If November was a busy month, December was even busier. Thanks to everyone who ordered books and posters, and I hope that everything was delivered safely. Last month’s Map of the Month, the Chicago El network inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright, is now my most successful design, with over 100 printed in just one month. Then, collectively, the Paris media went crazy about my concentric circles map (first released in August 2013). In the light of this, if any newsletter reader has connections in Paris, it might be fun to arrange a lecture programme, or exhibition of my Paris designs. Email me if you might be able to help.

In the media, on the web

- On the heels of the announcement by KVV, Karlsruhe, Germany, that they will be using curvilinear designs for their network maps, is this article in the local newspaper, Karlsruhe News.
- Architect Magazine put my Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired Chicago El map on their Christmas gift guide.
- A couple of miscellaneous articles about alternative London Underground maps; both of them included my London concentric circles design, via Design Week and Changing Stations.
- In the wake of the launch of Mark Ovenden’s latest edition of Transit Maps of the World, two more articles; both of them included my digital reconstruction of the 1958 New York Subway map, via Salon and Mental Floss.
- A chance tweet by the typographer, Jean Francois Porchez, and my old Paris concentric circles map goes viral. Apparently it was called the Metro Map for Dummies! English language articles are from The Local and Connexion. Articles in French are from Rue89 (the only article in which I was actually contacted for interview), Le Figaro, Konbini, Fisheo, Science Post, Linternaute, Sciences et Avenir, Le Bonbon, Villa Schweppes, Minutebuzz, GQ Magazine, Virgin Radio, Carambozilla, Enlarge your Paris, Il Était une Pub, PIWEE, Yahoo News France, Aujourd’hui Paris, Topic, Idées de Biz, Les Petits Frenchies, and Mon Paris en Bouteille. It was blogged by Aleze, Musique du Metro and Fredzone, made an appearance the Belgian newspaper De Morgen, and even appeared on the official RATP Facebook page. Phew!

Web page news

- I am continuing with my Twitter experiment on @TubeMapCentral. The newsletter will always be my main method of communication, but if you are a Twitter user then do subscribe for newsflashes.
- I’ve added two more titles to my lectures page. The first is Purely Decorative: The Journey Map is the Reward; a look at ornamental transit maps through the ages, including my own work. The second is The Paris Metro Map: Past, Present, and Future. There are now twelve titles available, and if you would like to book a presentation on behalf of an organisation that you represent, email me.
- The French version of Mark Ovenden’s book on the history of the Paris Metro map has finally arrived, and has been added to my Books & Links page. Do have a look at this page if you are interested in transit map design, you will be surprised at the range of books available.

Dates for your diary

- I have been invited to give an address at Typo Berlin, 12-14th May 2016. More details will be posted when I have them, we are currently investigating the possibility of including a small exhibition.
- I will be giving my talk Transit Maps: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly to the University of the Third Age Hillingdon branch, Monday 9th January 2017, 11:00 at Winston Churchill Hall, Ruislip, HA4 7QL.

Map of the Month: Porthole on chaos
The excitement generated by my concentric circles Paris map reminded me that I had a design in my in-tray waiting to be digitised. While the classic Lagoutte-Redon Metro map served Paris for over three decades, its geographical accuracy seemed to act as a challenge to people hoping to emulate the success of Henry Beck’s London diagram.
The recurring feature of the most of these bizarre creations is the conversion of the Paris orbit (Lines 2 and 6 today) into a perfect circle. The French National Lottery map on the previous page is well known, and this digitised version is reproduced in my book, *Underground Maps Unravelled*. The design on this page first appeared in 1975, designed by A. de Guerville and published by Lebre as a pocket card folder, although examples also appear in contemporary tourist guides to Paris published in Germany. My own version uses the original configurations, but colours the lines to match contemporary official Metro maps. It improves the (appalling) typography of the original, although I still used Univers and Univers Condensed. This completes my series of digitisations of all known Paris Metro diagrams which pre-date official attempts.

Regular readers will know that, for effective schematic map design, two of the criteria that I advocate are simplicity of line trajectories (straightest lines possible) and coherence of overall shape (the lines must relate to each other). To assist in coherence, I recommend that lines form familiar shapes such as circles and triangles. So, depicting the Paris orbit as a circle? Perfect? Job done? Yes? Well, no, not really!

One single recognisable feature is simply not nearly enough by itself to assist the user in identifying and understanding the overall shape and structure of the network. If the rest of the lines are at chaotic irregular angles, then all that the circle achieves is to draw attention to the failings of the rest of the design. In the last month, I have seen a Paris Metro map under development by an amateur designer, and it looks as though it is going to be problematic in exactly the same way. It’s out there, and it’s not pretty.

Why is a concentric circles map different? Because the stringent design rules force the elements to relate to each other in a highly organised way: Every straight line is a spoke radiating from single a central point. Every arc is part of a circle that is concentric with every other. The result is unparalleled coherence, although with frequent twists and turns, the simplicity of the line trajectories suffer. In the case of Paris, however, this is no worse than for the official design. Even so, a circle for the Paris orbit really does not suit the shape of this city: an ellipse would be a much better fit, matching the design rules to the structure of the network.

The Paris Metro shows no sign of ceasing to be a graphic designers’ graveyard, so if you think that you have a clever idea for taming it, do be brutally honest with yourself before releasing the result to the world. Perhaps even conduct some proper usability studies first. I have a busy term ahead of me, and so Map of the Month for February won’t be finalised for a while. You can subscribe to my newsletter at my web pages, www.tubemapcentral.com.

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