

Fetishising the Brussels roadscape

Claire Pelgrims 

Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

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Abstract

This explorative paper is an attempt to improve understanding of the material infrastructure and subjective affective investments into it. Building on the concept of “fetish”, it proposes a theoretical framework to analyse the entanglement of the functional, sensitive and social symbolic dimensions of Brussels’ “modern roads” to reinforce and stabilise a social imaginary of fast mobility. Examining technical reports, political discourses, press articles and cultural productions such as movies, TV broadcasts and photographs relating to the infrastructuring process, the paper reveals – beyond the case study – the aesthetic dimension of the modernisation of roads, which relates to symbolic investments in cars. The theoretical framework involves heuristic values when regarded beyond this specific Belgian context. It opens new possibilities for broader interpretations of the mobility infrastructure.

Keywords

Automobility infrastructure, imaginary, twentieth century, fetish

Introduction

French theorists from the 1950s onwards have highlighted the multiple dimensions of the car beyond its practical use.¹ Since the late 1990s, a broad

¹ David Inglis, “Auto Couture”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21:4–5 (2004), 197–219.

Corresponding author:

Claire Pelgrims, Faculté d’Architecture La Cambre Horta, Laboratoire Urbanisme, Infrastructure, Ecologies, Université libre de Bruxelles, Aspirante F.R.S. FNRS, Bruxelles, Belgium.

Email: claire.pelgrims@ulb.ac.be

range of mobility scholars has tried to unfold these social symbolic, material and affective “frames”² – or “social imaginaries”³ – of cars. “Emotional investments in the car go beyond any economic calculation of costs and benefits, and outweigh any reasoned arguments about the public good or the future of the planet”.⁴ They arise from the kinaesthetic feelings about cars mediated through what Sheller calls “emotional geographies”, that is to say, the cultural emotions framing cars according to expectations, patterns and anticipations. Through their speed, security, safety, link to sexuality and career achievement, and freedom facilitation, cars provide status and emotional affect.⁵ Mobility research has revealed cars as means of identification in terms of class and gender,⁶ nationality⁷ and individuality,⁸ as sexual partners,⁹ as items of consumption,¹⁰ possible abodes of privacy, solitude and ritual,¹¹ ceremonial initiations into adulthood, instruments of aggression and skill and potential hobbies.¹² These symbolic investments in cars coincide with a renewed conception of automobility infrastructures. These phenomena have rarely been analysed together, and the aesthetic dimension of the road project is often disregarded by works primarily concerned with its functional dimension.

Other scholars have nevertheless held a long-standing interest in physical infrastructures and transport networks. They have acknowledged social meanings, cultural dimensions and affordances of such supposedly “non-places”.¹³ First centred on “seemingly static mobility infrastructures”, scholars have now shifted their

² A technological frame refers to a shared cognitive worldview that binds different stakeholders together. Master frames are slow changing “structured stories” such one that link mobility to political freedom. Benjamin K. Sovacool and John Axsen, “Functional, Symbolic and Societal Frames for Automobility”, *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 118 (2018), 730–46; Mimi Sheller, “The Emergence of New Cultures of Mobility”, in Frank W. Geels *et al.* (eds), *Automobility in Transition? A Socio-Technical Analysis of Sustainable Transport* (New York NY: Routledge, 2012), 180–202.

³ Social imaginaries are institutions that give meanings to environments and actions. These affective and significant visions of the world organise and give meanings to sensory perceptions and discursive urban knowledge. They’re subject to a double process. The aesthetic experience of the city updates imaginaries. At the same time, imaginaries embody the city materiality, continuously restructuring the city through a plurality of embodiments. Cornelius Castoriadis, *L’institution Imaginaire de la Société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

⁴ Mimi Sheller, “Automotive Emotions”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21:4–5 (2004), 221–42, here 236.

⁵ Sheller, “Automotive Emotions”.

⁶ Linda Steg, “Car Use”, *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 39:2 (2005), 147–62.

⁷ Tim Edensor, “Automobility and National Identity”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21:4–5 (2004), 101–20.

⁸ David Gartman, “Three Ages of the Automobile”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21:4–5 (2004), 169–95.

⁹ Sheller, “Automotive Emotions”, 235.

¹⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la Ville* (Paris: Economica, 2009 [1968]); Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l’Espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1974); Guy Debord, “Situationist Theses on Traffic”, in Ken Knabb (ed. and tran.), *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006).

¹¹ Roland Barthes, “La Voiture: Projection de l’Ego”, in Eric Marty (ed.), *Oeuvres Complètes (1942–1965)* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), t.2 (1962–1967).

¹² Sovacool and Axsen, “Functional, Symbolic and Societal Frames for Automobility”; Jennifer Kent, “Driving to Save Time or Saving Time to Drive?”, *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 65 (2014), 103–15.

¹³ Marc Augé, *Non-lieux* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

attention to the mobile, affective and atmospheric dimensions of infrastructure. They have given insight into the “relational processes of ‘infrastructuring’ by which infrastructured spaces, subjects and practices emerge”.¹⁴ Regarding auto-mobility infrastructure, these researches have taken “automotive emotions” seriously.¹⁵ To inform a socio-technical transition towards more sustainable and “ethical” forms of mobility, they have engaged with the sensitive and social dimensions of automobility. They have aimed at understanding the stubborn persistence of car-based cultures beyond the more functional technical and socio-economic factors that ground “neoclassical” transportation policy and current transition strategies in Belgium,¹⁶ as elsewhere.¹⁷

Important work has recently been done to “understand the affective resonances, atmospheres, vibrations and enchanting qualities of mobility infrastructures and practices” (Figure 1).¹⁸ In line with works on the ambiances¹⁹ of continuously evolving infrastructure – socially, phenomenologically and materially – this paper is an attempt to improve understanding of the material infrastructure and subjective affective investments into it, building on the concept of “fetish”. I epistemologically and methodologically define it as a system of instantiations that, moving from “utopia” to “ideology”,²⁰ materialises and stabilises a social imaginary. The latter embodies the field (infrastructure), the sensitive dimensions (practices, emotions and living together) and the image (picture, narrative, discourse). The new concept helps to illuminate the representative and aesthetic dimensions of the world experienced in intensity. It allows analysis of images (through cultural production as films and photos) on the one hand, and of desires and aesthetic, affective and passionate investments on the other. My explorative approach differs from both functionalist and technical analysis of the road network in transport and urban history,²¹ and from public policies or systemic analyses of the Belgian infrastructure. This includes Ryckewaert’s analyses of how the political and economic interests tie up with spatial and urban planning considerations to guide Belgium’s infrastructural development;²² or Tellier’s enquiry on the agency of

¹⁴ Peter Merriman, “Mobility Infrastructures”, *Mobilities* 11:1 (2016), 83–98; see also Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox, “The Enchantments of Infrastructure”, *Mobilities* 7:4 (2012), 521–36.

¹⁵ Sheller, “Automotive Emotions”, 223.

¹⁶ Wojciech Kębłowski and David Bassens, “All Transport Problems Are Essentially Mathematical”, *Urban Geography* 39:3 (2017), 1–25.

¹⁷ Sovacool and Axsen, “Functional, Symbolic and Societal Frames for Automobility”; Elizabeth Shove, “Beyond the ABC”, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 42:6 (2010), 1273–85.

¹⁸ Merriman, “Mobility Infrastructures”, 86.

¹⁹ Jean-Paul Thibaud, “The Backstage of Urban Ambiances”, *Emotion, Space and Society* 15 (2015), 39–46.

²⁰ Paul Ricœur, *Temps et Récit. Le Temps Raconté* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

²¹ In transport history: “Bestuur der Wegen”, *Annales Des Travaux Publics de Belgique* (1987), 65–112; Ministère des Travaux Publics, *Belgian Roads. From Antiquity to 1980* (Bruxelles: Ministère des Travaux Publics, 1987). In urban history: Serge Jaumain and Chloé Deligne (eds), *L’Expo 58* (Bruxelles: Cri, 2009); Thierry Demey, *Chronique d’une Capitale en Chantier* (Bruxelles: Paul Legrain & C.F.C., 1992), II “DE L’EXPO 58 AU SIÈGE DE LA C.E.E.”.

²² Michael Ryckewaert, *Building the Economic Backbone of the Belgian Welfare State* (Rotterdam: NAI, 2011).



Figure 1. Cas Oorthuys, 1958. Source: © Nederlandse fotomuseum, Rotterdam.

technical administrations developing underground infrastructure to materialise their agenda.²³ My approach ties up with the evolution of traditionally objectifying disciplines, such as geography, that have now undergone a “sensitive” turn.

As for the car itself, automobility infrastructure seems to fulfil many symbolic and affective functions. Three dimensions of automobility infrastructure may be distinguished. The *functional* dimension may be defined as road convenience in terms of accessibility, speed and safety. The *sensitive* dimension refers to the affordances of automobility infrastructure as a sensitive environment, objects of

²³ Céline Tellier, “Corps Technique et Techniques du Corps, Sociologie des Ingénieurs du Souterrain Bruxellois (1950–2010)”, PhD dissertation, ULB (Belgium), 2012.

Table 1. Sources of dependence for the automobility infrastructure.

	Dependence		
	Functional	Sensitive	Social
Attachments to	Offered possibilities	Object/experience (pleasure of driving, visual, haptic, etc.)	Embodied values; procured social capital for individuals; mythical character of roads
Communities	Drivers, traffic engineers	Collectors, sportspersons, hedonists, artists	National, aesthetic communities of drivers
Values	Mobility, accessibility, rationality	Heritage, art, aesthetic	Freedom, emancipation, individualisation, progress; "modern life"
Objects	Networked infrastructure	Aestheticised and desirable engineered structures, collection, pictures	Instantiations of society, achievements, landmarks
Practices	Daily mobility, commuting from home to work	Leisure travel, speeding, cruising	Social distinction, expression of identity, myth construction

seduction and support of aestheticised experiences that bring pleasure and fear and impact the construction of pre-reflexive identity. The *social* dimension relates to values of freedom, democracy, progress and emancipation supported by automobility infrastructure development in representations, narratives and discourses. The three dimensions imply different forms of dependence on the automobility infrastructure. They structure different (emerging, dominant or residual) practices relating to different affects, attachments and communities around different values embodied in different facets of the infrastructure (Table 1). They thus hold important implications for the full understanding of the present dominant automobility. Nonetheless, the entanglement of those three dimensions in the mobility infrastructure to materialise and stabilise mobility imaginaries has not been developed. Dependence on automobility infrastructure, as much as cars, comes out of a complex social construction spreading across the twentieth century.

A theoretical framework may help us to examine the relationships between the functional, sensitive and social dimensions of automobility infrastructure. The definition of "fetish" developed by Pietz may help to build such a framework. We know from Marxist theory that technological networks can become "fetishised" like other elements of the urban environment.²⁴ The concept of

²⁴ Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw, "Fetishizing the Modern City: The Phantasmagoria of Urban Technological Networks", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24:1 (2000), 120–38.

fetish involves a clear comparative and critical dimension. It assumes an impossible, a-symbolic, multicultural perspective. However, Pietz develops the concept far beyond the theory of commodification. His definition is appropriate to diverse objects: modern art, sexual fetishes, and fetishes of primitive religion, technology and commodities and so on.²⁵ From the word's conceptual history via the intercultural context of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the West African coast until today,²⁶ Pietz has brought four recurring themes to light:

“the dependence of the fetish for its meaning and value on a particular order of social relations, which it in turn reinforces”, and “the radical historicity of the fetish’s origin: arising in a singular event fixing together otherwise heterogeneous elements, the identity and power of the fetish consists in its enduring capacity to repeat this singular process of fixation, along with the resultant effect”;

“the untranscended materiality of the fetish: ‘matter’, or the material object, is viewed as the locus of religious activity or psychic investment”, and “the active relation of the fetish object to the living body of an individual: a kind of external controlling organ directed by powers outside the affected person’s will, the fetish represents a subversion of the ideal of the autonomously determined self”.²⁷

These four points may be considered as different types of relations between the functional, the sensitive and the social dimensions of mobility infrastructure. They explain how those dimensions are entangled to materialise and stabilise the dominant imaginary of fast mobility in a system articulating *dispositifs* and internalised dispositions towards acceleration (Figure 2).

In the “Theoretical framework” section of this paper, I outline how the concept of fetish allows a transversal approach, interrelating with different interpretations of automobility infrastructure in mobilities studies. The relationship between the symbolic dimension of the automobility infrastructure and the functional and sensitive dimensions is defined in terms of interdependence. As such, infrastructure depends for its meaning and value upon the hybrid social system of automobility. The last of these includes a dominant culture that erases the political dimension of

²⁵ In that way, the “fetish” concept refers in broader terms to the power of an object to be a collective social object. Resulting from the affective and aesthetic investments in this object – here the modern road – as it “naturally” instantiates predominant social values, it is a power to propel specific behaviours, no necessarily co-related with alienation or oppression processes by elites. See for instance the fetishised pieces of modern art analysed in Deleuze’s essay of aesthetical philosophy, *Différence et Répétition* (Paris: PUF, 1972).

²⁶ The *fetisso* (pidgin term from the Portuguese *feitico*) in the late Middle Ages meant the “witchcraft” performed by the ignorant classes. However, unlike Christian ideas about witchcraft, personification of material objects and fixed belief in an object’s supernatural power were central concepts. The concept helped Enlightenment intellectuals to build their general theory of primitive religion disseminated in the nineteenth century, before being evoked by theoretical discourses in the twentieth century. William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I”, *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (1985), 5–17; William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, II”, *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (1987), 23–45.

²⁷ Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, II”, 23.

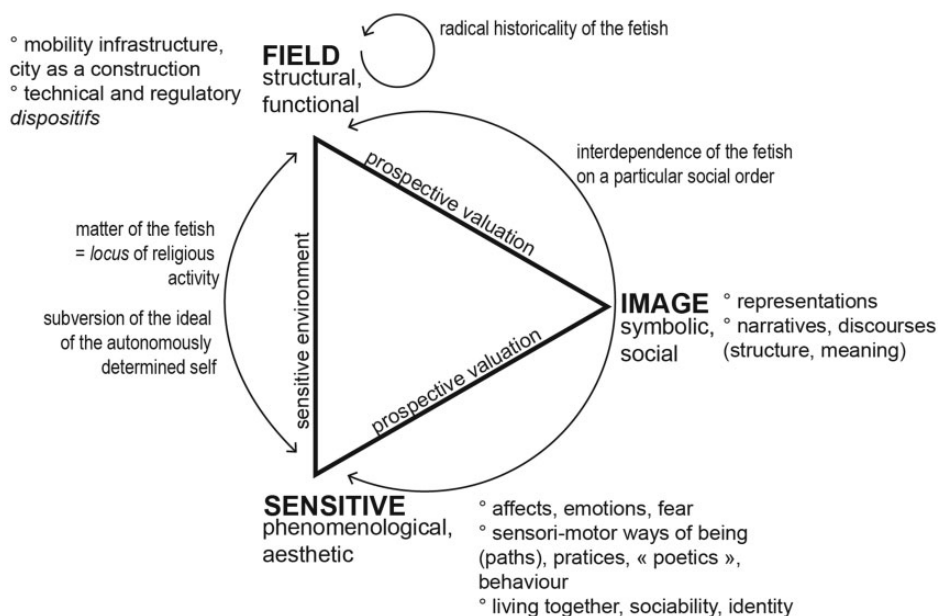


Figure 2. Application of the fetish theory on the three dimensions of automobility infrastructure.

automobility, naturalises the infrastructure and assimilates emancipation and individual mobility. In turn, the automobility infrastructure consolidates dominant social groups of the automobility machinic complex. The functional dimension is reinforced by a snowballing effect, mentioned as the “magic circle” of automobile development (which is also supposed to emancipate society) and the aesthetic experience of the modern road – mediated through cultural productions such as film and photo. This experience updates the imaginary and the aesthetic apprehension of driving, inducing the overturn of the urban, monumental expressivity in favour of a kinetic, tangential one. It thus reinforces the symbolic dimension of the road. The relationships between the functional dimension and the sensitive dimensions of automobility infrastructure are shaped by two logics that are two sides of the same coin. The assimilation of emancipation and individual mobility is achieved on a pre-reflexive level through the pleasures of driving: bodily sensations and feelings of ubiquity and agility in the management of daily rhythms. The excluding infrastructure is practised as a public space, as the “place of communion” of a civilised society of drivers experiencing “positive” freedom. However, it marginalises other mobilities. It also constitutes a network directed by technocracy and experts, which strongly constrains individuals in their travel, intercorporeality, identity and lifestyle.

In the “The fetishisation of the Brussels roadscape” section, I trace the birth of the Brussels roadscape in the early mass motorisation and “infrastructuring” process period of Belgium. The modernisation of the road deeply transformed the urban environment between 1949 and 1975. The deliberate policy of urban renewal began with the setup of the road modernisation plan, which has propelled the steady construction of urban highways in the capital. It ended with the adoption by the Brussels Agglomeration of a moratorium on highway construction that initiated a still difficult and slow reconversion towards a less car-dependent city.²⁸ I examine in the Brussels roadscape how the functional, sensitive and social dimensions of automobility infrastructure are entangled in a system that corresponds to Pietz’s definition. How it embodies the hegemonic fast mobility imaginary that is further stabilised and reinforced. This research is based on (1) discursive archives as technical reports and political discourses published in the *Annales des Travaux Publics* and other official publications, advertisements and articles in the national press or in popular magazines such as *Routes* and *Routes et circulation*, and (2) a selection of non-discursive productions of the second half of the twentieth century such as movies, TV broadcasts and photographs revealing the infrastructuring process.

Theoretical framework

In this section, I adapt Pietz’s four-point definition to the automobility infrastructure in light of mobilities studies to build a new theoretical framework of its fetishistic dimensions. I address this issue in two main ways.

Entanglements of the symbolic with the functional and sensitive dimensions: The dependence of the automobility infrastructure on a particular order of social relations and the radical historicity of its origin

The automobility system makes sense out of Pietz’s first proposition that the fetish depends “for its meaning and value on a particular order of social relations, which in turn it reinforces”.²⁹ As part of the *machinic complex*, the automobility infrastructure constitutes a fetish as it takes on its full significance and purpose from the hybrid social system of automobility, which induces distinctive manners of inhabiting, travelling and socialising, in and through the reshaped time space of automobility.³⁰

It is only because we have adapted the world to cars that cars and roads are now so valuable. By contrast, automobility became almost imperceptible as a social

²⁸ Michel Hubert, “L’Expo 58 et le ‘tout à l’automobile’”, *Brussels Studies*, 22 (2008).

²⁹ Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, II”, 23.

³⁰ Mimi Sheller and John Urry, “The City and the Car”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24:4 (2000), 737–57; see also John Urry, *Sociologie des Mobilités* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005), 69–70.

fact; the normality of automobile driving distracted critics from its political dimension to only its economic and cultural effects.³¹ “Naturalisation”³² is the process that erases the links between the technological network and the social and environmental conditions of its production process (inherent work and social power relations, transformation of nature through human works). The urban space became part of everyday life, and as such, naturalised, timeless and out of nature.³³ The technological network was afterwards attributed a value, which highlights its exceptional character. It became the support, not only of materiality, but also of promises and dream of a better society and a happier life that involves new aesthetics. The value of the transported commodity slipped into the infrastructure: car values of freedom and emancipation.³⁴

Every technology and technological network is supported in its development by different discourses that, beyond the advertising discourse, reformulate the imaginary of the conception stage to conciliate the developers and the users, and that participates in the creation of a new, shared, socio-technical frame that stabilises the technology.³⁵ In the case of automobility infrastructure, those legitimating discourses and narratives depend on

- An ordered and rational vision of the modern city, which traffic engineers can describe as an essentially mathematical issue.³⁶ The technical network produced by science is presumed to have the power to change the world for the better in a rational, epistemological context.³⁷
- The assimilation of personal mobility and personal freedom, which spreads from the car to the infrastructure and underlies the Western dominant culture of automobility.³⁸

However naturalised, timeless and out of nature, automobility infrastructure strengthens the diverse actors who fully embraced the fetish and helped in “infrastructuring” the city: state administration and politicians, engineers, builders and oil lobby, drivers, and so on. As Furness puts it, the technological choices and desires of society – particularly in terms of transport and mobility – are constrained by strong and specific institutions and companies’ imperatives of

³¹ Sudhir Chella Rajan, “Automobility and the Liberal Disposition”, in Steffen Böhm (ed.), *Against Automobility* (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006), 113–29, here 117.

³² David E. Nye, “Foreword”, in Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller (eds), *The World Beyond the Windshield: Roads and Landscapes in the United States and Europe* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), xi–xiv.

³³ Kaika and Swyngedouw, “Fetishizing the Modern City”, 122–23.

³⁴ Mathieu Flonneau, “Read Tocqueville, or Drive?”, *History and Technology* 26:4 (2010), 379–88, 379.

³⁵ Patrice Flichy, “La Place de l’Imaginaire dans l’Action Technique”, *Réseaux*, 109:5 (2001), 52–73.

³⁶ Kębłowski and Bassens, “All Transport Problems are Essentially Mathematical”.

³⁷ Gilbert Simondon, *Du Mode d’Existence des Objets Techniques* (Paris: Mouton, 1969).

³⁸ See Bruce Seely, *Building the American Highway System* (Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press, 1987); Cotten Seiler, *Republic of Drivers* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Zack Furness, *One Less Car* (Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press, 2010).

profit.³⁹ The construction of roads indeed empowered professionals who at first envisage, build, reproduce and legitimate construction in terms of efficiency, attractiveness and modern progress. It also benefits economic and political elites by raising their accessibility to international institutions and trade centres and by supporting the oil, road and car industries.

The second dimension of the fetish is the radical historicity of its origin: “arising in a singular event fixing together otherwise heterogenous elements, the identity and power of the fetish consist[s] of its enduring capacity to repeat this singular process of fixation, along with the resultant effect”.⁴⁰ The arising fetish is an assemblage of roads, buildings, signs, beliefs, fears and affects, images, values, autonomous humans and machine practices. In particular, I look here at the assimilation of automobility with personal freedom and social emancipation. How is it renewed at each driving experience as the modern road network expands and as the drivers’ community increases?

First, American *Hommes de la route* has noticed, since the 1960s, a very profitable (for oil and road industries) snowball effect in car development. The extension of the road network encourages motorists to drive more, inducing by a “fleet effect”: more individuals buy cars, thus increasing automobile traffic and the need for road network development.⁴¹ Insofar as the development of automobility infrastructure was then perceived as allowing the democratisation of society, this virtuous circle of positive feedback is quickly qualified as “magic”! It fixes by magic a major problem of society.

Second, the symbolic dimension of the modern road is also supported by new aesthetics in a dual sense: a new way of experiencing the city, and new taste and sensitivity to beauty. The crisis from which the fetish arises is – as for the modern art “fetish” – a poetical meeting, a nondescript transaction with the environment, whose remembrance it deeply affects. The assemblage of buildings, roads and nature in a roadscape stands as a modernist “aesthetical unit”. It constitutes the scene of a better society and the decor of a happier life. It relies on aesthetical logics shared by the different urban actors and linked to the car experience. High-rise buildings and groups of trees along the road create a new kinetic and tangential monumentality.⁴² Automobility bridges, flyovers and other new typologies of engineered structure were subject to careful design. They became landmarks of technologically formatted practices and representations of progress defined both rationally or functionally and aesthetically. As form follows function, the smooth fluent and elegant shape of the highway ramps, for example, materialised the

³⁹ Furness, *One Less Car*, 6.

⁴⁰ Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, II”, 23.

⁴¹ Gabriel Dupuy, “From the ‘Magic Circle’ to ‘Automobile Dependence’”, *Transport Policy* 6:1 (1999), 1–17, here 1.

⁴² Géry Leloutre and Claire Pelgrims, “Le Roadscape Bruxellois. Le Rôle de la Route Dans la Rénovation Urbaine ou la Coproduction d’une Infrastructure Paysagère”, in Tatiana Debroux, Judith le Maire, Yannick Vanhaelen and Claire Pelgrims (eds), *L’Entrée en Ville. Aménager, Expérimenter, Représenter* (Bruxelles: Editions de l’Université, 2017), 43–62.

perfect rational curve delivering comfort, vehicle stability and grip despite the vehicle's tendency to resist turning. Their experience renewed the pleasures of driving, and it defined driving as the best way to experience the city. This aesthetical crisis is restored and mediated by cultural production via photography and films. Those cultural productions have a pedagogical effect on society; they further transform how people look at automobility infrastructure. Automobility and automobility infrastructure representations abound in arts and literature, even if they are rarely analysed. Engineered structures appeared in movies because they are strongly telegenic with their exceptional dimensions, and they have a great dramatic potential.⁴³ More specifically, they are bound up with complex affective economies. Even humble car parks "vibrate and resonate with a complex array of affects and atmospheres – from oppressive, dystopic affects, to nostalgic feelings – and these atmospheres are in turn re-engineered by artists, film-makers and performance artists".⁴⁴

Between the functional and the sensitive: Untranscended materiality of the fetish and the fetish's active relation to an individual's living body

Furthermore, the automobility infrastructure seems to answer promises from contemporary liberal society in terms of freedom, individualisation and equality at a sensitive, pre-reflexive level. Mobility became a metaphor for progress and automobility infrastructure "the locus of religious activity or psychic investment".⁴⁵ The political and material construction of roads can indeed enchant, as roads reinvigorate the promises of speed and connectivity, freedom, integration and prosperity.⁴⁶

Roads can "enchant" not only as "material instantiations of dominant narratives", but also through their experience, material and affective engagements during the construction: by the overcoming of material and social resistance to the future, of political fragmentation and of economic fragility.⁴⁷ Infrastructures make the level of technical progress of society and its democratisation tangible. As such, they are also spaces of statecraft.⁴⁸

After construction, roads also enable direct liberal experience of freedom: that of a free person whose actions are his/her own.⁴⁹ Today, one's scowl at automobility, at best, may be nostalgic but, at that time, cars were experienced in the present. The very assimilation of personal mobility and personal freedom mentioned before arises from the embodied experience and pleasures of the driver to fight against the constraints on free movement.

⁴³ Claude Prelorenzo, "Le Mythe Cinématographique des Infrastructures", in Dominique Rouillard (ed.), *Imaginaires d'Infrastructure* (Paris: Harmattan, 2009), 15–27.

⁴⁴ Merriman, "Mobility Infrastructures", 89.

⁴⁵ Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, II", 23.

⁴⁶ Harvey and Knox, "The Enchantments of Infrastructure".

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 524.

⁴⁸ Harvey and Knox, "The Enchantments of Infrastructure".

⁴⁹ Chella Rajan, "Automobility and the Liberal Disposition", 113.

Speed performance provides on one hand particularly exciting bodily sensations in this embodied practice: feeling at one with vehicle and surroundings, feeling and hearing motor vibrations and wind, tasting dust, seeing the landscape differently through the windscreen, sensual car affordances on different infrastructure, and so on. The urban roadscape gives a landscaped apprehension of the urban “flowscapes” or even “taskscape”: “the ballet of road flows that innerves the city and seems to make a symphony”.⁵⁰ It is not the car anymore, but the driving that becomes mythical: “*le seul champ possible où investir des phantasmes de puissance et d'invention*”.⁵¹

On the other hand, the pleasures of driving emerge from feelings of ubiquity and agility in daily rhythm management. Driving raises potential destination horizons. It is the promise of adventures – individualised paths off the rails, driven by autonomous leadership, in a protective shell⁵² – deeply rooted in the freedom of movement at the heart of nature tourism⁵³ and North American automobile imaginary. Driving also gives better control in the “fight against time” that has characterised accelerated modernity. It is an experience of “real, positive, practical freedom” already defended in Europe by the Saint-Simonians during the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ For them, entry into mobility constitutes the best vector of the inexorable democratisation of occidental society.⁵⁵ Mobility demonstrates and realises autonomy, and real mobility can only be enacted if autonomous – otherwise it is a passive displacement.⁵⁶ Speed obsession, struggle against distances and widespread circulation are then linked to *emancipatory technical progress*.⁵⁷ Through the progress brought in terms of mobility’s technical acceleration,⁵⁸ democratised automobility provides the means for human emancipation to realise utopia. The infrastructure therefore fits into the process of civilisation transformation.⁵⁹ Sudhir Chella Rajan further discusses the evolution inside liberal thought from a negative freedom (“freedom from”) from the Enlightenment, to a positive freedom (“freedom to”). Joined values of “autonomy” and “mobility” allow automobility, as practice, to reinforce liberal thought without being theorised by it.⁶⁰ This autonomy refers to individual autonomy, and that of the object or machine

⁵⁰ Samuel Bordreuil, “Culture, Attentions Visuelles et Orchestrations des Mobilités”, in Sylvain Allemand, François Ascher and Jacques Lévy (eds), *Les Sens du Mouvement* (Paris: Belin, 2004), 207–15, here 213. Own translation.

⁵¹ Barthes, “La Voiture”.

⁵² Mike Featherstone, “Automobilities”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21:4–5 (2004), 1–24, here 1.

⁵³ Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1991), 30 quoted by Urry, *Sociologie des Mobilités*, 73.

⁵⁴ Michel Chevalier, “Les Bateaux à Vapeur de l’Ouest”, New Orleans, 8 janvier 1835, *Lettres sur l’Amérique du Nord*. Cited by Flonneau, “Read Tocqueville, or Drive?”, 382.

⁵⁵ Mathieu Flonneau and Vincent Guigueno, “Lectures Contemporaines de Michel Chevalier”, *Pour Mémoire* 3 (2007), 104–10, here 104.

⁵⁶ Steffen Böhm et al., “Impossibilities of Automobility”, in Steffen Böhm et al. (eds.), *Against Automobility* (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006), 4.

⁵⁷ Jean Ollivro, *L’homme à Toutes Vitesses* (Rennes: PUR, 2000), 26.

⁵⁸ Hartmut Rosa, *Aliénation et Accélération*, Thomas Chaumont (tran.) (Paris: Découverte, 2012).

⁵⁹ Flonneau, “Read Tocqueville, or Drive?”, 380.

⁶⁰ Chella Rajan, “Automobility and the Liberal Disposition”, 123.

owning movement capacity (automatic, automata, automobile, etc.). This twin resonance suggests the way the hybrid assemblage of the automobile driver was described by Haraway⁶¹ that makes speed performance feel so special.

Pietz has also defined the fetish as “a kind of external controlling organ, directed by powers outside the affected person’s will; the fetish represents a subversion of the ideal of the autonomously determined self”.⁶² In short, it is somewhat a remote control. Indeed, automobility infrastructure “forces people to juggle tiny fragments of time ... to deal with the temporal and spatial constraints that it itself generates”.⁶³ If the freedom of the road indeed remains, it also coerces to an intense flexibility. Alienating technical acceleration dilutes time as distance to cover increases, so that automobility stays as the only solution. More specifically, automobility infrastructure is a regulated road network, constraining individuals in their movements and their sensorial intercorporeality.⁶⁴ Drivers engage in choreography orchestrated by technocracy and “experts”, ruled through mode prioritisation, direction of traffic, traffic light timing, speed limits, stop and rotation, and so on. Automobility in this way produces “modern”, “civilised” individuals.⁶⁵ Their quality is attested by the successful driving test (which, in many countries, constitutes a ceremonial initiation into adulthood), and by respect for the road code as a governmental enforcement device.⁶⁶

At the same time, “Car travel rudely interrupts the taskscapes of others [...], whose daily routines are merely obstacles to the high-speed traffic that cuts mercilessly through slower-moving pathways and dwellings”.⁶⁷ The imperative of driving marginalises pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users outside the *public*, outside public space more and more transformed into public roads by civil society⁶⁸ as the number of drivers increases.⁶⁹ The definition of the marginalised otherness allows the society of drivers to define itself in opposition to it.⁷⁰ In dominant narratives, driving is then participating in the social inclusion process⁷¹ and expressing one’s citizenship.⁷² Hence, infrastructure is also “a place of community, almost a place of communion around founding values”.⁷³

⁶¹ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁶² Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, II”, 23.

⁶³ Sheller and Urry, “The City and the Car”.

⁶⁴ Urry, *Sociologie des Mobilités*.

⁶⁵ Furness, *One Less Car*, 6.

⁶⁶ Peter Merriman, “Materiality, Subjectification, and Government”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23:2 (2005), 235–50.

⁶⁷ Sheller and Urry, “The City and the Car”, 745.

⁶⁸ Urry, *Sociologie des Mobilités*, 193.

⁶⁹ See “club effect”, Dupuy, “From the ‘Magic Circle’ to ‘Automobile Dependence’”.

⁷⁰ Furness, *One Less Car*, 8.

⁷¹ Flonneau, “Read Tocqueville, or Drive?”, 380; Seiler, *Republic of Drivers*, 130–35. See also the US expression “Liberating, individuating, revivifying, equalizing”.

⁷² Furness, *One Less Car*, 7.

⁷³ Marie Bernard, “L’espace Fantasmé de la Route Américaine”, in Dominique Rouillard (ed.), *Imaginaires d’Infrastructure*, 39. Own translation.

Driving has also become a key practice in the constitution at the pre-reflexive level of an “aesthetic community” in the way Parret has put it:⁷⁴

The ways of engaging in the community are anything but reflexive, and play in something as inter-sensitivity, shared eroticisation. [...] because the engagement is precisely aesthetically overloaded, the perceptual investment, sensations, sight, audition ... play an essential role [...].⁷⁵

Individuals daily undertook the lonely and collective experience of immanent, inter-sensitive, quasi-reflexive “pulsing together” (*vibrer ensemble*). This pre-reflexive experience is even intensified by immersion in co-presence in the infrastructure. Moreover, interactions with others and with the environment awake and enact through emotions internalised, incorporated values.⁷⁶ This echoes Anderson’s argument about the American national “imagined community” performed through a daily ritual shared by millions of people – an “extraordinary mass ceremony”.⁷⁷ Building on Anderson’s argument, Furness proposed the daily car commute as a key practice in defining “what it means to *do* like an American”.⁷⁸ The persistent national identity constituents are indeed unreflective and grounded in quotidian spaces and practices.⁷⁹ Beyond national identity, the perception of the cross-border network also gives a sense of belonging to a civilised human community as already discussed by the Saint-Simonians.

The fetishisation of the Brussels roadscape

I now turn to an illustration of the framework developed in the “Theoretical framework” section through the case study of the Brussels roadscape.

The modern road largely transformed the landscape and the urban environment. More importantly, its modernisation introduced the firm belief that modern road was essential to anyone expecting a life in a modern, urban and civilised world. The modern road was first promoted by engineers and then normalised by society as a whole, notably by the increasing number of drivers. As highlighted by Peleman in his analysis of the Belgian Road Federation magazines *Routes* (1950–52) and *Routes*

⁷⁴ Herman Parret, *L’Esthétique de la Communication* (Bruxelles: Ousia, 1999) quoted by Jean-Louis Genard, “La Consistance des Êtres Collectifs”, *SociologieS* (2017), § 63. Those aesthetic communities don’t prevent others’ intentional communities as Automobile club to form.

⁷⁵ Genard, “La Consistance des Êtres Collectifs”, § 64–66. Own translation.

⁷⁶ Jean-Louis Genard, “Une Sociologie des Emotions ‘Modo Aesthetico’?”, *Raisons Pratiques* 29 (2020), forthcoming.

⁷⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London & New York NY: Verso, 2006 [1983]) quoted by Furness, *One Less Car*, 7.

⁷⁸ Furness, *One Less Car*, 7. See also for US and Europe, Peter Merriman and Rhys Jones, “Nations, Materialities and Affects”, *Progress in Human Geography* 41:5 (2017), 600–17.

⁷⁹ Examining British and Indian car cultures, Edensor, “Automobility and National Identity”.

et circulation (1953–62), the normalisation of the modern road has been operated in Belgium by a double narrative that established the infrastructure as a public good.⁸⁰

The first narrative is that of the modern road as the backbone of a new, modern, ordered and prosperous nation. Developed by the engineers and the Road Administration, directed by Henri Hondermarcq, this narrative suggested that the scientific approach of the modernisation would guarantee precise and direct – mathematical – effects on quotidian life and on the spatial construction of the entire nation. Avoiding the collapse of the city into a chaotic state, only the intervention of engineers on the road could restore a public civil life. Between 1950 and 1975, the large transformations of the built environment and skyline of Brussels were designed to contain urban exodus and to position the city in the international context as an important third sector centre: the *Carrefour de l'Occident*.⁸¹ The common ambition of urban renovation was to be realised through the leverage effect of public roads.⁸² The constitution of a Road Fund in 1955 and the empowerment of the Road Administration in a dedicated department constitute a pillar of public means for urban renovation. This narrative relies on a specific, modernist comprehension of circulation and mobility as an indicator of the vitality and health of the city – a vision built on the analogy between the urban body and the living organism.⁸³ Infrastructures are (pseudo-)scientifically dimensioned to ensure the continuity of the traffic for envisaged car flows, and the non-interference of flows between different directions and different transport means.⁸⁴ Beyond the different cultural framing of automobilities, there clearly appears the strong influence of the American example, which had stood as a model of progress for Belgian society in many aspects of daily life.⁸⁵ Engineers were formed by the new science of traffic developed in the United States,⁸⁶ and they based their prescriptions on the objectifying description through tables, graphs and maps. Outside the traffic engineering point of view centred on order and rationality, infrastructure does not mean the same or have the same value.

The second narrative is that of the modern road as necessary for modern life. Through advertising targeting drivers in popular magazines such as *Routes* and *Routes et circulation*, the members of the automobile lobby shared the clear state project of road modernisation with a larger audience.⁸⁷ This group of car

⁸⁰ David Peleman, "L'enchantement par l'infrastructure", in Dominique Rouillard (ed.), *L'infraville* (Paris: Archibooks, 2011), 233–41.

⁸¹ Ministère des Travaux Publics, *Bruxelles: Carrefour de l'Occident* (Bruxelles: Ministère des Travaux Publics, 1956).

⁸² Leloutre and Pelgrims, "Le Roadscape Bruxellois".

⁸³ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone* (New York NY: Norton, 1994).

⁸⁴ Tellier, "Corps Technique et Techniques du Corps".

⁸⁵ See the retail model of the shopping centres. Yannick Vanhaelen and Gery Leloutre, "Shopping Centres as Catalyst for New Multifunctional Urban Centralities", in Tom Avermaete and Janina Gosseye (eds), *Shopping Town Europe, 1945–1975* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 51–64.

⁸⁶ Pierre Lannoy, "L'automobile Comme Objet de Recherche, Chicago, 1915–1940", *Revue Française de Sociologie* 44:3 (2003), 497–529.

⁸⁷ Peleman, "L'enchantement par l'infrastructure".

amateurs, enthusiast drivers and members of car, road and oil industries translated and made the technological benefits of the modern road tangible. The expected impacts would have covered not only improvements in energy consumption and comfort in car travel, but also quotidian life: improved education, information, health and prosperity, happier life, more friends⁸⁸ (Figure 3). The third figure from Esso's advertising series represents an "appropriate" scene of quotidian life, in a modern, civilised and ordered society. It exemplifies the collective vision of the good life, the normative discourses, images and symbols of the dominant, Western "culture of automobility" that turns utopia into ideology.⁸⁹ These normative discourses rely on the assimilation of individual mobility and personal freedom: "The road and the car [...] increasingly free men from the slavery of collective transport, offering a chance of escape and giving them back an individual freedom that give them back their personality".⁹⁰ The modern road promises a bright, ethical, car-oriented and modern urban life. This echoes the progressive impetus around the first post-war universal exhibition, which took place under the Atomium in 1958. This event drastically accelerated the implementation of the Brussels urban highway network, which was presented as necessary to welcome the 42 million visitors.

In turn, automobility infrastructure strengthened the actors who promoted its modernisation. As we have seen, the social status of the engineers and their impact is improved; the modern road gives better access to political and trade centres (World Trade Centre, European Union, commercial headquarters), which are concentrated in the city centre; the construction of the road network induces an increase in traffic, oil consumption and car purchases – strengthening all car-related industries entangled in a more and more international network.⁹¹ The car manufacturing industry in Belgium, for example, was then mainly an assemblage base for international – mostly American – companies to supply Europe and to adjust car production.⁹²

This entanglement of all car-related industries around the magic circle of automobile development also answers the second dimension of the fetish: its ability to renew itself. I have not found in the archives any reference as such to the Belgian magic circle of automobile development. However, the road is described by the engineers as a vector of economic and social evolution for the country as a whole, presupposing a snowball effect of emancipation of society through improved access to modern roads and car purchases. In 1970, Lefèvre ended his report on the development of the Brussels Road Plan with the advantages of a meshed highways network (*"le filet auquel chacun pourra s'accrocher"*) to enhance the

⁸⁸ Advertising series by Esso entitled "Meilleures routes = Meilleures vies", published in *Routes* between 1950 and 1951.

⁸⁹ Flichy, "La Place de l'Imaginaire dans l'Action Technique".

⁹⁰ Henri Hondemarcq, "Le Rôle et l'Avenir des Routes Belges", *Bulletin de la Société Royale Belge des Ingénieurs et des Industriels* 1 (1953), 1–27, here 11–12. Own translation.

⁹¹ See the concept of "global petroleumscape" developed by Carola Hein, "Oil Spaces", *Journal of Urban History* 44:5 (2018), 887–929.

⁹² Henri Houben, "Les Restructurations dans l'Industrie Automobile en Belgique", *Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP* 2295-96 (2016), 5–71.

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314 •
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Figure 3. Example from Esso advertising campaign “Better roads = Better life” in *Routes*, 1951, no. 7, p. 314. Source: ©ExxonMobil.

different regions of the country.⁹³ Hence the connection to the road network emancipates: having access to urban highways, having highways within the boundaries of the municipality, is taking part in the world of progress. Automobility infrastructure construction became mandatory for public authorities.

Modern roads have also influenced the aesthetic of the urban renovation.⁹⁴ The *Brussels roadscape* developed at an urban scale what landscaper René Pechère called a “modern, park-like infrastructural landscape” adjusted to the new ethical modern society (Figure 1).⁹⁵ Pechère was in charge of the revegetation plan of the infrastructure: the Green Plan. To articulate infrastructure development and nature, it recalled the aesthetics of the highways, and it constructed visual and cinematic sequences with modernist aesthetical units made of roads and high-rise buildings in green open spaces.⁹⁶ Road administrations and politics wrote precise reports in the *Annales des Travaux Publics* on aesthetical and technological achievements in road conception and realisation.⁹⁷ Brussels’ roadscape articulates that way of functionality and modern aestheticism,⁹⁸ and it reinforces the imaginary of fast mobility through the co-constitution of motion and emotion in the infrastructure.

The new aesthetic also covers renewed experiences of the city. Various cultural productions, notably television, cinema and photos, manifest the transformation of how people look at the city from, with and through automobility infrastructure. The promotion of a new form of monumentality in the Brussels roadscape is followed by the numerous representations of this cinematic landscape from inside the car in television broadcasts.⁹⁹ Furthermore, opening scenes on the roadscape in Belgian movies have become classic ones. For example, the opening scene of Chantal Akerman’s *Toute une nuit* (1982), showing night traffic on Mont des Arts, Place Royale and on the Koekelberg Flyover in the first 2 min of the film; or that of Marc Didden’s *Brussels by Night* (1983) on the boulevard Adolphe Max and against the Brussels skyline; or again that of Samy Szlingerbaum’s *Bruxelles – Transit* (1979), where automobile traffic in front of the Midi station answers the circulation of trains on the platforms. Those opening scenes are ways among others to set the stage that, however, fits in the broader evolution. In the 1950s,

⁹³ Paul Lefèvre, “Autoroutes 1971 – Bientôt un ‘Réseau!’”, *Annales des Travaux Publics de Belgique* 2 (1970), 129.

⁹⁴ Leloutre and Pelgrims, “Le Roadscape Bruxellois”.

⁹⁵ Koenraad Danneel, Bruno Notteboom and Greet De Block, “The Garden Territory”, in *ECLAS Conference 2017 – Proceedings* (London: University of Greenwich, 2017).

⁹⁶ “Le Quartier du XX^e siècle. De la place Madou à la place Rogier, Zone verte avec des immeubles-tours”, *La Lanterne* 17 February 1961, 3.

⁹⁷ Paul Lefèvre, “L’Aménagement Routier de Bruxelles”, *Annales des Travaux Publics de Belgique* 1 (1959), 45–71; See also the representations in Ministère des Travaux Publics, *Intercommunale Pour les Autoroutes de la Périphérie de Bruxelles*, 15 September 1973, AVB Demey 1028.

⁹⁸ Leloutre and Pelgrims, “Le Roadscape Bruxellois”.

⁹⁹ “La Petite Ceinture de Bruxelles est Ouverte”, *Actualités Belgavox* (Bruxelles, 1957); “Le Tournant de l’Urbanisme Bruxellois”, *Antenne Soir* (Bruxelles, 1978); Françoise Carton, “Urbanisme à Bruxelles”, *Antenne Soir* (Bruxelles, 1982); “Vivre à Bruxelles”, *Bulletin D’information* (Bruxelles, 1985); “Voir la ville”, *TV scolaire* (Bruxelles, 1965).

the way narrative was “focalised” in movies changed at the international level to stage the new apprehension of the city allowed by automobility.¹⁰⁰ Movies became the “fetish factories” that entered engineered structures in the mythical dimension.¹⁰¹ The aesthetic of automobility infrastructure poetically refers in those three film extracts to that of the night. It recalls Marie Bernard’s description of the American road, when the landscape disappears at night: “It only subsists and shows on the road on which the automobile flow comes alive, hoisting infrastructure to the level of *monument*”.¹⁰² The light shows evoke a space of dreams, of freedom, “where everything is possible”, which resonates with and reinforces libertarian imaginary of automobility infrastructure. It is the “medium of representation of a territory innervated by illusory, dreamed travel but not truly covered”¹⁰³ (Figure 4). In Cas Oorthuys’s famous photo series of post-war Brussels, the aestheticisation of the poetical relation between night and the roadscape also refers to the urban, festive, animated atmosphere.¹⁰⁴

Modernisation is also a theme in the photos Cas Oorthuys took of Brussels in the run-up to Expo 58, the event that so profoundly transformed the city. The photographer neither contests nor champions those changes; his photos depict the experiential possibilities that arise out of the new, meaningful connections.¹⁰⁵

Automobility media mythologising has sometimes been ambivalent, even trivialising automobility. But in broader terms, cinematic images are magnifying and increasing the desire for automobility infrastructure. In a way, then, it repeats the singular process of fetish production. Cinema mediated even the embodied practices and sensations of speeding, which reveal, through performative emotions, the embodied values of individual mobility and personal freedom. In Jerzy Skolimowski’ *Le départ* (1967), the very excitation of racing is communicated to the audience in the driving scene on the Brussels roadscape: Meeûs Square, Botanical Garden Boulevard, Soignes forest, and so on. After engineers’ and industrial actors’ narratives, artists’ creations reinforce and stabilise fast mobility imaginary. The above-mentioned creations interweave bodily performative emotions, incorporating values of individual mobility and personal freedom, and sensory-motor processes.

The modern road also reinvigorates the promises of connectivity, social emancipation and well-being on a pre-reflexive level. The construction of some engineered structures challenges the Road Administration, engineers and construction

¹⁰⁰ Will Straw, “Cinematic Topographies and the 24-hour Cycle”, in Guillaume Devron et al. (eds.), *Chronotopies* (Grenoble: Elya, 2017), 32–41.

¹⁰¹ Prelorenzo, “Le Mythe Cinématographique des Infrastructures”, 15.

¹⁰² Bernard, “L’espace Fantasmé de la Route Américaine”, 32. Own translation and highlight.

¹⁰³ Bernard, “L’espace Fantasmé de la Route Américaine”, 30. Own translation.

¹⁰⁴ Cas Oorthuys, *Bruxelles, 1946–1956* (Bruxelles: Plaizier, 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Mil De Kooning and Gunther De Wit (eds), *40 Years of Plaizier in 10 Episodes* (Brussels: BOZAR, Plaizier, 2017).



Figure 4. Cas Oorthuys, 1949. Source: © Nederlandse fotomuseum, Rotterdam.

firms. The articles on the modernisation of the road network in the *Annales des Travaux Publics* mention the difficulties in construction that engineers had to overcome, while also avoiding interrupting traffic: existing infrastructure and buildings, soil condition, groundwater table, and so on.¹⁰⁶ Once completed, people perceive this technical infrastructure as a tangible amelioration of their living standard and human leadership on its own fate. Furthermore, the modern “American” crossroad (with bypass tunnel) and other breath-taking engineered

¹⁰⁶ Paul Lefèvre, “L’Aménagement Routier de Bruxelles”.



Figure 5. Crowd gathered at the inauguration of the Porte de Namur tunnel. "Sous la Porte de Namur", *Soir* 21 April 1967, I. AVB DD 529.

structures (flyovers, bridges and tunnels) fascinated and were religiously hailed as the manifestation of the Belgians' technical achievement. The national press widely covered inaugurations that gathered a large crowd¹⁰⁷ (Figure 5). Drivers were

¹⁰⁷ "Sous la Porte de Namur", 21 April 1967, AVB DD. 529; Hugues Vehenne, "L'inauguration de la Petite Ceinture. Six Cents Millions, Seize Mois de Travail...", *Le Soir* 29 September 1957, 1, 5, AVB

lining up to ride the new road. Infrastructure became, at a national scale and in the capital, an important vector of attractiveness. As such, the modern road also became a space of statecraft, symbols of politicians' contribution to the nation and key campaign arguments. The attractive positioning of Brussels as the "*Carrefour de l'Occident*" through a central position in the European highway network is presented as a major achievement.

The modern road was seen to play a role in the democratisation process. It enabled the direct liberal experience of freedom. The film *Le Départ*, mentioned earlier, exemplifies the pleasures that drivers could experience (speed performance, bodily sensations) in this brand new "loosened" urban landscape. The road also raised the capacities of individuals: "the road [is] an extension of each individual that multiplies possibilities and means of action in all areas without standardising them".¹⁰⁸ Belgian automobility thus constitutes a major expression of freedom, which, however, produces and reproduces normalised ethics and behaviours. The setting of a driving licence also distinguished healthy people from disabled, young and old people.¹⁰⁹ The rapidly increasing motorisation rate¹¹⁰ marginalised pedestrians, cyclists and public transport outside the public space. Tramways were put below ground level to ensure traffic fluidity on the surface; pedestrians saw their pavements reduced and interrupted while they were expected to wander in specific commercial and touristic pedestrian areas and galleries; cycle lanes disappeared with the modernisation of the road. At the pre-reflexive level, practising the automobility infrastructure gives a sense of belonging to an "aesthetic community" of modern and civilised drivers. They experience the national specificities of the aesthetic and kinaesthetic materialities of the roadscape, and they are nonetheless connected to the emerging European society through the European highway network.

Conclusion

To conclude, one encounters epistemological difficulties in considering the inter-relations of functional, sensitive and social-symbolic dimensions of automobility infrastructure. Analysing the renewed conception of automobility infrastructure from the 1950s in relation to the coinciding symbolic investment in cars helps to improve the understanding of the material infrastructure with affective and aesthetic investments into the "modern road". To address these difficulties, I have proposed a theoretical framework based on the concept of "fetish". Defined transversally and transdisciplinary by Pietz, the concept holds heuristic value to

Fauconnier 580; Ph. V., "Dimanche, 16h11, Feu Vert Pour le Tunnel", *La Libre Belgique* 1 September 1986, AVB Demey 1026.

¹⁰⁸ Hondermarcq, "Le Rôle et l'Avenir des Routes Belges", 12.

¹⁰⁹ "Le Permis de Conduire: Les Démarches", *Les Volants* (1966); "Bientôt un Permis de Conduire en Belgique", *Bulletin D'information* (Belgique, 1962).

¹¹⁰ The Belgian motorisation grew from 37 cars in 1952 to 213 cars per 1000 inhabitants in 1970. Houben, "Les Restructurations dans l'Industrie Automobile en Belgique", 11.

consider the entanglement between the three dimensions to materialise and stabilise fast mobility imaginary. It challenges and opens new possibilities for interpretations of the mobility infrastructure. Exemplified by the Brussels roadscape, it explains the dominant and spatial extent of automobility infrastructure, which deeply affects transition strategies towards sustainable mobility, despite the long-standing European critics of automobility's impacts on cities.¹¹¹ Methodologically, the concept also helps to investigate the representative and aesthetic dimensions of the modern road through a close attention to film, photography and pictures.

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ORCID iD

Claire Pelgrims  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2750-1641>

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¹¹¹ Alfred Sauvy, *Les Quatre Roues de la Fortune* (Paris: Flammarion, 1968); Hans Dollinger, *Die Totale Autogesellschaft* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1972); Ivan Illich, *Energie et Équité* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

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