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**Tension between fast and slow mobilities. Examining the infrastructuring processes in Brussels (1950–2019) through the lens of social imaginaries**

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**Abstract.** The paper analyzes the dialectic of fast and slow mobilities as a continuous tension, since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, characterized by three evolutions of the functional, phenomenological and social dimensions of mobility infrastructure and practices in Brussels, Belgium. It is based on the content analysis of diverse ‘embodiments’ of social imaginaries: mobility infrastructures, narratives and sensory-motor behaviors, and the images, movies and photographs. It casts light upon the great triple evolution (1) of the scale of the designed city, (2) of the limits between spaces devoted to speed, slowness, and overlaps, and (3) of the promoted aesthetics in terms of atmospheres and urban experience. These developments strongly relate to the changing meaning of slow and fast mobilities and to a broader change in the societal relationship to space and time.

**Keywords.** Urban mobility, Infrastructure design, Imaginary, Ambiance, Mobility history, Belgium.

In this article<sup>1</sup>, I explore the heuristic value of the dialectic between speed and slowness to analyze the long-term evolution of mobility infrastructure as they reflect a broader change in the relationship with space and time, and in the specific ‘sense of time’ as an articulation of past experiences and envisioned futures (temporality of progress, idealized past, social acceleration).<sup>2</sup>

Modernity is often defined as global ‘social acceleration’, which Hartmut Rosa framed as the addition of three phenomena: the technical acceleration, the acceleration of social change, and the acceleration of the pace of life.<sup>3</sup> In this perspective, forms of slowness and deceleration are limited to criticism of global capitalism. Slowness and deceleration have indeed been at the core of margin movements as the *Slow città* or feminist movements.<sup>4</sup> However, my hypothesis is that there is a tension between speed and slowness inherent to every ‘constellation of mobility’<sup>5</sup> or ‘transport regime’.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, speed has not replaced slowness.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, city users have had a range of speeds to move about the city—some of which being more valued in some parts of the city than others. This tension has therefore continuously existed inside globalization logic, as promoting slowness (in some part of the cities) remains one of the strategies that cities implement to remain attractive in the competition between cities and the fringe, and between European cities.<sup>8</sup>

Rather than separately observing cultural and material *dispositifs* towards acceleration or deceleration of movement, I propose to explore the frictions and articulations between the two, in a transmodal, diachronic and transdisciplinary approach. Indeed, speed can ‘act as a conceptual bridge across several existing academic chasms’.<sup>9</sup> With a background in the history and theory of urbanism, I draw on sociology, philosophy and history of transport and mobility to better understand this dialectic. How does this articulation tend to promote specific relationship with space and time? How does it tend to be ruled by changing norms that have influenced and shaped

both material objects and mobile practices? The dialectic of speed and slowness provides new insight on the ‘infra-politics’ of mobility.<sup>10</sup>

To analyze material infrastructure in its relationship with mobility practices, I consider the first as ‘sensitive environment’.<sup>11</sup> This paper therefore contributes to the recent ‘sensory and affective turn’ in research on mobility infrastructure. Moving away from the binary of mobility/mooring,<sup>12</sup> scholars have built on theories of atmospheres and *ambiances*<sup>13</sup> to better take account, in their methodology, of the changing phenomenological and aesthetical dimensions of mobility infrastructure.

At the core of mobility studies, mobility infrastructures were first taken as fixed and bounded elements that structure—and upon which rely—mobilities.<sup>14</sup> Physical infrastructures and materialities of mobility and transport networks were naturalized and their complex character and powerful spatial fixity stressed in terms of infrastructural lock-in.<sup>15</sup> In ‘transport-cum-mobility history’<sup>16</sup>, roads have been described as embedded in society: in connection with the territorial and societal context that they help to shape. In this way, this cultural approach of transport networks differs from the technical one. It depicts the designers and initiators of the infrastructure in the culture of their time.<sup>17</sup> The planning and construction of the road networks are also approached in relation to what Dominique Rouillard calls the ‘infrastructure imaginary’ in popular and high culture.<sup>18</sup> The works of transport historians remind us of the changing meanings and forms of infrastructure, following the evolution of meaning of mobility modes and practices. The notion, developed by geographer Tim Cresswell, of the “constellations of mobility” as historically and geographically specific formations of movements, narratives about mobility and mobile practices’<sup>19</sup> highlights the historical variations of these interrelations, and the continuation of the past in the present. This legitimates the interest of looking into the ‘usable past’ to inform and appraise the present debate

about future mobility.<sup>20</sup> Urban design always transposes formally and theoretically an evolving way of seeing the world.<sup>21</sup>

However, this cultural approach to mobility infrastructure was still imbued with the dialectic of mobility/moorings that constituted the original frame of the new mobility paradigm. This is problematic because, as Merriman puts it, it overlooks the small-scaled transformation of the infrastructure: ‘the affective resonances, atmospheres, vibrations and enchanting qualities of mobility infrastructures and practices’ at stake in their constant evolution.<sup>22</sup> It is too simple to account for qualities, temporalities, rhythms,<sup>23</sup> vibrant materialities<sup>24</sup> and affective resonances across and through infrastructures, environments, vehicles and bodies.<sup>25</sup>

First, from the perspective of the theories of *ambiance* and atmosphere, infrastructures are not simply static contextual settings for action but immersive environments that are central to mobility experiences. Speed—one of the aspects of mobility flows—partly depends on the sensory ‘locomotor efficiency’ of mobility infrastructure as space of movement. That efficiency is defined by the ‘ambiance factors’: the interactions between build form and luminous, sound and other physical signals that engage and disengage motor activity of passers-by, that invite for deceleration or acceleration.<sup>26</sup> If the ambiance factors have mostly been examined in relation to pedestrian mobility, a similar analysis can be made with other modes of mobility. Indeed, urban planners build the city to be traveled at a certain (normalized) speed. The rhythm of the plot, that of the facades, the height of the towers... are built to match fast or slow practices, specific metrics of mobility, to provoke—or invite to—specific aesthetic experiences in the city. It also provides a sense of the scale of the city in which it is envisioned. Second, infrastructures are ‘produced and shaped through embodied movements, interactions and techniques of inhabitation’.<sup>27</sup> Both mobility infrastructures

and practices get indeed caught up in changing affective relations and atmospheres that transform the mobility infrastructure.

In brief, infrastructures are involved in constant social and material processes which are defined by Merriman as ‘infrastructuring processes’. These constant processes invite a diachronic approach. This approach provides the opportunity to focus on processes rather than on specific periods of time and to reflect on mobility infrastructure as always in evolution—materially, socially and symbolically. These continuous infrastructuring processes are better understood, though, while referring to the work of **Cornélius** Castoriadis on *social imaginaries*.<sup>28</sup> As defined by C. Castoriadis in the late 1970s—in a sense close to that of ‘narratives’ or ‘representations’—, they are social institutions that provide meanings to environments and actions. Imaginaries are visions of the world made of affectively significant images stored in and released from the urban space.<sup>29</sup> They continuously restructure the city through a plurality of embodiments because of their tools, ‘instruments’ or *dispositifs*.<sup>30</sup> The imaginary embodiments of fast and slow mobilities share the urban space. The research in that way considers the long-term evolution—the changing ‘constellations of mobilities’—and the internal continuous ‘infrastructuring’ processes of (1) the material infrastructures that accommodate, through material, sensory and regulatory *dispositifs*, (2) the fast and slow (aesthetical) practices, and (3) the meanings, values and images associated with it in popular and high culture.

Building on the Brussels case study, this paper highlights the continuity of the tension between imaginaries of fast and slow mobilities. It is a result of 4 years of inductive research on the evolution of mobility infrastructure since the mid-20th century in Brussels. I conducted a content analysis of discursive and non-discursive documents from the municipal archives of Brussels and Ixelles on the meaning-loaded designs and practices of mobility infrastructure referred to in terms of fast and

slow movements. According to Colin Divall, the difficulties of a sensory and affective approach to mobility infrastructure and practices lie as much in the scarcity of sources that give an insight into these perceptual, sensual or emotional experiences of trips engaged in the formation and transformation of historical subjectivities of people on the move—and that of mobility infrastructure I would add—than in the lack of theoretical clarification and amplification in transport history.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, I have been searching for these imaginary ‘embodiments’ in original plans and master plans, vade-mecum, architect’s drawings, and in gray literature gathering discourses, narratives in newspapers, magazine articles and photographs. The spatial and material articulations between fast and slow mobilities can be observed at *different scales*, from the transport and urban planning at metropolitan scale to that of street construction details. I also introduce theoretically the notion of *grammar of fast and slow mobilities* that connects the concept of social imaginaries with the French theory of *ambiance* and ‘ambiance factors’.

The paper is structured in five parts. After the first section developing the conceptual framework, I delve into the triple evolution since the 1950s that characterize that tension. These are that (1) of the scale of the designed city, (2) of the limits between spaces devoted to speed, slowness, and overlaps, and (3) of valued ‘aesthetics’ in terms of *ambiance* and aesthetical experience. The analysis of the diverse corpus reveals the limits and scale of the envisioned capital and its relationship to the periphery. The embodiments of fast and slow mobility imaginary preferentially take over specific parts of the city over time, outlining the spatial segregation of infrastructures of speed, slowness and overlapping, and define the aesthetic investments in a city experienced in motion. The paper concludes with the evolution of meanings associated to slow and fast mobilities over time and how this reveals a broader change in the relationship with space and time and in the sense of time.

## Social Imaginaries of Fast and Slow Mobilities

Every space in which one moves gives rise—as ‘active potentiality’<sup>32</sup>—to perceptive orientations and specific motor behaviors: specific sensory-motor ways of being. The work of the French school of Grenoble on *ambiances* highlights the structuration of visual, luminous and sound experience and reveals dynamic and located relationships between build forms and social uses.<sup>33</sup> The sensory-motor effects result, among other things, from the environment expressive power and the motor power of visual orientations. First, the sensitive environment is expressive, in the sense that it generates action and makes itself available as occurrence. Second, the attentional gestures of observation, contemplation and examination that underlie the perceptive activity of the passer-by—or the car driver—engage its full body, extending often what the sight outlines in movement.<sup>34</sup> That accelerated or decelerated experience of the sensitive environment results in pleasures or displeasures. The ‘poetics’<sup>35</sup> of those urban experiences in turn updates the visions of the world: the imaginaries.

Social imaginaries are subject to a double process of actualization and instantiation. At the same time, indeed, mobility infrastructure materialize and stabilize mobility imaginaries, such as those that shape specific travels and ‘motilities’.<sup>36</sup> While an imaginary becomes dominant—moving from ‘utopia’ to ‘ideology’—,<sup>37</sup> embodiments are progressively normalized through the institution of a *grammar*.<sup>38</sup> These grammars transpose and practically inscribe the imaginary in congruent sensory-motor ways of being and in the material world.<sup>39</sup> And yet, they are strengthened or weakened in a pluralist context of competition with other imaginaries—residual, emerging, critical...—and constrained by existing materialities. They are therefore themselves in evolution, creating, reinforcing and transforming the different logic of articulation of imaginary embodiments in the city materiality.

## Scale of the Designed City

The dominant social imaginaries of fast and slow mobilities affect the limits and scale of the envisioned capital and its relation to the periphery. Scholars have written extensively on the link between urban form and mobility. They reveal that models of urbanity—and in particular the extension of the city—are highly dependent on the mobility systems on which they are based.<sup>40</sup> The metrics of movement—notably their speeds—affect the location and forms of the city. Based on Patrick Geddes' work on interurban and urban conurbations and scales, Lewis Mumford brilliantly recounts in *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* the evolution of the city: from the distribution of medieval organic formations on the territory ordered by the needs and aptitudes of the pedestrian, to the extension of the city allowed by the organization of public transport (omnibus, train, tramways), then by the car. This relationship between urban form and mobility is at the core of urban studies that try to mitigate that effect with the coordination of public transport network with urban development<sup>41</sup>—also known as transit-oriented development. In turn, this section highlights how the promotion of specific speed acknowledged as ‘more urban’—more adapted to the urban environment and the concentration of activities—can affect the scale of territory affectively invested and most considered in urban redevelopment schemes.

The urban renovation of Brussels at the agglomeration scale, between 1950 and 1989,<sup>42</sup> relied mainly on the strong and prevailing modern *imaginary of fast mobility*. It was based on logic that was iteratively emerging during a process of fast mobility imaginary stabilization into a *grammar of fast automobility*. Built environment underwent large transformations to adapt to the increasing automobility and to replant and sprawl the urban fabric according to the attractive model of the green periphery. Even though the motorization rate stayed low until the 1960s, as in other European countries, America's high rate of motorization seemed to signal Europe's inevitable future, one



with the public imagination and policy projections.<sup>43</sup> The urban boulevards—designed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as spaces of *flânerie*<sup>44</sup>—were therefore transformed into urban highways with tunnels and bypasses, becoming part of a roadscape articulating functionality and aestheticism.<sup>45</sup> In this way, the state administration enforced a new ‘park-like infrastructural landscape’ in Belgium.<sup>46</sup> The ‘modern roads’<sup>47</sup> that raised the accessibility and revegetation of the city center were supposed to trigger private investments for the construction of an urban realm in line with the after-war ‘modern’ society: the 20<sup>th</sup> century city. The shared ambition of urban renovation was indeed to be realized through the leveraged effect of public roads. The construction of urban highways at a frenetic pace benefited from the context of the Universal Exhibition of 1958 and the high financial capacity of the national Road Fund.<sup>48</sup>

Urban highways were part of a meshed network connecting the whole country. The foreseen urban fabric sprawling and revegetation through the leveraged effect of modern roads and urban highways supported the continuity of the urban metropole with its periphery and the link with medium-sized towns and the countryside in a united country. Brussels’s highway network was further envisioned to materialize the ‘Crossroad of the Western world’<sup>49</sup> with a central position in the European ‘E’ highway network. In the context of European Union construction, the development of Brussels is envisioned as that of the capital and main attractive employment center of the country. The capital is working to develop nothing less than the ‘World Trade Center’ of Europe! The capital therefore planned urban facilities targeting and designed for more than the national public. Modern commercial galleries of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s constituted for instance leading examples of ‘commercial urbanism’ in Europe, attracting—according to their developers—tourists and shoppers from neighboring countries.<sup>50</sup>

The urban struggles from the late 1960s and early 1970s in Brussels, as elsewhere opposing inhabitants' associations on one side and state administration and private developers on the other, called for quieter residential neighborhoods. Inhabitants associations also aimed at reversing the urban exodus of inhabitants to the attractive green periphery. However, they proposed a completely different solutions than the one privileged during the urban renovation: the diminution of traffic nuisances, and the reduction of urban segmentation produced by road infrastructure. The sensory depreciation of speed practices in the residential setting called into question the spatial grip of automobility infrastructure, and promoted 'more urban', 'soft', slow mobilities.<sup>51</sup> The emerging *imaginary of slow mobility* was based on logic that was iteratively emerging during a process of slow mobility imaginary stabilization into a *grammar of slow mobility*. The regionalization of Belgium in 1989 finally answered the call of Brussels inhabitants and urban activists by prioritizing slow mobility, and further stabilized its imaginary in regional mobility policies and infrastructure development guidelines. However, with the federalization of Belgium and the creation of a regional authority in 1989 with far less financial capacity, the scale of the designed city shrank.

The envisioned city became strictly limited to the nineteen municipalities forming the regional territory. The limits of the regional territory were even materialized through artistic intervention on 'urban doors' on the main penetrating automobility infrastructure.<sup>52</sup> Because of the lack of funding of the regional authorities to set up an ambitious policy to requalify urban public space at the regional scale, traffic calming policies and urban redevelopment and refurbishing tended, furthermore, to solely invest the historical city center where the imaginary of slow mobility was already stabilized. All the efforts were concentrated on heritage features and paths. Some examples of the early 1990s are the refurbishments of the 'Royal Path'<sup>53</sup> between the royal palace in Laeken and the monumental Courthouse, and of West-East paths in the historical center going from the

upper city of public institutions to the lower medieval center around the Grand-Place and, beyond, to the Bourse building.<sup>54</sup>

On top of the drastic decrease of the financial capacity of the responsible public authority, another explanation of this narrow focus is linked to a promoted mobility mode, which was walking. Where the car encourages sprawl, the promotion of more urban mobilities as walking tends to produce the opposite effect, squeezing the different aspects of everyday life into a more compact geographical area.<sup>55</sup> The projects developed by the Modern Architecture Association in order to challenge the authorities' official plans illustrate the envisioned establishment of spatially more restricted boundaries around the meanings of 'everyday travel' (Figure 1).

However, this envisioned shift did not really make it into reality. Moreover, outside the historical city center, which had to be 'reconstructed' according to the idealized urban model of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>56</sup> other infrastructures of the former roadscape continued to be ruled by the logic of fast mobility and acceleration, exemplifying the persistence in large parts of the regional territory of a classical-functionalist transport planning by public administration.<sup>57</sup>

*Figure 1: Project of the Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaine (ARAU) for the redevelopment of the area between the Central Station and the Grand-Place and the **Ilôt Sacré**. Marc Heene, 1983.*

© ARAU. Source: *Bruxelles vu par ses habitants (Brussels: ARAU/CFC, 1984), 67.*

Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there have been emerging new claims for large scale quality walking and cycling environment, revealing an *actualization of the slow mobility imaginary*. Envisioned infrastructural networks for future slow mobility are now planned to cover the whole region with radial routes linking the city center and the Flemish periphery within a 15 km radius. In that way, planners renew the envisioned relationship of the capital to its cross-border employment and living area. Redeveloping the connection of the capital to its close periphery,

those infrastructures benefit from ageing linear automobility infrastructure. Examples of these contemporary transformations and appropriations for active mobility of metropolitan automobility infrastructures are the E411 and E40 urban sections that are currently transformed in ‘parkways’, including active mobility infrastructures.<sup>58</sup> It may also be noted that they renew the infrastructure dialogue with the landscape on a much larger scale than the regional borders. Radial cyclo-pedestrian paths and other thematic routes make use of residual spaces along rail roads, of outdated mobility infrastructure, following where possible the valley, streams and other topographic elements.<sup>59</sup>

### **Spatial segregation and articulations between infrastructures of speed, slowness and overlaps**

Social imaginaries of fast and slow mobilities dominate specific parts of the city over time. The *grammar of fast mobility imaginary* regulated during the urban renovation period the articulation between fast and slow mobilities through different regulatory and material *dispositifs*, making an acceleration of automobility possible through a strong modal segregation. In this articulation, urban renovation created urban highways and spaces of slow mobility that tended to “immobilize”, to “capture” slow mobility paths. The latter were isolated spaces of destinations (pedestrian or restricted areas, parks, commercial galleries) bordering fast mobility infrastructure in the strong modal segregation system. Those separate spaces justified smooth connections to fast mobility infrastructures through the development of large car parking, and covered *passages*. In the 1950s, the model of the commercial gallery was for example appropriated by the urban renovation stakeholders to modernize the city and rationalize the uses of spaces. Conversely, commercial galleries remained in line with *passages* tradition and aimed at making the capital a ‘covered city’:<sup>60</sup> emancipating pedestrians from the climate, and making slow mobility practices more enjoyable to better keep passers-by consuming.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, the model of the commercial gallery

matched the logic I refer to as *horizontal and vertical zoning urbanism* that makes a greater acceleration of automobility possible.<sup>62</sup>

The construction of the Louise Gallery network contributes to the slippage of slow mobility paths and immobility spots, public transport stops and car parks into the built environment. With associated public works (including the building of tunnels, flyovers and parking—for instance the construction of underground parking below the Louise Tunnel), multilayered malls further multiplied the available ground level and spaces for mobility flows.<sup>63</sup> In that sense, the Louise Gallery network in the Deux Portes quarter constitutes an ‘analogous city’<sup>64</sup> of indoor streets and squares. They invite pedestrians to a slow and flowing movement from the display window on one side of the gallery to the other. Programmatic, regulatory, discursive and sensory *dispositifs*<sup>65</sup> indeed ensured, as in the design of the Agora Gallery next to the Grand-Place, that the passers-by would not be absorbed in a fast flow.<sup>66</sup> It strengthened the strong spatial segregation between fast and slow mobility by diverting passers-by from the sidewalks to increase space available for car circulation and parking. The modernist commercial gallery model is not then intended to make it easier for pedestrians to cross the city, but constitutes the very destination for trips by car or public transit,<sup>67</sup> as illustrated by the following quote.

“One would have thought that the automobile would have harmed such pedestrian-only arteries. It seems that this is not the case. On the contrary, if motorists manage to park their cars not too far away, they like to walk and shop in arteries that are both relaxing and lively!”<sup>68</sup>

The development of one of the first networks of restricted streets for pedestrians in the historic city center—the *Îlot Sacré*—is very similar in this respect. Envisioned in the frame of a nightlife revitalization plan of this touristic area next to the Grand-Place, it offers smooth connections to fast

transport infrastructure. It connects both to the “Pas perdue” Hall of the Central Station—through an underground *passage* later transformed in a commercial gallery and the large Horta Hall—, and to automobility urban highways—with parking directly linked to the nearby crossroad in front of Saint-Gudule cathedral (Figure 2) envisioned as a ‘traffic exchanger’ between the Junction Boulevard and the mini-ring road.

*Figure 2: (below) The **Îlot Sacré** and its proximity to the underground passage to the Central Station (bottom right) and open-air parking on the “Carrefour de l’Europe”, orthophotograph 1961, <http://bruciel.brussels> © urban.brussels (up) Picture taken by Public Work Administration of the related view on the open-air parking when going out of the pedestrian area of the **Îlot Sacré**, 1976. © Archives Générales du Royaume.*

From the 1960s, one could observe the emergence of an imaginary of slow mobility. It progressively extended from the medieval center of the **Îlot Sacré** around the Grand-Place to the surrounding streets and quarters. As it covered increasing parts of the city, design solutions evolved from radical segregated ones as pedestrian areas in the modernist city, towards more hybrid infrastructure as semi-pedestrian areas, 30 km/h zones, and more recently shared streets.<sup>69</sup> The modal segregation is therefore designed at the level of the street section, in the details of the border of the sidewalks, as it used to be in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Motorized and pedestrian traffic must share the traditional street profile with raised sidewalks to protect pedestrians from cars. The blue stone edge instantiates the limit between pedestrian and motorized traffic.

As regional authorities progressively implemented traffic calming logic, the emerging imaginary of slow mobility equipped itself with tools and defined itself through different logic which renewed the traditional street profile: deceleration of fast motorized mobility and acceleration of slow mobility. The slowdown of fast mobility articulated legal instruments of speed

limitations with material devices that, through an aesthetic treatment, blurred the legibility of the modal segregation then making drivers intuitively decelerate. For instance, in ‘semi-pedestrian’ roads (for example rue de l’Etuve) as developed in the late 1970s and 1980s, sidewalk and the passable part of the road were at the same level (or slightly raised by about 5 cm), only separate by a line made of blue stones which recall the former edge.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, the constitution of ‘calm city’ (*ville apaisée*) makes slow mobility more efficient, secured and comfortable.<sup>71</sup> Starting with central areas as municipal centers and school neighborhood where the imaginary of slow mobility was already stabilized, traffic calming *dispositifs* finally cover most of the Brussels region. However, speed limits tend to be neglected by car drivers on large axes and are often called into question in public debates.<sup>72</sup>

Currently, contemporary planning and policies are counting on active mobilities to fulfill the need for interconnectivity in the city and replace motorized mobilities in daily commuting and travel.<sup>73</sup> Mobility infrastructure demonstrates renewed perspective on the street’s modal split and road safety issues to promote *hybrid mobility practices* in terms of acceleration and deceleration. This indeed necessitates the acceleration of slow mobilities at metropolitan scale. Regional authorities therefore continue to develop shared spaces and active mobility infrastructures as part of the road. They also develop segregated landscaped networks of slow mobility infrastructure separate from the road—which segregated design recalls the one developed for the first Belgian highways—notably through the transformation of linear ageing automobility infrastructure.

### **Valued Aesthetic in Terms of *Ambiance***

This final section illuminates the evolution of mobility infrastructure promoted *ambiance*. In the urban renovation period, automobility infrastructures were instantiations of the progress of the Belgian society as a whole. While the car was symbolically invested, the new conception of

automobility infrastructure as an essential element for any aspect of a ‘modern life’ grounded the affective and aesthetic investments into the emancipating modern road.<sup>74</sup> It strengthened the assimilation of personal freedom with individual mobility which constitutes a key feature of the modern era since the Saint-Simonians<sup>75</sup> and had arisen from the comparison of the city to a living thing.<sup>76</sup> The aesthetic experience of the modern road—mediated through cultural productions such as movies and photographs—reinforce this perception of the modern road on a pre-reflexive level. Updating the imaginary and the aesthetic apprehension of the urban environment through driving, this experience induces the valuation of animated, vibrant, accelerated and mobile urban environment,<sup>77</sup> and the overturn of the urban expressivity in favor of a kinetic, tangential monumentality. The modern road indeed strongly influenced the aesthetic of the urban renovation, adapting the aesthetic and the monumentality of buildings surrounding the road to the performed speed. To articulate infrastructure development and nature, public authorities indeed recalled the aesthetics of the highways and constructed visual and cinematic sequences with trees and high-rise buildings along the urban expressways.<sup>78</sup>

The mobility-infrastructure imaginary promoted by urban activists that took part in the Reconstruction of the European City movement, on the opposite, relied on a dislike, not of the car (which is only slowed down in the urban environment), but of speeding practices which, as mentioned above, tend to be seen as non-urban, commuters’ practices. It crystallizes a strong criticism of the dehumanized, ‘Americanized’ modernist city, and a social claim for the integration of more natural elements in the city and more proximity-based sociality centered on pedestrians. Since the late 1960s, urban activists and Brussels Agglomeration administration<sup>79</sup> focused on the reconstruction of paved streets in the city center and the replanting of trees along urban boulevards that had been transformed in highways.<sup>80</sup> They strived to ensure the nostalgic staging of enchanting



urban spaces mainly in the city center, notably involving backward-looking ambiance and urban materiality (the use of cobblestones in most refurbishment...). They also aimed at the reconstruction of the idealistic characteristics of 19<sup>th</sup> century residential areas. The evolution of the management of traffic noises since the creation of regional authority, furthermore, reveals the desire to recreate acoustic ambiance of the past, suitable for rest and residential activities through the development of vade-mecum for urban designers.<sup>81</sup> Those guidelines reveal the importance and positive perception of the traditional urban block model, and its architectural vocabulary (porches...) and the disdain towards modernist building shapes and open-order town planning. However, there is a paradoxical demand for urban animation and calm areas<sup>82</sup> which unfolds the aesthetic dimension of the urban environment in the development of regular public events in the urban space and, more broadly, the valorization of hedonistic urban practices.

Nowadays, the phenomenology of the contemporary city tends to accommodate hedonistic slow mobility favored in the context of cultural capitalism, and to update the poetic of speed through micro-mobility and cycling practices. In contrast, automobility is still at the core of deceleration and traffic calming policies to ensure the setting of an attractive, calm urban ambiance accommodating hedonistic slow practices of the urban realm. Conversely, the functionalization of slow active mobilities is not achieved at the expense of the aesthetic, affective, and sensory experience of the urban environment. The evolution and recent pluralization of ‘slow’ practices in this context make visible its strong aesthetic dimension through the acceleration of slow mobility. Pedestrians and cyclists perform accelerated practices with ‘fun’ accessories, such as fixed-gear bikes, skateboard, scooter, Segway.... These accessories tend to answer the demand for mobilities both functional, efficient and fast in daily commute, and that trigger funny, playful, social and sportive experiences of the urban environment.<sup>83</sup> In a context of car congestion, cycling and micro-

mobilities indeed take over the features of emancipating fast mobility first associated with modernist automobility imaginary, renew the assimilation of individual mobility with personal freedom—‘the freedom of cycling’<sup>84</sup>—on a pre-reflexive level, and create new affective and ethical relation to motion and the urban environment. Envisioned infrastructural networks for active mobility accommodate these hybrid practices with aesthetically pleasant mobility infrastructures that allow revivifying urban, sportive, playful and social experiences.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the analysis of mobility infrastructure through the dialectic of fast and slow mobilities reveals the continuous tension between the embodiments of those competing imaginaries in the city materiality. It helps taking account of and understanding diachronically the phenomenological and aesthetic dimensions of mobility infrastructure. This tension explains the evolution from one ‘constellations of mobility’ to another and is at the core of the continuous ‘infrastructuring’ processes that ‘generate complex affects, experiences and atmospheres, “infrastructuring” practices, subjects, atmospheres and environments in diverse ways’.<sup>85</sup> It acknowledges the constant social and material process that creates, strengthens and transforms both practices and infrastructure—sensory-motor ways of being and material world.

This alter-tale of the continuity of the tension between imaginaries of fast and slow mobilities also reveals the evolution of meanings associated with ‘slow’ mobilities over time. Our understanding of speed and slowness are socially constructed. ‘Slow mobility’ is not only a matter of rhythm. It still conveys a series of characteristics because of its historical link to the *promenade*: pleasure mobility, requiring highly qualitative public spaces and underpinned by logic of places.<sup>86</sup> However, the notions of slowness and speed seem to be defined by contrast, following evolving reference norms. First envisioned as a leisure practice associated and spatially constrained to

specific (consumption-oriented) locations, it then became, in a determinist vision of the world, the idealistic mobility to promote a return to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century urban model and sociality. Now, slow mobilities—in their accelerated, sportive, playful and healthy variations—renews their potential to fulfill the need for interconnectivity in the city and replace motorized mobilities in sustainable future, while still offering occasions for hedonistic sensory-motor ways of being. On the contrary, first envisioned as an instantiation of the progress of the society and associated, at the pre-reflexive level, with the practice of freedom and emancipation, speed became gradually associated mostly to air pollution, insecurity and noises. It therefore was acknowledged as non-urban practices in opposition to timeless practices as walking. Nowadays, what makes cycling so special is nonetheless the sense of ability and ubiquity in the management of quotidian rhythms that strongly relates to that of automobility. ‘Future is back’<sup>87</sup> and mobility infrastructure shapes the future again. How, as a society, we define the present time and project ourselves in the future in the light of past experiences—the sense of time—strongly relates that way to the dialectic between fast or slow movements.

This evolution also reveals a broader change in the society engagement with space and time. This article casts light upon the great triple evolution since the 1950s, in the tension between imaginaries of fast and slow mobilities, of the scale of the designed city, of the limits between spaces devoted to speed, slowness, and overlaps, and of valued aesthetics in terms of *ambiance*. First envisioned in connection with the green periphery which stands as an example for the urban renovation, then shrank to the historical city center, the scale of the design city now connects again with the Flemish periphery through the development of landscaped active mobility ‘highways’. The tension between imaginaries of fast and slow mobility appears in the evolution of the limits between spaces of slowness, speed and overlaps. The emerging imaginary of slow mobility tends

to extend to the whole city and to replace the imaginary of fast automobility to enforce regulatory and material *dispositifs* of deceleration and congruent hedonistic practices. Evolving grammars of fast and slow mobilities articulate functionality and aestheticism in all mobility infrastructure—even in automobility infrastructure of the modernist and functionalist city. Over time, arising hybrid infrastructural *dispositifs* and practices of accelerated slow mobility with fun and functional accessories make it possible to appropriate a more ethical ‘poetic of speed’. The traffic calming policies ensure, in that context, the setting of an attractive, calm urban *ambiance* accommodating desirable experiences of sociality and of the urban realm for these new (accelerated) slow mobility practices.

Even though it promotes more ethical mobility, this valuation of deceleration and slow practices of the city is paradoxical in the broader context of scarcity of time and social acceleration described by Hartmut Rosa. It strengthens social inequity between people who have the temporal and spatial capacity to choose to travel fast or slowly—or not to travel—, and people constrained to speed to ‘juggle tiny fragments of time so as to deal with the temporal and spatial constraints that [automobility] itself generates’<sup>88</sup> and therefore pointed at.

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<sup>67</sup> Pelgrims, “Ambiance of Slowness”.

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<sup>69</sup> Pelgrims, “Creating spaces for slowness”.

<sup>70</sup> Redevelopment of the rue de l’Etuve, AVB TP89 793 (1985).

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<sup>85</sup> Merriman, “Mobility Infrastructures,” 87. 30

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