Number 88, Spring 2021

A catch-up newsletter, bringing the total for 2021 to two. I have always kept to a schedule of 12 per year, even if a monthly target cannot always be achieved. Paris seems an appropriate theme for springtime.

Date for your diary
The third Schematic Mapping Workshop will be held on 21st/22nd April, 2022, at Universität Würzburg, Germany. The workshop website includes the full scope and submission timetable. Reports on all aspects of schematic map research are most welcome. The portal for submissions opens in April 2021 and we are happy to take questions about these at submissions@schematicmapping.org.

Map of the Month: The Schematic Map that Parisians Deserved?
As I have discussed elsewhere, the Paris Metro map designed by F. Lagoutte in the 1930s (and continued by Georges Redon from the 1950s until the early 1970s) is one of the great topographical maps. Despite the apparent disorder of Parisian streets and Metro line routes, it somehow managed to present a clear, compact representation of the city, with excellent typography, so that there was never any ambiguity about station names. Despite its status, this did not stop many designers attempting to schematise the network, often with exceedingly bizarre results.

Henry Beck himself was asked to attempt a design for the RATP and his approach highlighted the fundamental difficulty that Paris presents: what to do about the tilt of the city. For designers of octolinear maps the problem is shown by Line 1 (red, crossing the
For one of my modern Paris Metro creations I have explored rotating the octolinear grid so that the design rules conflict less with Paris topography and Metro network structure. This approach does seem to help and I have often wondered whether it would have been well suited to the earlier Paris network, before the arrival of the RER lines made designing elegant clear, compact maps particularly difficult.

The short answer is yes, perfectly suited. Rotating the octolinear grid 16º clockwise, roughly matching Line 1 on the topographical map, enabled simplified line trajectories without leading to distortion of any consequence. Lines 1 (red) and 4 (dark green) now help provide central axes, and the trajectories of the orbital Lines 2/6 are clear. Station name placement can be exceedingly difficult when shallow diagonals are used, but there were no insurmountable problems here. [On a curvilinear map it is possible to bend the lines subtly to make additional space for text.]

I can’t help wondering whether Beck might have missed a trick. Rather than going into battle with the structure of Paris, twisting it into an alien, unbalanced configuration that would have disorientated or even upset many Parisians, he might have used more subtle techniques to enhance the design that was already in use, highlighting the structure that was actually present – rather than creating his own parody of this – and helping people make better sense of the reality. After all, that is exactly what he achieved in 1933 with his original design for London.

With enough material to keep the newsletter going for months, expect another catch-up edition very soon, this time returning to an egg theme. To find out what is in store, subscribe to my newsletter at www.tubemapcentral.com.

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