

PAST AND FUTURE INFRASTRUCTURING PROCESSES IN BELGIUM

23rd of May 2019, Metrolab (48 Quai du Commerce, 1000 Bxl)



Mobility scholars have written extensively on mobility infrastructures. First taken as fixed and bounded elements that structure –and upon which rely– mobilities (Hannam, Sheller, et Urry 2006; Merriman 2007), physical infrastructures and materialities of mobility and transport networks were naturalised and their complex character and powerful spatial fixity stressed in terms of infrastructural lock-in (Kaufmann 2014). Nevertheless, they’ve recently started to be seen as ‘mobile moorings’ or ‘relative immobilities’ (Adey 2006). As Merriman puts it, the dialectic of mobility/moorings is indeed problematic: it overlooks ‘the affective resonances, atmospheres, vibrations and enchanting qualities of mobility infrastructures and practices’ (2016). Firstly, the binary of stillness or movement is too simple to account for qualities, temporalities, rhythms (Lefebvre 1992), vibrant materialities (Bennett 2001) and affective resonances across and through infrastructures, environments, vehicles and bodies. Secondly, as long accounted by theories of *ambiance* and atmosphere, infrastructure is not simply static contextual setting for action but immersive environments that are central to mobility experiences and, at the same time, ‘produced and shaped through embodied movements, interactions and techniques of inhabitation’ (Merriman 2016). Both mobility infrastructures and practices get caught up in affective relations and atmospheres that differ around the world because of ‘the convergences and collisions between emotion cultures and material cultures’ (Sheller 2004). According to Sheller, there are such things as ‘emotional geographies’. Those emotional geographies make mobility transition to more sustainable and ethical mobility consumption even more complex to understand and to lead.

Infrastructures are in constant social and material process (requiring physical maintenance, gathering meanings and generating atmospheres). There have been for a decade some research that frame Belgian automobility infrastructure as a social construction, that attempt to theorise the relational processes between the material infrastructure, its sensitive aspect (affect, emotional geographies, enchantment, atmosphere, landscape), the construction stakeholders, the practices ... and how all this evolves in time. None of this has been done yet on active mobility infrastructure in Brussels or in Belgium, despite the fact that it is of great importance in order to engage a cultural transition towards more sustainable mobilities.

The different interventions will give insight, in a diachronic perspective, into the infrastructuring processes. The question is twofold. The morning session is devoted to infrastructuring processes of automobility by which infrastructure spaces, subjects and practices emerged in the past.

David Peleman will document the genesis of the Belgian road project as part of a widely supported and diverse process of urbanization. He'll focus on '*Les Hommes de la Route*' who displayed an increasingly broad social engagement with road infrastructure. Between the State and its engineers, those new actors legitimate the road project (Peleman 2014) and transform it from utopia to ideology (Flichy 2001).

Koenraad Danneel will talk about the creation of a modern, park-like infrastructural landscape. The landscape architect René Pechère and the Service du Plan Vert contribute to the construction of a 'technonatural assemblages' appropriate to the Belgian modern society (Danneels, Notteboom, et De Block 2017). This contribution emphasises the aesthetic dimension of the infrastructuring processes of car mobility.

Claire Pelgrims will examine how Brussels *roadscape* becomes the 'fetish' (Pietz 1985) of a hegemonic fast mobility imaginary which is further stabilised and reinforced in the latter half of the 20th century. The mobilised notion of fetish entangles in new ways the currently overlooked *functional, sensitive* and *social* dimensions of the Brussels automobility infrastructure, explaining the resilient dominance of automobility infrastructure over time and across space.

The afternoon session focusses on how the same infrastructure spaces, subjects and practices could nevertheless evolve in a transition towards more sustainable and ethical mobility. It aims at engaging with this large research agenda and identify possible food for thought from more field-based presentations.

Frederik Depoortere is BikeManagerVélo at the regional administration. He will present the evolution of urban politics of infrastructuring bicycles.

Géry Leloutre is researcher, teacher at ULB and urbanist. His presentation will critically examine, as a planner, the Parkway E40 example of contemporary practices of road calming.

Jean-Philippe Gerkens is a researcher and activist on bicycle mobilities and economies. He will chair the Q&A and the discussion.

Program

09:15	Welcome	13:30	Evolution of urban politics of infrastructuring bicycle – Frederik DEPOORTERE , Bruxelles-Mobilité
09:30	The actors of road construction – David PELEMAN , Ugent	14:15	Contemporary practices of road calming: the example of Parkway E40 – Géry LELOUTRE , ULB
10:15	The relation of roads within the landscape – Koenraad DANNEELS , UAntwerpen	15:00	Coffee break
11:00	Coffee break	15:15	Discussion chaired by Jean-Philippe GERKENS
11:15	The affective dimensions of the roadscape – Claire PELGRIMS , ULB	16:30	Closure of the Study Day
12:00	Lunch		

Registration no later than 20th of May: claire.pelgrims@ulb.ac.be
Registration is free, but mandatory.

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