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Walking from the 19th to the 21st Century: from Baudelaire's to Jean-Christophe Bailly's Paris

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This paper examines the continuities and ruptures in walking practices in Paris from the 19th to the 21st century, focusing on the works of philosopher and essayist Jean-Christophe Bailly and his dialogue with Baudelaire. During the Second Empire, Paris underwent profound transformations through Haussmannisation, which reshaped the city's infrastructure to promote hygiene, circulation, and order. While these changes facilitated pedestrian mobility and the emergence of public spaces, Baudelaire famously lamented the destruction of old Paris, revealing an enduring tension between modernisation and nostalgia.

Although the 19th century is often seen as the golden age of walking, it also marked the beginning of its decline: broad boulevards became dominated by vehicular traffic, and over the 20th century, pedestrians gradually lost ground. Bailly interprets these historical developments and the contemporary urban condition, showing how capitalist logics of circulation, elitism, and commercialisation have subtly altered the city's social and spatial fabric.

Drawing on essays such as *La Phrase urbaine* [*The Urban Sentence*] (2013), *Paris quand même* [*Paris Neverthless*] (2022), and *La ville en éclats* [*The City in Fragments*] (2025), this study explores Bailly's critique of the modern city and his reflections on flânerie as a poetic, aesthetic, and ecological practice. Walking is understood not merely as transportation, but as an existential and social activity that engages with the city's history, spatiality, and people. By emphasising wandering, observation, and engagement with urban life, Bailly positions flânerie as a form of resistance to the depersonalised, utilitarian logic of contemporary cities, offering a framework for a more mindful, inclusive, and sustainable experience of urban space.

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Introduction: Walking and its Infrastructure

Walking is political. I do not refer here to demonstrations in which a political message is conveyed through collective movement from one place to another, but rather to two other aspects: the planning of cities and the ecological implications of walking—or not walking—in urban environments.

At first glance, we might assume that walking depends solely on our two legs and our willingness to move. However, it is a far more complex phenomenon that depends on several factors. As Rebecca Solnit puts it in her famous essay on walking, '[o]ne must have free time, a place to go, and a body unhindered by illness or social restraints' (Solnit, 2001: 181). At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that the first condition concerns class, the second infrastructure, and the third discrimination (gender, race, disability, etc.). While all of these issues are important, this article focuses on the second condition, namely space: where do we walk, and how do infrastructures shape the way we walk? The aim of this article is thus to analyse Paris as a walking city from the 19th century, through Baudelaire's perspective, to the 21st century, through the lens of the poet and philosopher Jean-Christophe Bailly. In doing so, it examines the role of infrastructure in shaping walking practices and considers their implications from a contemporary ecological perspective.

As several studies have pointed out (Carse, 2017; Guajardo Soto, 2023; Esposito et al., 2023), the term *infrastructure* originally had a literal meaning in 19th-century France, referring to the works 'conducted *beneath* unlaid tracks (roadbeds)' or the construction that was 'otherwise organizationally *prior* to them (surveys, plans, bridges, tunnels, embankments)' (Carse, 2017: 29). This article does not aim to recount the history of the term, which has already been thoroughly studied. Rather, I would like to emphasise that infrastructure has obviously come to mean much more than the structure beneath railways. Today, the term encompasses both the material and immaterial arrangements that enable societies to function, including systems for the circulation of people, goods, and information, as well as sites of political debate and collective meaning-making (Esposito et al., 2023: 12). Accordingly, infrastructure should not be understood as a fixed physical object but as a dynamic assemblage of material elements, institutions, legal frameworks, policies, and forms of knowledge that evolve across space and time (Anand, Gupta & Appel, 2018: 12). As Larkin puts it, infrastructures are the 'built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space' (Larkin, 2013: 328).

Streets are the primary infrastructure for walking in the city. Their geography, layout, architectural features, and other physical characteristics shape the presence or absence of pedestrians. However, walking is not confined to a single street. Beyond

sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and traffic signals that make movement safer and easier at the street level, the city as a whole functions as an interconnected network of infrastructures that can either encourage or discourage walking. Factors such as traffic intensity, the presence of parks and green spaces, pollution levels, social practices (including the presence of other pedestrians), public transport, and even the overall image of the city all play a role in shaping walking practices. In this sense, this article understands infrastructure as a confluence of material and immaterial elements that together produce a walkable city, from the scale of individual streets to the broader urban imagination.

Our 21st-century cities are profoundly shaped by the development and establishment of 19th-century infrastructures (Kirkby, 2023: 2). Paris was also shaped to its contemporary form mostly in the 19th century, during the Haussmannian transformations. If this brutal remodulation of Paris was critiqued by some of Haussmann's contemporaries, such as the poet Charles Baudelaire, because of the demolition of the old city, it also undoubtedly modernised the city and adapted it to the industrial era.

However, is it still operational in the 21st century and its exigences? When Haussmann directed the works in Paris, people walked and travelled in horse-drawn vehicles. Since then, the automobile has come to conquer the streets of modern cities, profoundly reshaping everyday life and urban planning. In addition, ecological concerns have become central to contemporary debates on infrastructure in the 21st century. As Jaillet (2016) argues, renewed interest in walking is linked to a broader critique of the automobile-centred model that shaped cities in the second half of the 20th century. Growing awareness of climate change and the finite nature of fossil fuels has encouraged policymakers to rethink mobility systems and to promote more sustainable forms of urban development.

Today, walking has become a marginal activity in urban life. As major works on walking and urban mobility—such as Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust* (2001) and Matthew Beaumont's *The Walker* (2020)—have shown, the figure of the urban walker—born in the modern city of the 19th century, and experiencing both his zenith and his decline during that period—is now disappearing, largely as a consequence of the utilitarian logic of capitalism. As Solnit argues, the pursuit of efficiency is 'actually eradicating free time by making it possible to maximize the time and place for production and minimize the unstructured travel time in between' (Solnit, 2001: 11). Even when people do walk today, they are often no longer fully present but distracted by digital devices, 'impoverishing their everyday experience of its physical and social life by funnelling their attention through the screen' (Beaumont, 2020: 10).

Recent efforts to promote walkable cities—such as Anne Hidalgo's *15-minute city* in Paris—seek to reintegrate walking into contemporary metropolitan life. Paradoxically, however, they often do so again in the name of efficiency rather than as an end in itself. As Pascal Amphoux (2004; translation my own) argues, contemporary political discourse on walking tends to emphasise its ecological and functional benefits above all, promoting developments such as 'the removal of cars in most European urban policies (Paris being a current example)', and contributing to phenomena such as 'the gradual rise of critical discourse on the shortcomings and unintended effects of pedestrian streets, and the growing promotion of intermodality' (138).[1]

Rather than adopting a 'utilitarian' perspective on walking and its infrastructures, I propose to approach walking from a philosophical standpoint—specifically, that of *emotion*, which Amphoux identifies as the third type of mobility, after 'motricité' (spatial or technical dimension of walking) and 'mouvance' (social dimension): 'walking as a physical pleasure or a form of enjoyment of the landscape' (139)—and which, as will be shown, is no less 'useful'. I will analyse 19th-century Paris' transformation through the lens of the poet and urban walker Charles Baudelaire. This Paris, and its critique by Baudelaire—later analysed by figures such as Walter Benjamin and Antoine Compagnon—will serve as the starting point for this study, which seeks to understand the legacy of Second Empire infrastructures in the contemporary world.

In a second part, I turn to the conception of the city of Paris in the essays of the philosopher and writer Jean-Christophe Bailly. As a teacher in the École nationale supérieure de la nature et du paysage in Blois, he is specially interested in landscapes and architecture, often treated in his texts, the most known being *Dépaysement. Voyages en France* [*Disorientation: Travels in France*] (2011). Here, I examine how he conceptualises the infrastructures inherited from Haussmann's and Baudelaire's Paris, and how these relate to current ecological concerns in three of his publications that focus on the city: *La phrase urbaine* [*The Urban Sentence*] (2013), *Paris quand même* [*Paris Nevertheless*] (2022) and *La ville en éclats* [*The City in Fragments*] (2025).

Although Bailly does not explicitly adopt an ecological perspective, his work has a particular concern for living beings and space and develops a particular 'ecopoethics'—the latter being a concept coined by Anne Gourio (2021). According to Gourio, 'ecopoeths' 'revive the Hölderlinian imperative of a 'poetic dwelling in the world' in a context of 'ecological urgency'. In doing so, they return to a poetics rooted in the land and in territory, guided by an ethical concern: 'In a context of growing ecological precarity,

[1] The original versions of Baudelaire's and Bailly's texts will be provided, as these are the primary objects of analysis; for all other texts not originally written in English, only the English translation will be provided.

all these approaches indeed converge on a rejection of the poem's exclusively aesthetic purpose, in favour of the participation of ethos in the construction of a liveable dwelling and a shared world' (Gourio, 2021; translation my own).

The Paradoxes of Modernity and Haussmannisation

The growing body of scholarship on walking—its history, philosophy, and artistic representations (Le Breton, 2000; Solnit, 2001; Amato, 2004; Coverley, 2006; Gros, 2019; Beaumont, 2020)—shows that this practice is far more than a simple technique of putting one foot in front of the other. Rather, it is a culturally constructed phenomenon whose emergence can be historically situated. The figure of the walker, initially conceived as the archetype of the wealthy white male, emerged in the late 18th century and was consolidated during the 19th century through the Romantic idealisation of Rousseauian nature and the rise of the modern city. This does not imply, however, that forms of walking did not exist earlier or in other cultural contexts; rather, it is this particular cultural construction of the walker that belongs to modernity.

According to Laurent Turcot (2010; translation my own), walking in Paris emerged as early as the 17th century and was closely linked to the creation of spaces where pedestrians could move without being struck by carriages or splashed by waste thrown from windows:

> What should be described as the 'genesis of the literary and social figure of the walker' can be explained by the development of Parisian promenades at the end of the seventeenth century, through which the walker constructs a representation of space and develops a particular mode of observing urban space.

This new or renewed infrastructure *avant la lettre* enabled the emergence of the figure of the *promeneur* in the 18th century and that of the *flâneur* in the 19th century. However, the latter was already shaped by the most significant urban transformation project in Paris, commonly referred to as *Haussmannisation*, named after Baron Haussmann, Prefect of the Seine, who oversaw the city's large-scale renovation during the Second Empire under Napoleon III.

Beginning in 1852, Haussmann's plans included the sanitation, beautification, and securitisation of the city. This entailed the demolition of old Paris—its buildings and narrow streets—in favour of wide boulevards that allowed air to circulate, through the famous *percées* (urban 'pierces'). It also involved the construction of a modern sewer system, new buildings, parks, and green spaces. Finally, it exiled the poor to the periphery in order to create a rich and pleasant, *bourgeois* centre. As Walter

Benjamin observes, these transformations were not solely intended to make the city more beautiful or healthy, but also to control the population, which had a strong tradition of building barricades and engaging in revolutionary activity: 'The true goal of Haussmann's projects was to secure the city against civil war. He wanted to make the erection of barricades in Paris impossible for all time' (Benjamin, 2006: 43).

Both criticised and praised, Haussmann's work responded—albeit in his own way—to a growing population and a changing world, shaping what we now call the 'modern city.' The large avenues and boulevards facilitated the circulation of people, who increasingly occupied and walked through streets and parks, frequently depicted by artists.[2] This mass—the *foule*—created the ideal environment for the *flâneur*, for whom walking became an opportunity for immersion in personal reflection and observation (Turcot, 2010). For Benjamin, who analyses Baudelaire's *flânerie*, the *flâneur* is one 'who goes botanizing on the asphalt'—a phrase that alludes to the Romantic passion for nature while highlighting its transformation in the modern city. Rather than exploring forests and mountains, the urban walker studies his surroundings, treating the artificial landscape of the city as a new form of nature.

Baudelaire himself connects in 'Les foules' ['The Crowd'] of *Petits poèmes en prose* the act of walking to poetic creation, linking the solitary walker to the figure of the poet who is alone in the crowd:

> Multitude, solitude: equal and transposable terms for the active and fecund poet. He who knows not how to people his solitude, is equally ignorant of how to be alone in a busy crowd.
>
> The poet enjoys this incomparable privilege, that he can, as he pleases, be himself or others. Like those wandering souls searching for a body, he enters, whenever he wants, into the character of each person. For him alone, everything is open; and if certain places appear to be closed to him, it is because in his eyes they are not worth the effort of visiting (Baudelaire, 2024).[3]

Baudelaire thus practices a form of urban walking that enables errant movement and a simultaneous immersion in the self and the crowd. The *flâneur* is an outsider, 'both immersed in the crowd but isolated by it' (Coverley, 2006: 60).

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[2] For exemple, *Promenade du dimanche au Bois de Boulogne* of Henri Evenepoel (1899).

[3] 'Multitude, solitude : termes égaux et convertibles pour le poète actif et fécond. Qui ne sait pas peupler sa solitude ne sait pas non plus être seul dans une foule affairée. Le poète jouit de cet incomparable privilège, qu'il peut à sa guise être lui-même et autrui. Comme ces âmes errantes qui cherchent un corps, il entre, quand il veut, dans le personnage de chacun' (Baudelaire, no date).

Yet, while the modern city's multitude offers certain benefits to the poet, modernity is far from wholly positive in his view. As Antoine Compagnon (2014; translation my own) argues, Baudelaire's relationship to modernity and its manifestations is deeply ambivalent. Compagnon even suggests that Baudelaire's conception of modernity is paradoxically grounded in a form of *anti-modernity*: although inseparable from the modern world, he simultaneously resists its values. Thus, while Baudelaire celebrates modernity as an aesthetic category,[4] he repeatedly criticises its concrete expressions, including 'bourgeois materialism, Haussmannian urbanism, democratic fraternity—in a word, progress, or more precisely, the dogma of progress, the faith in progress, symbolized by the press, photography, the city' (Compagnon, 2014).

Baudelaire was, in fact, critical of Haussmann's transformations, as expressed in the famous poem 'Le Cygne' ['The Swan'], where he laments the destruction of old Paris:

> — Old Paris is no more (the form of a city
> Changes more quickly, alas! than the human heart);
>
> I see only in memory that camp of stalls,
> Those piles of shafts, of rough hewn cornices, the grass,
> The huge stone blocks stained green in puddles of water,
> And in the windows shine the jumbled bric-a-brac (Baudelaire, 1954).[5]

This ambivalence toward modernity, and Baudelaire's critique of progress, may in fact be considered more 'modern' than the attitude of many of his contemporaries, who generally embraced modern innovations with enthusiasm. Only a minority of thinkers critically addressed the transformation of cities and the destruction of natural environments. Rapid population growth and the development of industrial urban centres raised increasing concerns about public health. More broadly, critiques of the modern city were often inseparable from critiques of capitalism itself:

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[4] For Baudelaire, '[m]odernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, that half of art of which the other is the eternal and immutable' (Baudelaire, 2020) [La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable'] (Baudelaire, no date). It is manifested in new forms of poetry, as he describes in his Preface to *The Petits Poèmes en Prose*, the 'the miracle of a poetic and musical prose without rhythm or rhyme' ['"prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime'] (Baudelaire, 2024), which is inspired by the modern city: 'It is above all from frequenting enormous cities, from the intersection of their innumerable relationships that this obsessive ideal is born' [C'est surtout la fréquentation des villes énormes, c'est du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal obsédant' (Baudelaire, no date).

[5] 'Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville / Change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d'un mortel); / Je ne vois qu'en esprit tout ce camp de baraques, /Ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fûts, / Les herbes, les gros blocs verdis par l'eau des flaques, / Et, brillant aux carreaux, le bric-à-brac confus.' (Baudelaire, no date).

> In the 19th century, one can observe that it is also among politically progressive thinkers that a radical critique of the transformations of urbanism emerges. What is distinctive here is that, far more than in the often pre-communist bucolic utopias of the Enlightenment, the new ravages of pollution impose themselves as one of the principal scourges of the modern city (Audier, 2017: 242–243; translation my own).

Thinkers such as John Stuart Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville, Victor Considerant, and Flora Tristan simultaneously criticised capitalism, industrialisation, pollution, and the miserable living conditions of the working classes. Although Baudelaire's perspective is not ecological,[6] his denunciation of urban demolition and his attention to the fate of the poor and the ironic description of the violence they suffer in several of his poems[7] resonate, to some extent, with these broader critiques.

From a contemporary standpoint, the ambivalence surrounding Haussmannisation invites renewed attention. On the one hand, Haussmann's interventions entailed the large-scale destruction of the urban fabric of old Paris, erasing a significant architectural and social patrimony and displacing working-class populations toward the city's peripheries. This process not only transformed the physical city but also reshaped its social geography, reinforcing divisions between classes. On the other hand, these same transformations created the spatial and infrastructural conditions necessary for new forms of urban experience. The wide boulevards, open vistas, and interconnected street network established a new unity within the city, while also making walking more practicable and pleasurable. As Benjamin observes, '[b]efore Haussmann, wide pavements were rare; the narrow ones afforded little protection from vehicles. *Flânerie* could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades' (Benjamin, 2006: 68). In this sense, Haussmannisation provided an ideal setting for *flânerie*. Yet the same process of modernisation gradually destroyed the *passages*, or 'rue-galéries' so characteristic of Paris, where the *flâneur* was born (Benjamin, 2013).

This paradox is particularly evident in relation to the evolution of mobility in the city. Although Haussmann's transformations initially improved pedestrian circulation, they also laid the foundations for a street network increasingly adapted to vehicular traffic. As Lesieur (2023, translation my own) notes, the Haussmannian boulevards were designed not only 'to ventilate the city, but also to accommodate horse-drawn traffic during the era of rapid automobile expansion'. This transformation profoundly altered the experience of walking. As Coverley (2006: 62) argues, the *flâneur* gradually lost the privileged knowledge that had allowed him to navigate the city's labyrinthine

[6] Even though more recent studies did explore ecocritic readings of some of Baudelaire's poems, such as 'Le Crépuscule du soir' ['Evening Crepuscule'] (Quandt, 2015; Lübecker, 2020).

[7] For example, 'Les yeux des pauvres' ['The Eyes of the Poor'] or 'Le vieux saltimbanque' ['The Old Acrobat'].

streets. As traffic increased and public space became increasingly regulated and commercialised, walking ceased to be an exploratory practice and was reduced to a more passive form of promenade.

Haussmann did not—or perhaps could not—anticipate the transformation of transportation brought about by motorisation. However, as Jordan notes, 'The transportation problems Haussmann had been unable or unwilling to solve remained (and still exist) to plague the city' (2004: 95–96). Criticism of Haussmann's legacy also emerged long before contemporary debates on sustainable mobility. Writing in 1962, Bernard Champigneulle argued that Haussmann's urban model had become outdated and condemned its lasting consequences, including the destruction of historic heritage and the reinforcement of the city's socio-spatial divisions between the wealthy West and the poorer East (Champigneulle, 1962).

As Jordan (2004) further argues, Haussmann's ideas about urban mobility were, even by mid-19th-century standards, limited, being largely confined to walking and private carriages. He had little understanding of the importance of public transportation within the city, even though he demonstrated some imagination regarding railway systems connecting Paris. In turn, according to Jordan, the growing presence of automobiles has placed increasing pressure on Parisian streets, perhaps more than in many American cities, although the extent of this congestion is difficult to quantify (96).

In summary, by adapting the city to circulation without fully anticipating motorised traffic, it laid the groundwork for the later dominance of the automobile, without providing an adequate infrastructure to accommodate it. The rise of the automobile thus generated new tensions, and today, from an ecological perspective, we are confronted with a challenge that echoes that of Haussmann's era: how can walking be restored in cities whose streets have been overtaken by cars?

Jean-Christophe Bailly and the Temporalities of Paris

From the form of the text to the form of the city

Interestingly, Jean-Christophe Bailly does not address cars directly. He walks, and he writes about walking as if automobiles simply do not exist. In this sense, his perspective is decidedly 19th-century: for him, walking is a spiritual activity, an emotion shaped more by the ambiance of the city—the invitation it offers to pedestrians—than by infrastructure narrowly understood as signs or crossings. Despite this, Bailly's vision of a liveable city includes walking and the improvement of infrastructure—not as a rigid, technical exercise, but as a way to encourage pedestrian life. In this sense, his approach can ultimately be read as a strategy to reduce reliance on cars and promote a healthier, more ecological urban environment.

Two of the three works examined in this article (*La Phrase urbaine* [*The Urban Sentence*][8] and *La ville en éclats* [*The City in Fragments*][9]) are compilations of articles and lectures Bailly wrote over several decades, united by a common theme: the city. *Paris quand même* [*Paris Nevertheless*][10] is the result, as Bailly explains in the introduction, of an invitation from friends to share the 'anecdotes' he knows about Paris (PQM: 8). Regardless of these external motivations, all of these books share a formal heterogeneity. As Bailly writes about *La Phrase urbaine* [*The Urban Sentence*]: it is 'oscillating between slipped-in forms of writing and attempts at definition, ranging from public or critical interventions to simple characterisation, and even to notation or daydreaming' ['oscillant de formes d'écriture glissée à des tentatives de définition, et passant par l'intervention publique ou critique à la simple caractérisation, voire à la notation ou à la rêverie'] (PU). This enumeration demonstrates how different modes of writing, genres, and even themes coexist within the same work, alongside its overarching focus on the city. As such, the work is characterised by fragmentation, a defining feature that reflects the ethos of the essayist, who seeks to understand and describe phenomena in pieces, giving the impression of a whole without engaging in definitive theorisation.

In *La Phrase urbaine* [*The Urban Sentence*], Bailly explicitly explains his approach:

> The very form of the book—a playful essay in archipelago—removes any pretense of producing a treatise, and it is not at all an image of the city that it seeks to achieve; on the contrary, diffraction is permanent, and the greater temptation is rather to let a kaleidoscopic image form, or, more dynamically, a series of plans alternating between panoramas and fleeting sequences (PU).[11]

On one hand, this *ars poetica* situates Bailly in a long tradition of French essayists, from Michel de Montaigne to Rousseau, whose *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire* are written to the rhythm of the author's walks, much like Bailly's essays. It also recalls Baudelaire, whose *flâneries*—as we will see—serve as a reference. This kaleidoscopic representation of reality through fragments is aligned with Baudelaire's ideals; in *The Painter of Modern Life*, he describes the *flâneur* as 'a kaleidoscope endowed with

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[8] From now on referred to as PU in quotes. Given that I consulted an e-book version, there are no page numbers in my references. Translations are my own.

[9] From now on referred to as VE in quotes. Translations are my own.

[10] From now on referred to as PQM in quotes. Translations are my own.

[11] 'La forme même du livre – un essai diverti en archipel – le retranche de toute prétention au traité, et ce n'est aucunement à une image de la ville qu'il cherche à aboutir : au contraire, la diffraction est permanente, et grande serait plutôt la tentation de laisser se former une image kaléidoscopique ou, plus dynamiquement, une suite de plans alternant panoramiques et séquences furtives'.

consciousness which, with its every movement, conveys the multiplicity of life, and the grace in motion of every element of that life' (Baudelaire, 2020) [un kaléidoscope doué de conscience, qui, à chacun de ses mouvements, représente la vie multiple et la grâce mouvante de tous les éléments de la vie (Baudelaire, no date)]. Therefore, through this image, Bailly, *via* Baudelaire, emphasises the mobile character of both the city and the *flâneur*, who experiences the urban landscape from constantly shifting perspectives.

On the other hand, the kaleidoscope image also can imply the fragmented nature of the city. As the title *La ville en éclats* [*The City in Fragments*] suggests, it also refers to the breaking apart of the old city under the impact of what Bailly considers a 'quantitatively staggering' acceleration (Ruby, 2025). Bailly emphasizes that contemporary cities are fragmented: 'Today, the city appears, on a global scale, as a puzzle whose pieces do not necessarily fit together, and it would be futile to expect them all to configure even a somewhat stable image' ['La ville apparaît aujourd'hui, et à l'échelle du monde, comme un puzzle dont les pièces ne s'ajointent pas forcément et dont il serait vain d'attendre qu'elles puissent toutes ensemble configurer une image un tant soit peu stable'] (PU).

This fragmentation can be understood symbolically, temporally—as violent ruptures with the past—and physically. In the following sections, I will analyse this fragmented city in Bailly's texts, with the paper adopting a temporal segmentation. This approach will allow to explore the interplay of past, present, and future in the city—its monuments, contemporary conditions, and utopian potential.

Past

The role of Baudelaire in Jean-Christophe Bailly's understanding of image and painting has been already examined (Zanetta, 2022). Yet Baudelaire also plays a central role alongside Benjamin in Bailly's reflections on the city itself. Both figures serve as spiritual guides in Bailly's *flâneries* through Paris, shaping his attention to the rhythms, ambiances, and emotional textures of urban life.

Bailly frequently references Baudelaire's famous verses from 'Le Cygne', which reflect the destruction of Paris and its transformation. In *Paris quand même* [*Paris Nevertheless*], he highlights the rupture brought about by Haussmannisation. He examines Baudelaire's perspective, emphasising the poet's lament for a city in a state of perpetual transformation. Bailly then offers his own interpretation from his present, arguing that, paradoxically, the Haussmannisation experienced by Baudelaire as a process of continuous change has become the most enduring layer of Paris. It constitutes a rupture whose effects continue to shape the city and remain clearly perceptible today:

> The paradox is that the city resulting from the transformations witnessed by the poet has largely endured to the present day, so resistant do the features established by Haussmannisation appear. Countless further, including more recent interventions have continued to transform Paris, yet the tension, now stabilized, between the 'old Paris' Baudelaire saw disappearing and the new one whose lines of force were established in the second half of the nineteenth century remains entirely perceptible in the heart of the capital (PQM: 20).[12]

In *La Phrase urbaine* [*The Urban Sentence*], Bailly invokes the same verses of Baudelaire to reflect on the brutality of Haussmannisation: 'Brutal in many of its aspects—it is in this brutality that Baudelaire's *Le Cygne* is written, where the "form of a city" is perceived in the atmosphere of an apocalyptic construction site' ['Brutale par bien de ses aspects – c'est dans cette brutalité que s'écrit *Le Cygne* de Baudelaire où la "forme d'une ville" est perçue dans l'atmosphère d'un chantier apocalyptique'] (PU). Therefore, Bailly adopts his predecessor's sense of nostalgia and shares his mourning for the city's lost monuments.

Yet he also emphasises the originality and structural logic of Haussmann's project: 'This reorganization nevertheless followed a very original path which, despite its well-known strategic assumptions regarding class struggle, traces a balance between a clean slate and nostalgia' ['Cette recomposition a pourtant suivi une voie très originale qui, malgré ses attendus stratégiques bien connus touchant à la lutte de classes, trace un équilibre entre la table rase et la nostalgie'] (PU). This suggests that, despite the extensive remodelling of the city, the 19th-century vision of urban transformation still preserved, to some extent, a respect for the past. This is reflected in Bailly's use of the term *nostalgia*, which, for him, carries positive rather than negative connotations. Indeed, he understands nostalgia as a natural and healthy way of relating to the past: 'For nostalgia, daughter of time, accompanies time itself: it is everything except a stubborn form of regret that seeks to erase the movement of time' ['Car la nostalgie, fille du temps, va avec lui et l'accompagne : elle est tout, sauf une forme de regret buté qui se donnerait pour visée de rayer le mouvement du temps'] (PQM: 220). In other words, nostalgia should be understood as an awareness of disappearance rather than a desire to freeze or halt time. While Bailly rejects the progressivist impulse that denies memory, he insists on the necessity of feeling loss, as Baudelaire did. Yet he envisions as positive the changes that are *organic*, allowing past and present to coexist in dialogue.

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[12] '[M]ais le paradoxe est que la ville qui résulta des transformations dont le poète fut témoin s'est globalement maintenue jusqu'à nos jours, tant les traits fixés par l'haussmannisation semblent résistants. On ne compte plus les opérations plus tardives et même récentes qui, depuis, ont continué de transformer Paris, mais le heurt aujourd'hui stabilisé entre le "vieux Paris" que Baudelaire voyait disparaître et le nouveau dont la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle allait installer les lignes de force reste, au centre de la capitale, entièrement perceptible'.

Moreover, elsewhere Bailly suggests that Haussmannisation ultimately became integrated into Paris's identity. Over time, it ceased to be perceived solely as a rupture and instead became another layer of the city—indeed, its dominant one—with its own network of streets, monuments, and urban forms. As Bailly observes, the city's previous 'urban fabric'—the interconnected tissue of streets, buildings, and public spaces that constitutes its material and lived reality— 'could have broken. Instead, it miraculously held, and with a few exceptions—including most notably the addition of underground traffic routes—it is the fabric in which Parisians still live' ['aurait pu rompre. Il a, au contraire, miraculeusement tenu et, à quelques exceptions près, dont la plus notable est l'adjonction de voies de circulation souterraines, il est celui dans lequel les Parisiens vivent toujours'] (PU).

The best example to understand Bailly's view on the differences between Haussmann's interventions and 21st-century approaches to the 'old' city is his discussion of the passages. As noted earlier, for Benjamin, the galleries are the true habitat of the *flâneur*. Bailly fully embraces this idea and, through the history of the Galerie Véro-Dodat, shows that passages not only survived Haussmannisation but also became the embodiment of the modernity Benjamin describes. Despite the destruction and social segregation, Paris remained 'a city still extremely porous, allowing, despite the class divisions that block any true harmony, an infinite variety of passages and cross-streets' ['une ville encore extrêmement poreuse, autorisant, malgré la division entre classes qui y bloque les compteurs de toute véritable harmonie, une variété infinie des traversées'] (PQM: 30). However, in a subtler and more invisible manner, contemporary transformations of these passages have succeeded in eroding their very essence, resulting in a form of 'devitalisation':

> The Véro-Dodat gallery, whose structure and layout are intact, seems exemplary of this type of devitalising transformation: everything is there, even perfectly restored and maintained, yet nothing remains of what allowed the spaces themselves to remember and dream, for the deprivation of past and future occurs simultaneously (PQM: 58–59).[13]

Devitalisation is the result of both commercialisation and of monumentalisation, a practice in which monuments are isolated from the life of the city: 'Fossilised, smoothed, delimited, the past no longer acts according to the inconstancy of its own will

[13] 'La galerie Véro-Dodat, dont non seulement la structure mais les ordonnancements sont intacts, me semble exemplaire de ce type de transformation par dévitalisation : tout est là, et même parfaitement restauré, entretenu, mais plus rien ne subsiste de ce qui permettait aux lieux eux-mêmes de se souvenir et de rêver, car simultanée est la privation de passé et celle de futur'.

but becomes imprisoned in a freezing patrimonialisation' ['Fossilisé, lissé, délimité, le passé n'agit plus selon l'inconstance de son bon vouloir mais devient prisonnier d'une patrimonialisation gélifiante'] (PQM: 128). In France, he argues, architecture rarely encounters the vitality of the city, often becoming the focus of grandiose, symbolic 'grands travaux' projects. Bailly observes that the logic of monumental display has replaced small-scale, continuous, and varied interventions, isolating architecture from urban life. He advocates instead for incremental, diverse works that respect the existing fabric and generate new forms of urban vitality. Anti-models include the Opera Bastille and the Bibliothèque nationale, whose construction breaks the continuity of the urban landscape. Positive examples include the Centre Pompidou (or Beaubourg), which Bailly prefers because of its smoother integration in the city.

In summary, against this official, imposed memory that manifests in monuments, Bailly argues—according to Jacques (2014; translation my own)—that we need a 'dynamic memory, continually actualised through walking and wandering, a memory that creates the desire to articulate the city and project it into language'. Moreover, Bailly's analysis shows that urban memory and the *flâneur*'s experience require more than physical preservation: they depend on a living, dynamic relation between past, present, and future, sustained through walking and engagement with the city.

Present

Walking, for Bailly, is thus essential to both 'create' and 'perpetuate' the identity of cities. Like Michel de Certeau (1990), whose 'rhetoric of walking' considers everyday practices that conform to, modify, or subvert the official concept of the city, Bailly speaks of 'the grammar of legs' that writes the city. This is the 'passant,' the *flâneur* who '(re)invents' the city, sometimes moving against the paths laid out by official policies:

> The city is, above all, a phrasing, a conjugation, a fluid system of declensions and agreements. It is this phrasing that must be recovered: moving from a stored or stacked language to a spoken language, inventing the generative grammar of urban space (PU).[14]

This suggests that cities are shaped by those who inhabit and traverse them, by the people who use their streets and public spaces. As Rebecca Solnit (2001: 231) observes of Bailly, Paris is for him 'a collection of stories, a memory of itself made by the walkers

[14] 'Or la ville est avant tout un phrasé, une conjugaison, un système fluide de déclinaisons et d'accords. Ce sont ces phrases et ce phrasé qu'il faut retrouver : passer d'un langage stocké ou empilé à un langage parlé, inventer la grammaire générative de l'espace urbain […]'.

of the streets'. Thus, as noted in the previous section, due to their 'devitalisation', contemporary cities such as 21st-century Paris are less coherent or legible to the *passants*. Bailly extends his grammatical metaphor to highlight the incoherence of the contemporary city:

> The contemporary urban landscape is like a pseudo-sentence, made up of stretched and inappropriate words, unconjugated verbs, and agreements that are not formed. It is as if infinitives and nouns had simply been placed next to one another, with a few decorative adjectives added here and there (PU).[15]

In opposition to this nonsense of urban landscape, Bailly thinks that architecture should emphasise connection between places, people, past and future. Without offering concrete solutions and remaining somewhat elusive and metaphorical, Bailly proposes an architecture that is attentive to the city's actual uses, thereby rejecting isolated monumental architectural projects that, in themselves, do not make a city, in his opinion.

Another problem related to this is the transformation of the city into 'patrimoine marchandisé', a tourist and consumer-oriented phenomenon in which luxury and elitism isolate spaces that are no longer frequented by local or poor residents—what today is often called gentrification, although Bailly does not use this term. He ironically describes the 'users' of the street as individuals who are merely juxtaposed, existing alongside one another without any meaningful relationship. Nor do they maintain an intimate connection with the places they frequent; instead, they move through the city in a state of distraction, echoing what Beaumont (2020) describes. Bailly harshly criticises consumerism as the primary purpose of urban mobility, while nevertheless reproducing gender and ethnic stereotypes without questioning them, as can be seen in the following quote:

> A 'panel,' as they call it, ranging from the Russian oligarch to the hurried businessman from anywhere, not to mention entire battalions of women fully devoted to the cult and trinkets of the market—in short, everything that compliant journalism calls the elites, who are in fact always self-proclaimed, and whose self-proclamation relies precisely on a whole series of codes, including frequenting certain places and ostentatiously displaying particular brands (PQM: 116–117).[16]

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[15] 'Le paysage urbain actuel est comme une pseudo-phrase formée de mots distendus et impropres, de verbes non conjugués, d'accords qui ne sont pas faits. Tout se passe comme si l'on avait disposé les uns à côté des autres des infinitifs et des substantifs, en ajoutant ici et là quelques épithètes décoratives'.

[16] 'un panel, comme ils disent, allant de l'oligarque russe à l'homme d'affaires pressé de n'importe quelle contrée, sans parler de bataillons entiers de femmes intégralement converties au culte et aux colifichets du marché, bref tout ce qu'un journalisme aux ordres appelle les élites, qui sont en fait toujours autoproclamées, et dont l'autoproclamation repose,

The best example of this in Paris is the Champs-Élysées, officially considered the most beautiful street in the city, but which Bailly, as he says, never walks along. For him, this famous avenue is an 'open-air duty-free shop where the subscribers of the most appalling aspects of mass tourism parade in awe' [ce duty free shop en plein air où défilent ébahis les abonnés de ce que le tourisme de masse a de plus consternant] (PQM: 163), in addition to the 'oversized arch' that has nothing to do with the true Paris he knows.

On one side, he critiques elitisation of the centre; on the other, the *zoning* [*zonage*].[17] Today, Paris has very large outskirts that are almost completely isolated from the city centre. Although the segregation of the population and the exile of the poor from the centre began with Haussmann, according to Bailly, Paris remained a single, coherent city at that time: '"Paris" does not split into two in its very being: unreconciled, the different social groups that compose it continue to churn together under its name and within a form in which cut stone and Parisian plaster are secretly complicit' ['"Paris" ne se casse pas en deux dans son être : non réconciliés, les différents groupes sociaux qui le composent trépignent ensemble dans son nom et dans une forme où pierre de taille et plâtre parisien sont secrètement complices'] (PU).

However, today, the banlieues tend to function like separate cities, physically detached from the centre yet lacking the infrastructure and complexity that define fully developed urban environments. As Bailly argues, the contemporary city is increasingly fragmented and amorphous, expanding beyond a scale at which it can function as a coherent whole or even sense its own limits. Since the industrial revolution—and increasingly after the Second World War—urban expansion has taken the form of a continuous, uncontrolled sprawl, erasing boundaries rather than structuring them.

This fragmentation is particularly evident in large housing estates and suburban developments, often reduced to 'dormitory towns.' Such spaces reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to inhabit a city. Dwelling is not simply a matter of being housed; neither the city nor its outskirts can be reduced to an accumulation of isolated units or zones. Instead, housing should be understood as part of a broader, interconnected network that enables relationships, movement, and shared experience.

For Bailly, to inhabit means not only to exist within the confines of a private space, but also to project oneself beyond it, engaging with others and with the urban fabric.

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justement, sur toute une série de codes dont la fréquentation de certains lieux et l'exhibition ostentatoire de certaines marques font partie'.

[17] 'a utilitarian doctrine according to which the functions of dwelling (housing, commerce, etc.) are spatially separated' ['doctrine utilitaire selon laquelle les fonctions de l'habiter (logement, commerce, etc.) sont dissociés spatialement' (Jacques, 2014; translation my own)].

The house is therefore not merely a place of retreat, but a starting point for connection and participation. Zoning, by rigidly separating functions and spaces, undermines this dynamic and contributes to the loss of a truly lived and shared urban experience.

The consequence of this is the disappearance of *flânerie* and *flâneurs*: 'spaces without *flânerie* and without flâneurs, spaces that neither invite nor encourage them and, at times, even prohibit them,' [des espaces sans flânerie et sans flâneurs, comme des espaces qui ne les appellent ni ne les recommandent et qui même, parfois, les interdisent] (PU). As discussed in the introduction, however, *flânerie* represents a particular way of relating to urban space, rather than the only possible one. Bailly's account thus carries a distinctly 19th-century nostalgia for the disappearance of this figure and the mode of urban experience it embodies.

Future

Bailly distinguishes three phases in the development of cities: the *cités-monades* from Antiquity to the 18th century, the 19th-century city, and the 20th-century metropolis. Each corresponds to a specific form of utopia: insularity (an integral model), the anti-urban, and a utopia yet to come. Although contemporary visions include ecological or technological utopias—such as the 'smart city' ('Some may dream of turning Paris into an Olympic city or into a chic, heritage-based variant of that thoughtless utopia that is the smart city' ['Certains peuvent bien rêver de faire de Paris une ville olympique ou une variante chic et patrimoniale de cette utopie sans pensée qu'est la *smart city*'] [PQM: 35])—Bailly argues that these should not be regarded as the true utopia of our societies (VE: 53). Without pretending to a total solution or having the only solution himself, he provides some ideas as to how to build a utopia through all of his texts.

As mentioned earlier, this involves 'writing' the city through the practices of its inhabitants, in harmony with what already exists. Bailly provides a concrete example—a housing development in Saint-Nazaire—where, instead of imposing infrastructure from above and requiring people to adapt to it, the design followed the movements of residents, developing from the bottom up:

> Observing that, in this housing estate as in many others, informal pedestrian paths had carved out their own trails and routes, superimposing themselves on the purely geometric grid of circulation planned in the original design, the landscape architects in charge of the site decided to take them into account. These 'wild' paths, reflecting real patterns of movement reinvented by the inhabitants, were consolidated, developed, and illuminated. As a result, the directive and schematic framework of the initial plan is now overlaid with the network of a living plan—one that functions

> and, needless to say, stimulates and sustains connections in the manner of a network of streets (PU).[18]

The last chapter of *La ville en éclats* [*The City in Fragments*], entitled 'L'architecture au-delà du projet' ['Architecture beyond the project'], gives interesting ideas in this sense. Bailly proposes to create an 'echosystem' with an *h*. Instead of a city defined by its obsession for technological innovation in the name of progress and modernity, he prefers an ecological cohabitation in 'echo' with the place.

> Instead of occupying the world, one should be in harmony with it; instead of merely residing, one should engage in dialogue; instead of enclosing, one should think in terms of connections and transitions. It is necessary to learn—or relearn—how to link and unlink, to create shortcuts, to conceive urban, peri-urban, and even rural space as a single continuum, and the territory as a fatigued body, yet one still structured by energies that a form of acupuncture-like work could help to recover (VE: 175).[19]

This passage does not offer concrete solutions: Bailly proposes an attitude rather than a programme of urban planning. Here, ecology is understood as an ethic of respect for place, encompassing both its natural setting and its historical layers. He suggests that we should create buildings and infrastructures that are not 'heavy,' both in a metaphorical and ecological sense, and literally—a lightness in materials and structures that respects the place (VE: 177).

In *Paris quand même* [*Paris Nevertheless*], he uses the term 'open city' to refer to more or less the same idea. He describes a city that engages with its surroundings to foster creativity and growth. Instead of monumental or flashy projects, true urban vitality comes from countless small interventions—revitalised streets and squares, redesigned parks, integrated greenery, and inventive reuse of materials—combined with renewed activity and chance encounters. Contemporary Paris, however, often lacks this energy: subtle techniques of neutralisation preserve forms but strip them of the social life and spontaneity that originally gave them meaning. In consequence, this remains, for now, a utopia.

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[18] 'constatant que, dans cette cité comme dans toutes les autres, un cheminement piétonnier sauvage avait tracé ses sentes et ses chemins en les surimposant à la grille purement géométrique des circulations prévues par le plan initial, les paysagistes chargés de la cité ont décidé de le prendre en compte. Ces chemins 'sauvages', correspondant à des logiques de circulation réelles réinventées par les habitants, ils les ont consolidés, aménagés, éclairés. De telle sorte qu'aujourd'hui, à la trame directive et schématique du premier plan, se superpose la trame d'un plan vivant, qui fonctionne et qui – ai-je même à le dire ? – stimule et entretient la liaison à la façon d'un réseau de rues'.

[19] 'Au lieu d'occuper le monde, être en intelligence avec lui, au lieu de résider, dialoguer, au lieu d'enclore, penser les liaisons, les transitions, apprendre ou réapprendre à lier et à délier, à shunter, à penser l'espace urbain et périurbain et même ruralité comme un continuum unique et le territoire comme un corps fatigué mais tramé par des énergies que l'équivalent d'un travail d'acupuncture permettrait de retrouver'.

Conclusion

This article has shown, through the perspectives of poets and essayists, that 19th-century infrastructure played a decisive role in shaping the image of Paris. Haussmann's transformations left their mark on the city like scars on a body. Yet, as this study has also argued, those scars have, at least in part, healed and have become integral to the city's identity, contributing to what Rebecca Solnit describes, talking about Paris, as 'a single construction of inconceivable complexity' (2001: 212).

Therefore, from Bailly's perspective, the legacy of Haussmannian infrastructure is double-edged. On the one hand, it reflects a 19th-century tendency toward destruction and a notion of progress that often disregarded the past. On the other hand, it did not erase the city entirely; much of Paris could—and did—reabsorb these transformations. Today, the city that captivates us is still largely this 19th-century creation. Its golden era of *flânerie*—the reflective, observational walking Baudelaire and Bailly both celebrated—thrived in this context.

The problem, Bailly argues, is not the inherited infrastructure itself but the mentality it carries. Modernity, framed as progress in the 19th century, often prioritised monumental interventions over human life, health, and everyday practices. Over time, this mentality has persisted and adapted to new contexts: mass tourism, elite boutiques, and the segregation or ghettoisation of neighbourhoods. These tendencies, rooted in Haussmann's era, are now flourishing openly.

The analysis of Baudelaire's and Bailly's texts has also demonstrated that, despite the different historical contexts in which they wrote, their attitudes towards modernity closely mirror one another: a nostalgic awareness of the old city lost, a commitment to *flânerie*, and an ambiguous stance toward change—neither rejecting adaptation nor ignoring the past.

This perspective has clear consequences for walking and urban experience. Walking is not simply utilitarian, moving efficiently from one point to another; it is existential. Bailly advocates for errancy, for moving through the city in a way that inhabits it socially and personally. For the philosopher, walking is not about the mere presence of side streets or shortcuts, though they may help—rather, it reflects a city that calls to you, inhabited by people who actively use and appropriate its spaces, including for purposes beyond commercial consumption, and whose interactions are part of what makes the city a living place. Spatial segregation and fragmentation, by contrast, hinder this circulation and appropriation, producing a city that is difficult to inhabit. Walking is thus a social practice, what Amphoux calls 'mouvance':

> And walking, as a social practice (and not an individualistic one), can naturally play a major role at this level—not to trace a route, but to share a journey, to meet, to civilise, to make public…, to confer urbanity not only in densely built spaces but above all in the diffuse spaces of what some have recently called 'the city-nature' (2004: 139; translation my own).

Crucially, this is a reciprocal relationship: a liveable city invites walkers, but walkers themselves help create the city. Planning can encourage this process, but it must be bottom-up rather than top-down, emerging from the interactions and movements of inhabitants.

Both Baudelaire and Bailly write from the perspective of white male intellectuals. Their reflections on the city are not concerned with questions of gender, race, or disability, nor do they address the ways in which different bodies experience and navigate Parisian urban space. As this article has shown, Bailly's reflections on walking—although they do not constitute a systematic theory but rather a series of fragmented essayistic observations—remain indebted to a modernist and 19th-century conception of urban experience. In this respect, he also perpetuates the tradition of the *flâneur*, who, as Rebecca Solnit observes, 'was male, of some means, of a refined sensibility, with little or no domestic life' (2001: 215).

Where Bailly departs most clearly from this tradition is in his ecological concern. This article has shown that Bailly conceives ecology primarily in ideological rather than environmental terms. His critique is directed less at issues such as pollution or waste than at the effects of capitalism and neoliberal urbanism, including mass tourism, patrimonialisation, and the subordination of the city's liveability to economic interests. Rather than focusing on conventional environmental concerns, Bailly is interested in the conditions that enable an ethical and meaningful relationship between inhabitants and urban space.

Nevertheless, Bailly's conception of urban infrastructure is inherently ecological. He does not advocate the outright exclusion of cars; instead, he imagines a city in which people are both able and willing to walk, thereby gradually reducing dependence on motorised transport and other environmentally harmful practices. In this vision, infrastructure is light, adaptive, and respectful of both the city's historical layers and the people who inhabit it, fostering a dynamic, lived environment rather than a static monument. It is also genuinely *ecopoethical*, insofar as it links everyday practices in urban space with civic responsibility and artistic creation. This connection is embodied in Bailly's generative 'grammar of legs', through which walking becomes both a mode of inhabiting the city and a creative act that continually rewrites its urban fabric.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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