-link. Or more exactly, his office did.

The road-inspection office of Brussels' vicinity, as it was called, flanked Department 12. Both were, generically speaking, as defined by their tutors, Governor's or Minister's offices. They accomplished the adjustments and negotiations which fuelled the agglomeration. They did all the work that has been mentioned so far, from red-tainting the land to allotting pavement-stones, from distinguishing futures to spotting the adverse landowners, from discussing curbs to recommending party-walls. Furthermore, under their impulse, for traffic's sake, a tremendous lot of digging and filling went on around Brussels: tons of ramble were imported, hills were streamlined and main axes were flattened. In order to enhance investment, so as not to obstruct further changes, extensible sewers were defined, reversible stairs were added to doorsteps, ground-floors were elevated or, in a nutshell, urban fabric was made to be open-ended. The offices' impact was huge: they touched up and opened up the entire outskirts of Brussels. They succeeded at gradually transforming the micro level at a very large scale. Aligned façades and crooked leftovers, waiting party-walls and elevated window-sills, flat boulevards and steep traverses, all still witness of their action today. More than the Ministry and its motives, *they* were the drive of the agglomeration. Brussels was moulded

by civil servants' inventiveness and hankering. In other words, there's appetite in this tale.



Caption 5 : Reconstruction of the labeling map & agglomeration's perimeter drawn by the road inspector Victor Besme in 1874. Source: Benedikte Zitouni, *Agglomérer. Une anatomie de l'extension bruxelloise (1828-1915)*, Bruxelles, Acad and Scientific Press & VUBPress, 2010, p. 153. Image produced by Tristan Boniver.



Caption 6 : Comparison between perimeters drawn by road inspection and/or Department 12 during the 19th Century and current city-limits of Brussels. Source: Benedikte Zitouni, *Agglomérer. Une anatomie de l'extension bruxelloise (1828-1915)*, Bruxelles, Academic and Scientific Press & VUBPress, 2010, p. 187. Image produced by Tristan Boniver.

Motives are nothing compared to the sudden surge of self-satisfaction which reveals, retroactively, even for the protagonists themselves, what might have been driving them from the start. Such a moment occurred in 1874, when the Agglomeration received its perimeter. It happened rather discreetly, if not secretly. One by one, the municipalities accepted a labelling proposal made by the State without clearly being told that a unified perimeter was at stake. Any such metropolitan unity would have worried them but here, they merely added agglomerated land (blue) to the already agglomerated land (red), increasing their demolition rights in exchange for passing through the Governor's offices. Some even went on to ask for more labelling (blue beyond perimeter); at other places, too little land was included (perimeter inside red); or maybe these discrepancies are due to the archival montage. Indeed, no trace is left of the perimeter except for partial recalls on seven out of the twelve municipal labelling maps which were then treated by the offices and which are here used to piece together the first image. The second image, then, shows that of all perimeters drawn by the offices, the Agglomeration's resembles today's city-limits most. No wonder the civil

servants were satisfied! After many years of experimentation, cunningly, deceptively, they succeeded in unifying the developmental ways around Brussels. 1874 marked their point of no return.

Today's Brussels Region might well have a forerunner which took its unity from matching growth-manners rather than from establishing municipal annexation or governmental takeover or, for that matter, rather than surging from some spontaneous cluttering of houses. The agglomeration came through slow techno-legal crafting of agglomerates and their assemblage following principles of ubiquity and seriality. It was meant to enhance orderliness, precondition growth, and revolved around a narrow set of stakes, i.e. construction and demolition rights. Thus, 19th-Century territoriality might teach us to cherish the manners of city-making, the manifold ways of unifying, the powers of techno-legal tooling, and it might make us reconsider territorial narrowness. Each territorial layer is thin, delicate, with its moments of glory and downfall, its ways of becoming and unifying, but it is too often subsumed in a rather vague genealogy of cities. What of territorial makings driven by water vaulting? What of those triggered by public health inquiries? Both are contemporaneous to the agglomeration and we therefore tend to say that, like a rabbit from a magician's hood, the city sprang from them all at once. But it's a mistake. Such mingling hides the fact that, ultimately, each territory evolves according to its own stakes. More even, such vagueness throws particulars like the 1874 perimeter or the craft of agglomeration, into oblivion. It leaves us bereaved and gives us very little to consider when building our own city-futures today.

Empirical tracings are the social sciences' or urban studies' tool of disentanglement and, henceforth, of *pluri-versing* or of reenacting the multiplicity of worlds. There cannot be many if they are all-encompassing, such is the credo. In order to acknowledge the multiplicity of unifiers and the variety of city-makings, we must acknowledge the narrowness and blindness of each one of them. The tracings allow us to do just that. They make discoveries, unveil the offices' labour and the unified perimeter, because they grab one layer of collective agency only and follow the actions closely, systematically, until the patterns appear, until the motive of orderliness, the requirements of fluidity and profitability, the drives of civil servant's hankering and technocratic experimenting, become clear. By zooming in, they refrain from telling all tales at once and from saying what we, vaguely, already know. Instead, they reveal a city that is unified by its developmental ways, that fosters negotiation and local involvement, that runs on inflexions and gradual collective changes, that likes pretence and material-virtual cogitation, that plays with time-frames and does not crave for total instant planning yet. It is a city that calls upon our own inventiveness. Circle of ubiquity, virtual dotted lines, open-ended fabrics, they might show us how, technically, legally, experimentally, tentatively, doorstep by doorstep, street by street, a city can be reclaimed.

It is one thing to acknowledge that the grip excluded workers and farmers. It's another to therefore cross out the mere possibility of techno-legal ingenuity, to ignore the material-virtual powers of procedure, and to start from scratch as if no other territorial makings could be learned from. This is the tale of a gripping territoriality that ran on hankering. It shows collective agency and its unpredictable or bigger-than-intentional quality. The civil servants begot a reality of which

they, themselves, did not know the name and which can be called the craft of agglomerating but which I've chosen to call the begetting of developmental ways. No transcendence, no simplicity either. Empirical tracings follow minimal sense-givers in order not to jump to conclusions, not to take theoretical or historical shortcuts, but they also follow them in order not to foreclose complexity. The tale must be full of echos, feedbacks, retro-actions, back-fires, repercussions, mediations, slips, lapses, clever consequences and multiple bindings, if it wants to account for the concatenation of collective agency. In crowds and constellations, nothing comes straight. The effects and impacts, the intentions and causes, move along tangles. All is cogs and wheels, especially when city-making and gridlocks are concerned. Or stated differently: our take on our city today, in the midst of thick actuality, needs strategical tales, full of articulations and experimental holds.

Some theoretical considerations

Empirical tracings reconfigure the social sciences' theoretical scene. They establish a live-box of inspiration, emulation and affiliation which potentially includes all theoretical branches or analytical projects caring about enfoldment, rescaling and appetite. To name just those which instilled this particular tale on the agglomeration, they are: Actor-Network-Theory or sociology of translation emphasising mediated action and the incommensurability of worlds (Latour, 2005; Houdart and Thiery, ed., 2011); French philosophy stressing the connections between knowledge and power as well as the role played by desire (Deleuze and Parnet, 2000; Foucault, 2003); the Chicago School highlighting the thickness of social texture and the performance of internal coding (Park, 1963; Park et al, ed., 1967); Marxist analysis pointing at land mutation, value-triggering transactions and the deceptive nature of bourgeois State (Topalov, 1987; Smith, 1996); the Harvard Project insisting on aggregate patterns and the actual workings of cities (Koolhaas et al., ed., 2000; Koolhaas and Cleijne, 2007); the Los Angeles School bringing thematic cuts and territorial prisms into co-existence (Soja and Scott, ed., 1986; Davis, 1990); environmental historians and their eye for virtual beginnings (Cronon, 1990; White, 1995); political ecologists and the unveiling of power-enmeshed networks (Swyngedouw, 2004; Graham and Marvin, 2001);... All are crucial to this tale.

The list might seem random, eclectic, solely defined by my researcher's trajectory. But let's not downplay the connexions. Such trajectory is more like a quest having its own dynamics and crossings which, for conclusion's sake, tryingly, will be generalised here. As just stated, there's a pretty good chance that most inspirational sources of the empirical tracings are connected by three claims: claims of enfoldment, rescaling and desire. Enfoldment is perhaps the most unusual one, at least in urban studies. It is inspired by Gottfried Leibniz and Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze, 2005) and is perhaps best visualised by Patrick Geddes' "thinking machines" (le Maire, 2009). These were meant to trigger reflexion along the gradually more complex and more detailed folds of a schematic piece of paper: starting with general notions such as city and nature, culture and labour, the subsequent traversing folds brought more specific notions such as landscape, agricultural terraces or urban lots, and got more meaningful as folding went on. The paper tool followed the mind's move-

ment, from vague grappling to clear-cut holding, in order to analyses urban surroundings and their embedded experiences. Thus, enfoldment means the virtues of increasing precision as well as ever lurking and relative complexity.

The second claim is more well-known. Walter Benjamin made it quite clear in his call for concreteness, wanting to make historical materialism more tangible through empirical, photographic and poetical accounts, rather than structuralist ones (Benjamin, 1990; Benjamin, 2000). According to him, facts were like crystals beholding global determinism, material detail showed capitalism at work. Of course, capitalism was a spectre, haunting, exceeding all, but it had to be analysed on the ground-level, in its locus of effectuation and impact. In other words, rescaling means letting go of big versus small-thinking, of material versus virtual-thinking, and offers a more horizontal relief where determination and effectuation, as opposed to disinterest and passivity, matter most. Rather than asking what's big or small, what's real or not, one must ask through which connexions do the spectres arise, exactly? In other words, empirical tracings cut across social sciences' classic inheritance, such as Marxism or critical theory, and gathers works along new lines of affinities. To sum up, in the empirical tracings' live-box, one may find accounts and analyses which move along an explanatory curve of increasing precision and which cherish factual concreteness. Not for the love of fussing but for the love of possible action and thus reclaiming.

Last, there's the appetite or the matter of desire. That claim is easily made by referring back to the agglomeration's tale. Had the analysis stopped at the most obvious trait of 19th-Century territoriality, that of social injustice, none of its more active and desirous articulations would have appeared. The tracings would have missed the resourceful sides of the territorial experiment. Indeed, out of scientific seriousness or for the sake of political criticality, the poetic engrain of a technical sketch or the philosophical character of an administrative letter or the political relevance of an institutions' dispute are often ignored. That's a shame. For agency doesn't spring from boredom; existential fuel cannot be water; actors don't move because they are told to. They move because they strategise, hatch up schemes and aspire. Such wheeling and dealing, such appetite, cannot be understood if the positive, interesting and even transcending empirical moments are systematically set aside. In other words, we need to think *with* the collective undertaking. The seemingly banal must be granted Godlike grandeur, the empirical detail must be treated as if it were the augurs of an oracle, for only then are we able to discover the potentially more empowering sides of the local epos. Only then does State-led grip reveal a city in the making, given to our taking.

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