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“Suitable Palaces”: Navigating Layers of World Ordering at the Centre William Rappard (1923–2013)

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ABSTRACT

International law “moved to institutions” in the early twentieth century. While recent literature has explored the intellectual trajectories of these international organisations, most accounts divorce their analysis from the seemingly banal histories of the “buildings, staffs, and letterheads.” Conversely, I put the spatiality of the Centre William Rappard at the forefront of the history of interwar internationalism—and its echoes throughout the century. Erected in 1926 to serve the International Labour Organisation, this building was repurposed to host the World Trade Organisation in 1975. In this article, I reconstruct how struggles over claims of the (in)dignity of international order can be explored through disputes related to the political economy, material culture, and architecture of this infrastructure of global governance.

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In 1977, [the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)] moved into a building newly renamed the Centre William Rappard after the impresario of the neoliberal intellectual movement at the Graduate Institute for International Studies in the 1930s and 1940s ... One of the first activities of the new occupants was to remove and cover over murals and tilework that had decorated the building in its previous function as the seat of the International Labour Organization (ILO) ... years later, World Trade Organization [(WTO)] director-general Pascal Lamy quipped later about the art’s removal: “[i]t’s a bit as if you took over from immigrants in a social housing development.”¹

One is never as provincial as when one claims to have a “global view.”²

A “Room of One’s Own” for International Organisations

Little over a century ago (April 1921), in a strongly worded memorandum, the Canadian Herbert Ames—first Financial Director of the nascent League of Nations (LoN)—was alerted to an impending “housing crisis within the Secretariat.”³ The international civil servant Howard Huston requested immediate funding from Ames

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to increase the capacity of the current site of the League: l'Hôtel National.⁴ In Huston's view, the expansion of the Economic Section, the separation of the Health Section from the Social Section, and—perhaps most dramatically—the creation of the Armaments Section required urgent spatial transformations in the burgeoning international institution. In particular, Huston requested an additional one thousand gold francs per month so that an adjacent villa could be rented. After all, one of the considerations the League had in mind when it initially bought the l'Hôtel National for the enormous sum of 5.5 million gold francs the year before was the availability of nearby villas for expansion.⁵ While a recent fire had taken its toll on the optimism that this newly created cohort of international civil servants felt towards their site,⁶ one must not forget that only a year earlier Eric Drummond—the League's first Secretary-General—had declared that this was the only building in Geneva that could suit the organisation.⁷ After a brief stint at Sunderland House in London, Drummond had finally found a place whose “dimensions, style, and architectural beauty are worthy of the great international task that the lies before the League.”⁸ Despite such high rhetoric, by 1921 it was already clear that the League was running out of space.

If it was raining at the League then it was pouring at the neighbouring International Labour Organisation (ILO).⁹ This institution—which was created in the wake of the Great War and with the mandate of regulating conflicts between workers, states, and employers so as to guarantee an “universal and lasting peace”—was facing a similar set of concerns.¹⁰ In 1922, the ILO governing body adopted a similar report with regards to its spatial constraints.¹¹ Under the leadership of Albert Thomas, the ILO had made a home for itself in the basement of the Institut International d'Education La Châtelain in 1920, often called the Thudichum school after the name of its owner.¹² This building would later be reconverted into the Carlton Hotel, and would eventually come to host the International Committee of the Red Cross.¹³ What matters here is that by 1921, the ILO was entirely fed-up with the school. In their view, the situation “does not r[e]ach even a reasonable standard from the hygienic point of view, to say nothing of its allowing the space necessary for really efficient work.”¹⁴ They were—not unlike myself—writing in the wake of a pandemic, which explains their suspicions that the “high rate of sickness this winter has been partly due to the inadequacy of the present accommodation.”¹⁵ And yet, the organisation was under a constant pressure to expand. If for Huston the straw that broke the camel's back at the League was the creation of the Armaments Section, for the ILO the pressing issue was the ever-growing library. And these concerns were only related to the buildings that hosted the staff of these international organisations (IOs)—the insufficiency of the infrastructure for parliamentary gatherings was yet another problem entirely. In these early years, the ILO and LoN assemblies were awkwardly held at either the Salle de la Réformation—also known as Calvinium (demolished in 1969)—or at the Casino Kursaal (nowadays the Fairmont Grand Hotel). Both were seen as highly inadequate due to their acoustic conditions.¹⁶

In sum, by the early 1920s, international civil servants at both the LoN and ILO were increasingly convinced that their places of work were *undignified*.¹⁷ Indeed, “[f]or all the great hopes placed in these organisations, Geneva in 1920 did not offer more than a disused hotel for the [LoN] and an old boarding school for the [ILO].”¹⁸

And yet, our histories of international law, international relations, and global governance often have very little to say about the frustrations with these everyday geographies of early internationalism.¹⁹ On the one hand, the accounts produced by international lawyers and international relations scholars tend to rely almost exclusively on methodological cues taken from intellectual history and the history of political thought, divorcing their analysis from the seemingly banal histories of the “buildings, staffs, and letterheads.”²⁰ On the other hand, while there is some important literature produced by these IOs themselves in relation to their own buildings, these narratives tend to follow the genre of coffee table literature—highlighting hagiographic narratives of progress and downplaying moments of conflict, tension, and discomfort.²¹ Indeed, as Bob Reinalda noted, “IOs are inclined to define their own histories by writing ‘official histories’ themselves [usually by commissioning] insiders, who lack a scientific or critical regard.”²²

Instead, to bridge these gaps and hoping to strike a conversation between scholars of international law and those of architectural theory and history, I here trace a “new materialist” history of a particular infrastructure of global governance: the Centre William Rappard.²³ This international legal edifice, originally erected by the Swiss beaux-arts architect George Épitaux to host the ILO, now serves as home to the WTO. Hence, its material and architectural history offers us a vantage point to observe the different layers of visions of world governance that have dwelled within its halls. If the history of international law can be understood through the metaphors of layers of geological sediments deposited uneasily throughout the ages, then the Centre William Rappard is surely a ripe location for exhaustive archaeological research into the architecture(s) of global governance.²⁴ I argue that, within a single place in Geneva, we can excavate the different layers of meaning left behind by the adventures of the twentieth-century international legal imagination and its “move to institutions.”²⁵

To do so, I guide the reader through the many transformations that shaped the Centre William Rappard in the period 1923–2013. As an international legal historian, I focus less on the “style” or “aesthetic taste” of the building than on the ways in which different actors raised claims related to its architectural (in)dignity in buttressing their own vision of what the ILO—and, more broadly, the post-war international order—could and should look like.²⁶ Dignity, as a “worldly concept,” can be interrogated as a motif that allowed actors to bring together architectural, aesthetical, geopolitical, diplomatic, legal, and even financial considerations together to justify or critique the newly created spaces of global governance.²⁷ In other words, I am interested in exploring the connections between this particular architectural site and a broader system of economic production and politico-diplomatic constellations of pressures and interests. The Centre William Rappard offers us a promising vantage point to observe these entanglements between early-twentieth-century architecture and the ways in which international law sought to fashion a shell for itself (and its nascent institutions).²⁸

In what follows, I first reconstruct the processes which led to the making of the original centre for the ILO, before I turn to its conversion into a different environment for international economic ordering in the last decades of the century. By tracing the layers of projects of world ordering that have been deposited in this building,

I show the relevance of materiality and political economy for the study of global governance—past, present, and future.

For the Dignity of Labour

Roughly one century ago, the Genevese and Swiss authorities were quite aware of the importance of infrastructure and architectural considerations in their quest to consecrate Geneva as an internationalist “city of refuge,” worthy of the dignity of hosting the LoN and ILO. William Rappard, who had served as chief Swiss negotiator at the Paris Peace Conference, knew that other European cities were competing to dethrone Geneva, something that would be unacceptable for his domestic constituencies. The mere fact the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse* had published a call for furniture supply for the Secretariat had angered local businessmen, as it made them doubt whether the LoN had “the restoration of Swiss industry from its present depression at heart.”²⁹ In fact, Brussels had almost outbid Geneva when the LoN Council recommended the United Statesean President Wilson to convene the first assembly in Belgium in 1920.³⁰ While Geneva was saved by Wilson’s “friendly and spontaneous” gesture to prefer the neutrality of Switzerland over the *revanchisme* of the recently invaded Belgium, this episode reminded Rappard and the president of the Swiss Confederation, Giuseppe Motta, that now it was their turn to reciprocate.³¹ Had it not been for the personal rapport between Wilson and Rappard, perhaps Geneva “might well be nothing more than a cantonal capital.”³²

The first overture came in the form of a tax exemption in 1920, while the second gesture took the form of the offer of two properties in 1922–23. In 1920, the Genevese Conseil d’État decided not to charge the LoN the payment of the *droits de mutation et des transcription* (a tax related to the acquisition of property) of the acquisition of l’Hôtel National, which amounted to almost 700,000 gold francs.³³ Liberal members of the chamber advocated for the exoneration, to support the League and show their commitment to its historical mission—and its pivotal role as guarantor of Swiss neutrality and independence. The minority of socialists, on the contrary, argued that the state could not afford to exonerate the payment of this tax amid the acute housing crisis affecting the working class. Along these lines, their spokesperson León Nicole stated that the League represented the interests of the international capitalist class, which is why the only stable peace could be built by the international workers’ movement. In the end, the socialist faction remained defiant, tallying twenty-two votes against the majority’s sixty-two votes, to exonerate the tax. In the following weeks the Conseil d’État, presided by Paul Pictet, published its official decision to exonerate, laying the first stone upon which “International Geneva” was erected.³⁴ While León Nicole and the left-leaning faction he headed was unsuccessful in their critique of public subsidies for these “capitalist IOs,” his position would later be echoed by posterior movements of the radical left *vis-à-vis* international institutions—as we will see below in relation to the expansion of the WTO some decades later.³⁵

Low taxation, however, is but one of the aspects of any paradise—diplomatic, fiscal, or otherwise. The newly created IOs also needed land to expand, and the Swiss

authorities had prepared two lake-side parcels facing Mont Blanc—perhaps an offer the LoN and ILO could not refuse? To justify its decision, the Swiss Federal Council reminded its legislative branch of its “moral duties” (*devoirs d’ordre moral*) towards the LoN and ILO.³⁶ While the LoN was installed in a satisfactory manner, the situation of the ILO was rather dire.³⁷ After all, the Thudichum venue was too small and far from the public tram system. After hearing endless complaints from his staff, Thomas decided to leave behind his driver and walk the slopes of the Route de Pregny on foot.³⁸ After he arrived one morning to the office sweating profusely, he decided to arrange for the creation of a bus service that spared his colleagues from such daily climbs. All in all, the insufficiency of Geneva was apparent and the departure of the ILO loomed large.³⁹ At the same time, the Swiss authorities knew that there were no other adequate existing buildings. The solution, therefore, was to erect a new one: the first purpose-built environment specifically designed to host an IO.⁴⁰ It was the time for “suitable palaces” (*des palais appropriés*)—settings that were dignified enough to reflect their importance within the project of global governance.⁴¹ The question at hand, urged the Federal Council, was an issue of historical importance which should not be marred by “temporary financial concerns.”⁴² The two parcels that constituted this “gesture of international solidarity” were the so-called Champagne and Armelder lots. While the former was used by the ILO to erect its new palace at the now familiar Rue de Lausanne, no. 154, the latter would be given to the LoN for its own conference hall, aptly baptized as the Palais des Nations, adjacent to its awkwardly named Hôtel National. The LoN and ILO accepted this donation in the third League assembly session in 1922, and the property transfer was effectively legalized in the summer of 1923.⁴³ In what follows, I will focus solely on the Bloch lot, for it was here that the ILO attempted to first make a nest for its mandate.

Ironically, the ILO’s house of peace would lay its foundations upon the spoils of war. The owner of the site, Jules Bloch, had originally made his wealth through watchmaking, but quickly turned to munitions during the great war.⁴⁴ In this context, he met the French Minister for Ammunitions (the aforementioned Albert Thomas) and agreed to supply the allied cause—which raised all sorts of questions in the German-speaking Swiss cantons and, more dramatically, in the German Empire.⁴⁵ His Jewish background, to be sure, did not help either. For those reasons, by the end of the war, Bloch had gained a colourful reputation as a so-called *Roi-Million*, playing into the antisemitic trope of the unscrupulous Jew who lived in a lake-side palace while profiting from the suffering of German-speaking peoples.⁴⁶ The Swiss Federal authorities, concerned with Bloch’s finances, launched a fiscal inquiry that eventually led to the *Affaire Bloch*: the “King of Munitions” was jailed and heavily fined due to tax evasion related to his profits of war, while the federal civil servant Julien Junod was accused of corruption.⁴⁷ The Bloch parcel, thus, was part of the indemnity paid to the Swiss authorities.

Thomas, now master of the domain that his former business associate had lost in scandalous circumstances, had no time to lose. As we have seen, the ILO’s situation regarding sufficient space was a pressing one. At the same time, this institution was in a quite advantageous position. While the LoN had to buy a disused hotel at an exorbitant price (plus the expenses of renovation), the ILO could design a more modest and cost-efficient locale from scratch for roughly half the price: three million gold

francs.⁴⁸ Wishing to avoid a lengthy process to choose the architect through an international competition (as had happened in 1905 for The Hague's Peace Palace and would happen again later in the case of the LoN's Palais des Nations), the ILO opted for a selection process that was only open to Swiss architects.⁴⁹ This raised stern protests from, for example, the Royal Academy of Belgium and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Copenhagen, traces of which can be found in the archives.⁵⁰ The latter association pleaded to the ILO to consider that their institutional mission had to reflect its architecture and, as such, should "at all times promote the common tongue that guarantees peace among all races, that draws from the Temples of the Indians, the Chinese, the Japanese and the Egyptians while also taking from the Greek Parthenon and the Roman Capitol."⁵¹ In other words, how could the ILO be truly international (or at least interracial, to remain true to the language employed by the Copenhagen Academic Joakin Skovgaard and many of his contemporaries) if only Swiss architects were eligible to erect its dwellings?⁵² How could this site dare to "represent" the world if it looked like any of the other lake-side villas that dotted the shores of the Lac Léman but did not dare to speak on behalf of the globe?

The ILO's deputy director Harold Butler, who would replace Thomas at the helm of the ILO in 1932, shrugged off these concerns in a letter to Drummond.⁵³ While it would be ideal to have a broader competition, it was imperative that the new ILO site would be ready by 1925, which required the speedy selection of an architect. But the concerns raised by Brussels and Copenhagen would come back to haunt these interwar institutions, especially once architects from non-member states, colonial domains, occupied territories, and dissolved states joined the fray. Indeed, this problem would eventually become an explosive issue for the LoN's Palais, as the rise of the modern movement in architecture (and, in particular, the involvement of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret in the Palais competition) put these nascent IOs in a difficult position in terms of reconciling their lofty internationalist commitments with the rather nationalist interests of their patrons.

Be that as it may, in the ILO competition, George Épitaux from Lausanne emerged victorious. He had gained a reputation for realising private villas, schools, and public health-related facilities in the Canton of Vaud.⁵⁴ The task set for him by the ILO was to erect a building (of the "dignity benefitting an international institution") that could accommodate around five hundred employees within a general budget of 2.5 million gold francs—a goal that became increasingly difficult due to the intervention of the Genevese Hygiene Committee.⁵⁵ To achieve this goal, Épitaux opted for a neoclassical Florentine design (or, as the secondary literature has put it, "a bloated Palazzo Farnese for a modern bureaucracy") peppered with interior designs from the emerging art deco tradition.⁵⁶ In fact, several of the interior decorations were commissioned directly by ILO officials after their fascination with the 1925 Paris Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts (chief among them, the Blue Robed Bambino fountain piece).⁵⁷ The result was oddly familiar to the Palais de Rumine, a similar Florentine-style palazzo erected in Lausanne in 1904. In the same years that Épitaux and his crew were working to lay the foundations of the ILO building, international diplomats were, in turn, building their own international order in western Asia—it was at the Rumine at the Lausanne Conference (1922–23), after all, where borders and population of the modern-day state of Turkey were defined.⁵⁸

On June 6, 1926, following a delay of only one year, the new ILO building was inaugurated. Its overall dimensions were 86.3×33.8 m, and it housed 350 telephones, 618 radiators, and three electrical transformers.⁵⁹ While some lamented a missed opportunity to erect a magnificent palace, Épitaux (and Paul Budry, the art critic who was commissioned by the ILO to review the building) regarded it as a sober testament that catered to the needs of its constituency: corps of civil servants committed to the improvement of the working class (fig. 1).⁶⁰ In fact, Épitaux preferred to see his building as an *usine intellectuelle* (a factory for white-collar workers) instead of a luxurious palace.⁶¹ Budry praised the way the building reflected ideals of equality and fraternity among (male) humans—its figure had embodied the spirit of the modern laws of work (“il figure clairement la loi moderne du Travail dans ses murs”).⁶² Inspired by Geneva’s Calvinist spirit, perhaps, the architect wanted to show that dignity does not only come in the form of the golden baroque, but also in rationally organized space. As the LoN would later put it in its preparatory documents for the Palais des Nations competition, the times required “solid constructions without undue luxuries.”⁶³ But Épitaux’s choice was controversial. Years later, Albert Cohen, a former ILO employee would gain international recognition with his book *Belle du Seigneur* (1968)—a novel in which a protagonist complained about the ILO’s sombre atmosphere, full of “trade unionists” and “left wingers,” “where everyone has to go at it hammer and tongs” in comparison to the luxurious Palais des Nations.⁶⁴



Figure 1. Original ILO Building. © Copyright ILO. I thank Mr. Jacques Rodriguez & Mr. Remo Becci (ILO Historical Archives, Geneva) for their authorization to reproduce this image.

Was the discomfort of Cohen's protagonist warranted such that the cohorts of diplomats, international civil servants, "trade unionists and left-wingers" felt they were inhabiting a dignified workplace? Perhaps. And yet, even among them, debates about the proper style of dignity raged after the building opened its doors in 1926. An exploration of the interior design of the building and its relation to the politics of gift-giving in international relations can show how different internationalisms contested the mantle of dignity.⁶⁵ After the first stone was laid down by Thomas on October 21, 1922, all sorts of state and non-state actors sought to embellish the site with artefacts that represented the pride of their nation or guild. The Free State of Ireland failed spectacularly, for example, to donate a masterful stained-glass window.⁶⁶ The original design proposed by the modernist artist Harry Clark had offended his official patrons due to its portrayal of alcohol, female nudity, and its lack of Christian undertones. His government opted to buy the window to bury it in state archives and thereby guarantee it would never be displayed in either Geneva or Dublin. Later in 1961, the Republic of Ireland donated a new modernist mural to the building at a time when vanguardist sensibilities had gained acceptance within the halls of IOs.⁶⁷ In this same vein, when Butler assumed the directorship of the ILO, one of his first actions was to hide the modernist *Pygmalion & Galatea* painted by Eduardo Chicharro y Agüera and donated by the government of Republican Spain, partly due to its frontal display of female nudity.⁶⁸ In the 1920s, just like today, bare female breasts were considered rather *undignified* sights for the male gaze. Given that the archival traces only capture that Butler was "startled" by this painting, scholars like Murray can only speculate whether it "[w]as the nudity or the representation of the myth" that so profoundly offended the ILO's second Director-General and his staff.⁶⁹

The first cultural object that found a ceremonial place within the building was the Delft panel of 1926, installed in 1927 in the entrance hall.⁷⁰ It was donated by the Amsterdam-based Social-Democratic International Federation of Trade Unions "on behalf of approximately 14.000.000 organised workers."⁷¹ Crafted by Albert Hahn, Jr., the plate enshrined a towering figure of a (white male) worker surrounded by the preamble of Part XIII of the treaty of Versailles in four languages: English, Spanish, French, and German. This section of the treaty insisted that any lasting peace must be based on social justice. Combining elements of the emerging socialist realism and art deco traditions, the panel reflected the anxieties and hopes of reformist labour movements in Europe. However, not all workers' associations were satisfied with it. European Christian labour unions were outraged at the lack of religious teachings in the Delft panel, and quickly moved to donate their own artefact.⁷² This led to the creation of *The Dignity of Labour* (1931), a mural commissioned by the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (fig. 2).⁷³ The French painter Maurice Denis had originally opted for a scene of Jesus Christ working in his workshop in Nazareth with a "Palestinian décor," but his patrons in the religious syndicate found this antiquarian approach untenable.⁷⁴ Like modernist Catholics, they wanted a piece that could speak to the contemporary struggles between the faithful working class and capital, especially *vis-à-vis* the emerging red menace.⁷⁵ Dignity could not be based on a mere invocation of the past, rather it had to serve as a banner that could be



Figure 2. David Morse (fifth ILO Director-General) with the Belgian priest Joseph Leo Cardijn admiring *The Dignity of Labour* in 1957. © Copyright ILO. I thank Mr. Jacques Rodriguez & Mr. Remo Becci (ILO Historical Archives, Geneva) for their authorization to reproduce this image.

deployed in current struggles regarding the relationship between the state, the international sphere, and the local community.⁷⁶

The walls of this building, as Quinn Slobodian and Ryan Jeffery have shown in their film *The Walls of the WTO* (2018), have many more stories to tell.⁷⁷ More could be said about the geopolitical, affective, and aesthetical tensions surrounding the United States Room A of 1955 (decorated with murals by Dean Cornwell, in which non-white workers and female breasts were exceptionally allowed—but perhaps only because of their role in conveying a story about the European gift to the Americas through the conquest of the New World).⁷⁸ Or of the “Brazil room” of 1949–51; of the Luxembourgish iron gates; of the *Blue Bambino* donated by British Sailors; of the Portuguese *azulejos*; of the Australian wooden door; of the Swiss statues that besiege the building on all fronts.⁷⁹ For the purposes of this article, I simply note that the considerable efforts made by both state and non-state actors in the building and furnishing of this site show that studying IOs without paying heed to the material

investments that underpin their discursive and normative operations leave us with half, or more, of the picture missing. And what has been particularly absent from our inquiries in the theory and practice of IOs is a study of the juridified financial mechanisms that allowed the siphoning of public monies and private capital into the making of these suitable palaces. To this we turn now.

Modern Galateas

According to the classical myth, Pygmalion was a Cypriot sculptor who had grown dissatisfied with the sexual impurity of the women who surrounded him.⁸⁰ After taking a vow of celibacy, he attempted to erect (some pun intended) an ivory statue that embodied all the perfect “female qualities.” He then pleaded with the goddess Aphrodite to provide him with a suitable and dignified partner, in the likeness of his stony idol. With the blessing of the goddess, the statue suddenly gained warmth and life (and is given the name Galatea in later accounts). It is not hard to see why this trope—which had Greek antecedents and would continue to have echoes in the days of Shakespeare and Rodin—was so appealing to the modernist imagination of the interwar period.⁸¹ Did it not represent, in many ways, the quintessential fantasy of the twentieth-century western male imagination? The dream of an architect who is so visionary; of an engineer who is so precise; of an international lawyer who is so compelling that they can transform an imperfect present into an ideal future through their rational work?

Be that as it may, the version of this myth that made its way to the walls of the ILO (and then the WTO) was the aforementioned modernist painting by the Spaniard Eduardo Chicharro y Agüera, donated to the ILO on May 14, 1925 (fig. 3). Murray highlights that it was one of the few interpretations of this tale that portrayed Galatea in her moment of awakening.⁸² In Chicharro y Agüera’s painting, this takes the form of a group of birds that convert the creature of stone into a living monument. But what does all of this have to do with international law and global governance?

My argument is that we can think of some of the “great men” mentioned in this article (from the architect Épitaux, to international civil servants like Thomas or Butler, and diplomats like Rappard) as interwar Pygmalions, striving to cast a new world order out of the wrecks of their impure surroundings. The modern Galateas, then, are the towering IOs created during international law’s move to institutions in the twentieth century.⁸³ But what cosmic powers sprung these institutions into life? Ideas about international ordering and schemes for world peace had long predated the conversion of the Bloch property into the first purpose-built environment for international cooperation.⁸⁴ And yet, ideas on their own do not erect headquarters, establish bureaucracies, or cross frontiers.⁸⁵ They require capital and labour. Contemporary dreamers can no longer rely on the divine intervention of Aphrodite, but, instead, on the magic of the balance sheet.⁸⁶ In this vein, I conclude that, apart from their material dimension, our histories of IOs could benefit from a more sustained engagement into the mechanisms (legal or otherwise) that created—and sustained—these institutions in moments of dire planetary economic



Figure 3. 1925, Eduardo Chicharro y Agüera's "Pygmalion" (restored). © Copyright ILO. I thank Mr. Jacques Rodriguez Mr. Remo Becci (ILO Historical Archives, Geneva) for their authorization to reproduce this image.

crisis.⁸⁷ In this sense, I follow Bilotft's invitation to rethink IOs as institutions already "deeply embedded in global capitalism and thus reflective of its dynamics."⁸⁸

At the same time as the ILO and LoN held an open competition to choose a Swiss architect, they held a less visible but not less important parallel competition to choose a banker—the Academy in Copenhagen might have been relieved to know that non-Swiss bankers were eligible too.⁸⁹ While the LoN assembly had decided to budget three million gold francs for the creation of the ILO building, neither institution had such funds readily available by the time the construction would begin in the fall of 1923.⁹⁰ As such, they required a generous loan of private capital which the LoN and ILO would slowly pay back, drawing from the dues of member states, ideally with a low interest rate. In a meeting held in Joseph Avenol's office on June 14, 1923, it was decided that the leading men of the two organisations would reach out to friendly bankers to initiate informal negotiations, while the legal section, led by Joost van Hamel, would start hammering out all the potential legal questions that could potentially emerge from this atypical business transaction.⁹¹ In fact, even Rappard himself had intervened a couple of weeks earlier, offering to connect the LoN's financial director with Alfred Georg, the director of a private insurance company, aptly named *La Genevoise*, so he could advise the international civil servants on "the conditions under which a building loan might be made in Switzerland."⁹² The Swiss architect Julien Flegenheimer (who would go on to build the central train station *Gare Cornavin* in 1929) even met with Butler on April 31, 1923 to suggest that he and an undisclosed group of collaborators could raise 2.5 million gold francs in private capital for the ILO's building. While his offer was politely dismissed (and Butler even shared with Ames that he was not very impressed by him), Flegenheimer would perhaps have the last laugh as he would eventually be part of the architectural team involved in the design of *Palais des Nations*.⁹³ Recent historical interventions have noted that private connections played an enormous role in the early hiring practices of IOs.⁹⁴ The same, of course, is the case with how these institutions acquired financial backing.

After lengthy negotiations with several financial institutions (including *Credit Suisse*, *la Caisse Hypothécaire*, *la Banque Suisse*, and *la Banque Federale*), the ILO and LoN opted for the offer made by *Lloyds Bank*.⁹⁵ In fact, *Lloyds & National Provincial Foreign Bank* did not only have a sprawling network of offices around continental Europe (including nine in France, two in Belgium, one in the German occupied territories [Cologne], and two in Switzerland), but had its main base of operations in the British Empire and was well connected to the men of the peace of Versailles.⁹⁶ London, after all, was still "the pivot of European finance and diplomacy."⁹⁷ Moreover, it offered a relatively low interest rate of 4.5 per cent.⁹⁸ This was half a point higher than the Swiss National Rate and was certainly lower than *Credit Suisse's* 5.25 per cent. Once this had been negotiated, Drummond submitted a resolution to the League Council that would provide him with the "authority" to undertake certain financial operations.⁹⁹ In tandem, the legal section prepared a lengthy expose (authored by Hugh McKinnon Wood) tackling some pressing legal questions related to the enforceability of a mortgage on the League of Nations (as collateral for *Lloyds Bank's* credit).¹⁰⁰ Offering a true catalogue of the 1920s' "invisible college" of international lawyers, McKinnon provided an overview of the leading works of Oppenheim, Calvo, Westlake, Bluntschli, and Sato's diplomatic

practice, among others, to justify his position that Swiss courts would be competent to solve any potential dispute related to the real property of the LoN.¹⁰¹ This reassured Lloyds of the security of their investment, and led to another flurry of legal activity related to the negotiation of a mortgage deed and the acquisition of proper insurance.¹⁰² Once the League Council approved the request for Drummond's financial powers in relation to the Lloyds credit on September 1, 1923, a mortgage deed was registered before the Genevese notary Gustave Martin on December 6, 1923.¹⁰³

Without all this financial and legal engineering, Épitaux would have run out of resources quite quickly after he laid the first stone in October 1923. And yet, scholars of international studies have paid little attention to the microhistories of capital circulation and accumulation that made twentieth-century internationalism financially feasible, logistically possible, and ideologically attractive. Without these material investments, our modern Galateas would perhaps still remain in their stone-cold dreams—empty shells without claims to international authority. Much more work remains to be done to interrogate the ways in which concrete suitable palaces—of which the ILO is just one early example—became breathing intellectual factories of world ordering. Moreover, the material constellations that underpin these global institutions are rather unstable. In fact, despite the building having been carefully designed to cater to the needs and ideological project of the ILO, a couple of decades later it housed an entirely different organization. In what follows, I move forward to the moment in which the Secretariat of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) inherited the site in order to reflect on how a change in management revived again the question of the dignity of the building for its internationalist purposes.

The GATT in the Hat

The ILO's appetites would soon exceed the shores of Lake Léman. While modest expansion occurred in 1937–38 and 1957, by the early 1960s it became clear that the post-Second World War period required a massive growth in international bureaucracy.¹⁰⁴ At that time (especially as decolonisation saw membership ranks swell), the Genevese and Swiss authorities sought to find a solution that could enlarge the ILO's lakeside site.¹⁰⁵ However, these plans were scrapped due to fears of local backlash—after all, this section of the lake's shore had long been considered the Pearl of the Lake (La Perle du Lac).¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, when the Italian city of Turin offered not only to host the ILO's International Institute for Labour Studies but the whole institution, Berne and Geneva knew they had to act.¹⁰⁷ This led to the creation in 1964 of the Fondation des Immeubles pour les Organisations Internationales (FIPOI), a private non-profit entity that pools city, cantonal, federal, and private funding to cater to the infrastructural needs of IOs.¹⁰⁸ Ever since this moment, the FIPOI has played a crucial role in the building and maintenance of international Geneva without gaining much attention from scholars of international relations or related fields.

With the FIPOI's generous funding scheme, the ILO exchanged its lakeside Rue de Lausanne site for a parcel three times bigger at the Grand-Morillon hill. Inaugurated in 1974, this massive structure stood as the biggest administrative building in Switzerland.¹⁰⁹ After a series of renovations, the GATT (along with the Library of the

Graduate Institute for International Studies and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) inherited the now renamed Centre in 1977. While the ILO took some of the art up the hill, some of it remained as an awkward inheritance for the building's new occupants.¹¹⁰ As Director-General Lamy quipped years later, at that time the GATT secretariat felt as if they had "[taken] over from immigrants in a social housing development."¹¹¹ Given that the GATT was ideologically grounded in a project of trade liberalisation through the multilateral reduction of tariffs and barriers,¹¹² it is not surprising that the new building's occupants might have felt uneasy within a monument enshrined to workers' rights—especially at a time in which "protectionist" labour policies increasingly found themselves being questioned.¹¹³ As the GATT's successor organisation would later recognise, this uneasiness could also be explained in terms of the "antagonistic ideological and political values in both organizations in the context of the Cold War."¹¹⁴

Nowadays, the WTO's institutional position is that "[d]ifferent occupants, different times, and different perspectives [required] that some of the works disappeared from view."¹¹⁵ In 1977, the GATT's secretariat was perhaps more forthright—its Director-General pressed for the removal of almost all labour-related interior decorations, as they were undignified sights for the building's new occupants.¹¹⁶ Ironically enough, FIPOI's and Geneva's intervention saved Denis's *The Dignity of Labour*, which remained a stalwart reminder of this awkward cohabitation between the ideals of Christian labour and commerce—reminiscent of a long tradition of religious providential justifications for free trade.¹¹⁷ But "secular" socialist realist art? Time to go. For instance, the GATT Director-General Olivier Long (who taught international law at the aforementioned Geneva Graduate Institute) remained particularly adamant that the so-called Delft panel had to be covered up.¹¹⁸ The menacing naked breasts of *Pygmalion & Galatea*, along with Cornwell's allegorical murals of United Statesean industry, were also covered or dismantled.¹¹⁹ In an interview, Roger Praplan, the architect responsible for the building's renovation, candidly revealed that "Long did not want to show profane, sentimentalist, almost human works of art in an office dedicated to trade."¹²⁰ The dignity of labour is dead, long live the dignity of trade!

It was only years later, early in the twenty-first century, when the WTO found itself challenged by a growing global backlash against economic globalisation, that the institution sought to unveil the layers of itself it had previously covered up.¹²¹ In the same year that anti-globalisation protests shocked the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle, its governing body sought to find a way to expand its infrastructure at the now increasingly limited lakeside property.¹²² But if the ILO's expansion in 1964 had been scrapped due to fear of popular outcry, how could the WTO even dream of touching the lake's shores precisely at a time when its international legitimacy was at stake?¹²³ Out of the grand plans of the 1990s, the only new site that came to fruition was an important but relatively modest new conference hall in 1998. With the arrival of the new Director-General Pascal Lamy in 2005, the WTO sought to re-establish the popular dignity of its operations, especially *vis-à-vis* increasingly polarized publics in, and beyond, Geneva. As part of that strategy, the WTO opened its doors to ethnographical and anthropological researchers who Lamy gave access hoping that their works could contribute to a more nuanced and overall positive portrayal of the WTO's everyday operations beyond the

stereotype of a shadowy cabal of capitalist elites.¹²⁴ In this same spirit, Lamy gave the green light to a valiant group of archivists from both the WTO and the ILO who painstakingly tracked and reconstructed the lost artefacts. Hence, in the early 2000s, the WTO reframed its narrative of “different perspectives” to instead highlight the common ground that labour activists and free trade enthusiasts share—after all, we are all for international cooperation here.¹²⁵ Despite the opposition of contemporary radical leftist groups, the Swiss authorities, FIPOI, and the WTO were able to garner the support of local voters (61.8 per cent) to erect a new complementary “south building” next to Épitaux’s sober factory in 2009–13.¹²⁶

My point is not that one should disagree with the WTO’s reframing of its mission (although some readers may). Rather, it is to show that space, materiality, and architecture play a salient but undertheorized role in the ways in which we understand, contest, or consecrate the “dignity of an international institution.” In its quest to make an identity for itself in the tense early years of the so-called international liberal order, the ILO sought to create a site worthy of its mission. Such a vision of the dignity of international law and its institutions, however, seemed woefully inadequate for the purposes of the GATT—and its successor, the WTO. This, in turn, required a reimagining of this lakeside site so it could better suit the identity of another vision of our contested “rules-based international order.” The layers of meaning that have been slowly deposited by different ideological constellations in the Centre not only bear witness to the historical ruptures and continuities in the century-long project of international ordering through institutions for global governance. They also highlight the malleability and open-endedness of this chimerical project. For the “dignity” or “suitability” of these institutions—and of the palaces they inhabit—remain even today a hotly debated question.

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Notes

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73. Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 54–57; see also Bernard Delpal, “Sur le tableau de Maurice Denis : La dignité du travail (Genève, 1931),” *Chrétiens et Sociétés* 9 (2002): 1–33.
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75. James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).
76. Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 25–64. I am here referring to a broader conversation about the relationship between international law and Christianity. See also Daniel R. Quiroga Villamarín, “*Vicarius Christi*: Extraterritoriality, Pastoral Power, and the Critique of Secular International Law,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 34, no. 3 (2021): 629–52.
77. *The Walls of the WTO*, dir. Ryan S. Jeffery and Quinn Slobodian (2018), 9 min 45 s, <https://vimeo.com/262340286>.
78. Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 64–72. I prefer not to use the adjective “American” to refer to the United States, for the Americas are a pair of continents and the US is but a single country. I thank one of the reviewers for their comments in relation to this as it allows me to make this point more explicitly.
79. More comprehensive overviews can be found at Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 28–75; World Trade Organization, *WTO Building*, 11–72.
80. Patricia Salzman-Mitchell, “A Whole Out of Pieces: Pygmalion’s Ivory Statue in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,” *Arethusa* 41, no. 2 (2008): 291–311.
81. Nathaniel Berman, “‘But the Alternative Is Despair’: European Nationalism and the Modernist Renewal of International Law,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1792–1903; Daniel Damler, *Bauhaus Laws*, trans. David L. Burnett (Cambridge: Intersentia, 2019).
82. Murray, “The Diplomacy of Art,” 56–57; Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 40–41.
83. Kennedy, “The Move to Institutions.”
84. Crinson, *Rebuilding Babel*; Stefan Kadelbach, Thomas Kleinlein, and David Roth-Isigkeit, eds., *System, Order, and International Law: The Early History of International Legal Thought from Machiavelli to Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
85. Samuel Moyn, “On the Nonglobalization of Ideas,” in *Global Intellectual History*, ed. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 187–204.
86. Bilotto, “Decoding the Balance Sheet.”

87. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916–1931* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015); see also Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
88. Bilotto, “Decoding the Balance Sheet,” 382.
89. “Draft of the Report by the Secretary General to the Council—Proposal in regard to a loan for the Erection of a building for the International Labour Office,” June 10, 1923, LoNA R1536, 1.
90. “Installation du Bureau International du Travail,” 26.
91. “Result of Meeting in M. Avenol’s Office on Thursday June 14, 1923, concerning the International Labour Office Construction Loan,” LoNA 1536, paras 2 and 4.
92. “Letter from Herbert Ames to M. Alfred Georg (*La Genovaise*—2, Pl. Hollande),” May 25, 1923, LoNA 1536, 1.
93. See “Letter from Julien Flegenheimer ‘Architect-expert’ to M. Le Directeur Général-Adjoint du BIT Butler,” May 8, 1923; and “Memo from Butler to Ames enclosing a letter from a Mr. Flegenheimer and of my reply thereto,” May 11, 1923, LoNA 1536.
94. Haakon A Ikonomou, “The Biography as an Institutional Can Opener: An Investigation of Core Bureaucratic Practices in the Early Years of the League of Nations,” in *Organizing the 20th-Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920–1960*, ed. Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon A Ikonomou and Torsten Kahlert (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 33–48.
95. “Memo for the information of the Sec. General—The International Labour Office Construction Loan,” June 17, 1923. LoNA 1536, 1.
96. Clavin, *Securing the World Economy*, 16; moreover, Lloyds had a long history of collaboration with the LoN and the British Empire. See Hannah Tyler, “Breaking Even for the Future: The Financial History of the League of Nations Between 1919 and 1933,” *Monde(s)* 19, no. 1 (2021), 134.
97. Tooze, *The Deluge*, 21.
98. “Letter from Lloyds Regional Manager Hoare to Herbert Ames, Financial Director,” June 15, 1923, LoNA 1536, 1.
99. “Memo by the Secretary-General to the Members of the Council on the Financial Arrangements for the Erection of a New International Labour Office Buildings,” June 23, 1923, LoNA 1536, 1–3.
100. “Note by Mr. McKinnon Wood on the Enforceability of a Mortgage on League of Nations Premises,” June 21, 1923, LoNA 1536.
101. “Note by Mr. McKinnon Wood on the Enforceability of a Mortgage on League of Nations Premises,” June 21, 1923, LoNA 1536, 5. See also Oscar Schachter, “Invisible College of International Lawyers,” *Northwestern University Law Review* 72, no. 2 (1977–78): 216–17.
102. “Letter from Lloyds Regional Manager Hoare to Herbert Ames, Financial Director,” December 21, 1923, LoNA 1536, 1.
103. “Résolution adoptée par le Conseil de la Société de Nations,” September 1, 1923, LoNA R1536, 1; “Acte Notarié—Ouverture de crédit et affectation hypothécaire entre Sir E. Drummond et les M. F. Hoare et H. Hammond,” December 6, 1923, LoNA 1536, 1.
104. Thomas, “Le Bureau International du Travail à Genève,” 111.
105. Sandrine Kott, “ILO: Social Justice in a Global World? A History in Tension,” in *The ILO @ 100: Addressing the Past and Future of Work and Social Protection*, eds. Christophe Gironde and Gilles Carbonnier (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 21–39.
106. Following an expression originally coined by Rolex founder Hans Wilsdorf. See Kuntz, *Genève Internationale*, 121.
107. Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 8. On the Turin Centre, see Kott, “ILO: Social Justice in a Global World?” 33.
108. Michael M. Gunter, “Switzerland and the United Nations,” *International Organization* 30, no. 1 (1976), 139–40; Courtiau, *XXe*, 347.

109. Kuntz, *Genève Internationale*, 117–31; Courtiau, *XXe*, 368.
110. Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 31.
111. Slobodian, *Globalists*, 240–41.
112. See, generally, Francine McKenzie, introduction to *GATT and Global Order in the Postwar Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1–25.
113. Moonhawk Kim, “Disguised Protectionism and Linkages to the GATT/WTO,” *World Politics* 64, no. 3 (2012): 426–75.
114. Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 31.
115. World Trade Organization, *WTO Building*, 11.
116. Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 11.
117. Ileana M. Porras, “The Doctrine of the Providential Function of Commerce in International Law: Idealizing Trade,” in *International Law and Religion: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Martti Koskenniemi, Mónica García-Salmones Rovira, and Paolo Amorosa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 313–33; Martti Koskenniemi, *To the Uttermost Parts of the Earth: Legal Imagination and International Power, 1300–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 384–91.
118. Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 20.
119. Slobodian, *Globalists*, 240–41.
120. Murray, “The Diplomacy of Art,” 61.
121. David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2010); “Interchange: The History of Capitalism,” *Journal of American History* 101, no. 2 (2014): 503–36.
122. Steve Herbert, “The ‘Battle of Seattle’ Revisited: Or, Seven Views of a Protest-Zoning State,” *Political Geography* 26, no. 5 (2007): 601–19.
123. Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 12–13.
124. See, among other sources, Marc Abélès, ed., *Des anthropologues à l’OMC: Scènes de la gouvernance mondiale* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2011); George E. Marcus, “The Green Room, Off-Stage: In Site-Specific Performance Art and: Ethnographic Encounters,” *Les actes de colloques du Musée du Quai Branly* 2 (2009):1–7; Hadi Nicholas Deeb and George E. Marcus, “In the Green Room: An Experiment in Ethnographic Method at the WTO,” *PoLAR* 34, no. 1 (2011): 51–76; George E. Marcus, “Art (and Anthropology) at the World Trade Organization: Chronicle of an Intervention,” *Ethnos* 82, no. 5 (2017): 907–24.
125. Kuntz and Murray, *Centre William Rappard*, 12–13.
126. World Trade Organization, *WTO Building*, 61–63.