Welcome to my May 2014 newsletter. After the hard work during March to set up the internet survey and the workshop, April has been relatively peaceful; plenty of time to catch up with creating new designs.

In the media, On the web

- My map of the month for April generated a lot of interest on the internet. I have now found out that this particular design was never published, possibly a victim of a strike by Berlin S-Bahn workers. *The Atlantic Cities* ran an article about the map and my reconstruction.

- Also doing the rounds, a series of designs by Jug Cerovic, who is seeking to produce standardised maps for networks worldwide. I try not to comment on the work of other amateur designers in public unless I am provoked in some way (*email* me if you would like my private thoughts). Some people writing about his new designs have mentioned my own work: you can always rely on *2nd Avenue Sagas* for intelligent, thoughtful editorial and comments. A mention, also, at the *Daily Telegraph*, another by *Jackie Barry*, and also at *Around This Town*.

- My psychology colleagues and peers finally get to see what I have been up to, Circles Tube Map appears in *The Psychologist* (paywalled). The same design pops up again also at *Kaapi & art* and at the *Fuse Open Science blog*, although I'm not quite sure why for the last one.

Dates for your diary

*My diary is still empty!* I am always happy to give presentations about my work, see the range of topics available at [www.tubemapcentral.com/lectures/lectures.html](http://www.tubemapcentral.com/lectures/lectures.html) and ask me about a booking. Recent talks include: Abingdon National Trust; the Smarter Travel 2013 conference; GeoMob; the Design Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the Sign Design Society.

Map research

- The internet survey on map design is still live. So far, 150 people have taken part, and you can access it at [www.tubemapcentral.com/survey](http://www.tubemapcentral.com/survey). It takes around 15 minutes to complete, and I will need many more people to respond to get the best possible data. All are welcome, even (especially?) map-phobics.

- Most of the papers for *Schematic Mapping 2014* are now online, including two written by me: What’s your theory of effective schematic map design and Schematic maps in the laboratory. The first paper includes a preliminary analysis of the data from the first 100 people to take part in my internet survey, so please don’t read about the findings before taking part in this.

Map of the month: Design on the Orient Express

In the Sablon district of Brussels is a modest 1950s arcade. One of the shops, with the evocative name *Maison de Papier*, specialises in *antique paper* and has some real gems inside. If you want to purchase an original film poster, expect to pay at least a four figure sum for something collectible, but there is plenty here for railway map enthusiasts. If you plan to visit though, let the owner know your interests in advance.

Historic railway maps are are often inserted into booklets or timetables, or printed as part of a pamphlet. It can be laborious inspecting a large pile of documents, one by one. After a while it might be tempting to judge them by the covers, skipping those that look unpromising. One booklet towards the bottom of the pile, an Italian guide to rail travel, could easily have been put to one side, but something about the modernist cover caught my eye. There was indeed map inside and, carefully unfolding it, a hush descended on the shop. In front of us, designed in Italy and published in 1938, was something astonishing.

The map is a graphic index, intended to help the user find the correct timetables to plan a journey across Europe. The colour coding is by class of travel rather than grouping of services, so sleeping car routes are in blue, first class routes in red, and so on. But it is the design itself that is breathtaking, with the whole of Europe shown as an abstract diagram, using the same angles as Henry Beck just five years earlier for London. Was the designer aware of this work? Did he create other maps? Given Italy’s turmoil and the Second World War, I would not even know where to begin to research its origins and these questions.

This map has been digitised using vector graphics, but why would I want to recreate a map that I already own? So that I can get a feel for how it was put together, and how the designer approached the task.
As usual, selecting the typeface caused some headaches. The first impression is Futura, but not quite. The characters of Futura are beautiful, distinctive, and pure, but the R is astonishingly weak: the typeface here has that defect fixed. Other distinctive features (the lower-case letters are nothing like Futura) led me to yet another Futura-derivation, Semplicità by Alessandro Butti. The modern version, Simplo by Durotype was the best match for my purposes. Bizarrely, the key in the corner of the map is in Gill Sans. The script writing of the original appears to be something off the shelf rather than hand-drawn, but finding a computer font match to any script is futile.

From recreating this design I learned that this was a very meticulous piece of work, a credit to the anonymous designer. Everything is neatly aligned, every curve has the same radius. The layering of the lines is particularly well thought out and beautiful. I think my reconstruction reinvigorates the original without introducing serious anachronisms. It certainly looks impressive printed out.

Of course, this is a design from troubled times. I showed it to my Italian curator, who declared it to be a “Fascist map”. Here is yet another problem of researching graphic design during this period: the negative political associations – although the dictators of the 1930s tended to hijack promising new developments rather than inspire their own. However, the stamp of the dictators is nonetheless writ large on this map. Stations in red are border stations between countries, but border stations are notably absent between Germany and Austria.

This is such an important design, anticipating Henry Beck’s shift to maps dominated by horizontals and verticals by 15 years and, dare I say it, a nod of anticipation towards Massimo Vignelli’s famous New York subway map of 1972, with its colourful striped horizontals and verticals descending down through Manhattan like waterfalls. If I hadn’t been so conscientious searching through that little shop in Brussels, who would have suspected that this gem might have existed?

For the map of the month in the June newsletter, I will be plumbing the depths of bad information design, or will I? You can subscribe to this at my web pages www.tubemapcentral.com.

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