Political and cultural events in the Parisian métro: Manifestations of urban or mobile communities?

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AAG Annual Meeting – 3/25/09

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1. Introduction and background

> Subject: The expression of social groups inside the Parisian métro

> While cultural expression has found a place inside the system, any political dimension has remained undesirable

> Yet, political expression is more and more frequent

> The majority of these political claims focus specifically on the system itself

>> Mobility spaces are subject to some kind of territorial appropriation or at least territorial claim
1. Introduction and background

Parisian métro system:
> 16 lines
> First ones opened in 1900 /
Last one opened in 1997 [« Météor »]
> 4.7 million passengers per day
> 297 stations, each 500m apart

>> a utility network, technical artifact
2. Social events

> At the beginning of the seventies, a technological change transformed the way of planning
> The automation (instead of ticket-punchers) of control gates allowed all sorts of people to enter the system
> New commercial and cultural changes entered the system
> The Parisian transport authority (RATP - Régie autonome des transports parisiens) first tried to dissuade them but finally accepted them integrated them into its own service.
> RATP issued music players with permission cards and even organized some live performances inside its spaces

>> A large part of the cultural events, even the most recent ones like the flash subway parties, have been absorbed by the RATP within the framework of a process of « humanization » of it spaces
3. Political claims

Graffitis:
> Since the opening of Parisian subway spaces, a new kind of practice has appeared: the tag (Kokoreff, 1990)
> A new, wild and sharp way to communicate
> It challenges the « smooth order » (Kokoreff, 1990: 124) of métro
> A territorial marker...

>> ... as well as other political events that mushroomed throughout the system
3. Political claims

« Stop-ad »
> Since the beginning of the nineties, around the key figure of Yvan Gradis
> First, without any mask or anything covering their face and with journalists recording the action
> Then began the time of police and justice repressions
> While passengers seemed to judge them more favorably

>> A region-wide debate could have been chaired
3. Political claims

Free transport
> Blossomed during the sixties for ecological reasons
> Recurred in the nineties for social reasons
> « RATP » collective : « Réseau pour l’Abolition des Transports Payants » /
  literally : « Network for the Abolition of Paying Transportation »
> Distribution of tracts and free tickets to passengers.
> Free transport weeks and some kind of « open houses »
> They also blocked parts of the sidewalk and forced pedestrians who
  wanted to walk across to pay for it

>> People can feel in public spaces when they walk across the mobility
  spaces and they don’t understand why they should pay for it
4. Discussion

> Other kinds of demands for territoriality may grow

> For example the women’s demand for separate spaces on the train or even in the station

> This makes it clear that territorial appropriation also means the exclusion of the stranger

> That’s why it seems so urgent that the Parisian transportation authority take this demand into account

>> The mobility spaces are no longer a machinery but evidently a territory

Thanks for your attention