Jean-Luc Adde/AFP-Mehdi Fedouach

THE NEGOTIATED URBANISM OF *GRAND PARIS EXPRESS*
Mobility narratives and design politics in the networked metropolis

Lara Belkind, Harvard University

Synopsis
This research is part of a larger study which examines a recent reframing of Paris as a 'network' and how the infrastructure that facilitates this reconceptualization – an expanding regional rail system – acts as a site both of urban conflict and of urban negotiation in a highly fragmented metropolis. It seeks to explore how a shift in urban framework and its accompanying discourses of mobility are altering the public sphere and the roles of architecture and planning in urban politics.

Introduction

Focusing on the shifting urban politics of infrastructure, this paper examines two aspects of the recent *Grand Paris Express* proposal for a rapid regional rail network serving greater Paris. First, it examines the conflict between the State and the Region's visions for the project – and the contrasting narratives of spatial mobility (social vs. economic) that underlie this conflict. Narratives of mobility and of networks are employed both by proponents of economic development and by proponents of social justice. However, the strategies each proposes to achieve mobility goals are often directly in opposition.

Second, the paper analyzes how, in the midst of this debate, the State has instrumentalized architects to more effectively promote its economic development agenda for *Grand Paris Express*.

1

France's mayors and presidents have long employed architecture as a tool of urban politics, but the political role for architecture is changing as Paris is reframed as a networked, polycentric metropolis. I argue that this reframing is as much an aspiration as it is a reality – the multipolar city has become an economic development paradigm for achieving global competitiveness. At the same time however, under globalization pressures and decentralization policies, the governance of greater Paris has become fragmented and exceedingly complex. Meanwhile, the infrastructure that enables this complex metropolis is increasingly a focal point of its conflicts. In this challenging metropolitan context, the media role played by architecture is key to shaping public opinion and directing urban development.

To provide evidence supporting this discussion, I analyze the proceedings of two interrelated public processes that took place between 2007 and 2011. The first is the *Grand Pari de l'agglomération parisienne* international design consultation to envision the future of greater Paris, which culminated in the *Grand Pari(s)* exhibition at the Cite de l'Architecture in 2009. In parallel, I filter the documentation of the *Débat public sur le projet de Réseau de transport du Grand Paris*, the largest participatory planning process in France's history, which took place in late 2010. The mission of this process was to contrast and debate the merits of the Region's *Arc Express* versus the State's *Grand Huit* regional train proposals. The former favored serving existing areas of population density, particularly the disadvantaged communities impacted by the riots of 2005. The latter emphasized establishing new economic poles in the far periphery linked to airports and TGV lines.

Node to Network

Recently, urban scholars and public officials have been engaged in rethinking the geography of Paris. Their narratives have shifted away from a strong dichotomy of center and periphery toward a picture of the city as a constellation of diverse, complementary centers. This new diagram is both analytical and aspirational. On one hand, it is based upon close study of how the city actually functions – of emerging patterns in the locations and movements of residents, workers, employment and leisure activities, as well as new investment. On the other, this diagram reflects an increasingly influential paradigm – the multipolar metropolis. Multipolar city-regions, consisting of networked centers of activity that are specialized yet complementary, have been touted as tremendously efficient engines of economic growth by such institutions as the European Union and have become a dominant development model in Europe and in Asia.

Meanwhile, the infrastructure networks that facilitate this framework, especially transportation, are playing an expanding role in the city's spatial and design politics. These networks are framing urban conflict and shaping public space. They are also changing how architecture is employed as a tool in metropolitan and national politics. Finally, new infrastructure networks are engendering strategies to negotiate governance and urban planning in a contested, highly fragmented metropolis.

One result of the shift to a network discourse is a project currently underway in the Paris region, a State initiative to finance and build a *super métro*. This project is an extensive regional high speed automated train system intended to transform Paris from a highly centralized into a multi-centered urban region. Most recently christened the *Grand Paris Express*, it envisions the construction of approximately two hundred kilometers of track and seventy new stations forming regional loops that tie into existing Metro, regional RER and long-distance high speed TGV lines and enhance connections to the region's three airports.

On one hand, this new diagram of Paris as constellation can be read in both visual and empirical evidence, such as photo-documentation of the Paris region and analyses of its evolving

economic and demographic trends.[1] On the other, re-envisioning the city as a network of flows has become central to political rhetoric promoting the city's economic development. Although they have a somewhat opposite perspective, proponents of urban social justice have similarly adopted a network discourse, focusing on physical mobility as a fundamental civil right. These contrasting perspectives on mobility and flows were at the core of a recent debate between two proposals for Paris's regional transportation future: *Le Grand Huit*, advanced by the State, and *Arc Express*, developed by the Region.

Both proposals were responses to stark shifts in the Paris agglomeration. Urban economist Frédéric Gilli and architect Paul Chemetov collaborated in 2006 on a cartography of key trends in land use, demographic data and travel patterns in greater Paris. What surfaces in their maps is a view of an inter-regional metropolis whose zones of density and activity are often fluid and discontinuous. Although the greatest cumulative concentrations of activity lie in and around Paris and its inner suburbs, this distribution breaks down when one isolates and maps such data as locations of new technology firms, employment sites of foreign workers, urban investment, and leisure activities such as cinemas. Such activities appear in clusters scattered across an extended metropolitan area. [2]

Data charting the decentralization of the region's population and employment supports these patterns. Between 1960 and 2000, Paris intramuros steadily lost a third of its population until it stabilized at around 2 million. Where in the late '60s, this represented more than a quarter of the total regional population, today it represents less than a sixth. In the same four decades, Paris lost 300,000 jobs, while its region gained 500,000. Although 100,000 new jobs were developed in inner

---

[1] See, for example, photo-documentation of the Paris region by Dominque Delaunay, "Points de vue," included in the exhibition, *Le Grand Pari(s): Consultation Internationale sur l'Avenir de la Metropole Parisienne*, Paris, Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, April 30 – November 22, 2009.
[2] Chemetov, Paul and Gilli, Frédéric, *Une région de projets: l'avenir de Paris,* Paris, Diact et La Documentation française, 2006.

suburban economic poles such as La Defense, these were far outpaced by job growth in the wider region.[3]

In addition, maps of commuting patterns by Gilli and Chemetov reveal an archipelago of numerous gravitational centers outside of the central zone, reflecting a city that is increasingly shaped by flows and exchanges rather than centrality of place. Indeed, seventy percent of all trips in the Paris region are now made from banlieue to banlieue. Very few of these trips are made using public transportation. While from Paris, approximately three quarters of the region's jobs are accessible by public transport, from the near suburbs, only about half and from the far suburbs, only around one sixth of jobs can be reached this way.[4] Eighty percent of trips in the periphery are made by car.[5]

This cartography demonstrates not only that significant employment, residential and leisure activities are now located far beyond central Paris, but that the existing transportation network no longer corresponds to metropolitan realities. This infrastructure was primarily built in the 1970s in a hub-and-spokes formation to bring people in and out of the city center. In order to move from one outlying destination to another, one is forced to travel to the center and back out again – and travel times are long. The existing system is overwhelmed with ridership and untenably congested at the core. In addition, a number of outlying station projects from the 1960s and '70s were never realized, leaving communities – particularly residents of social housing estates – stranded with few transportation options. Their mobility limitations become even more acute as jobs and other opportunities shift to a wider range of metropolitan locations.

The preceding data provides an analytical picture of Paris's reconfiguration as a 'network city,' but the network paradigm is also aspirational. It not only describes a shift in how the

---

[3] Frédéric Gilli, "La region parisienne entre 1975 et 1999: une mutation géographique et économique," *Economie et Statistiques,* 387, 2006, p. 3-32, cited in Frédéric Gilli et Jean-Marc Offner, *Paris, Metropole Hors Les Murs: Amenager et gouverner un Grand Paris*, Paris, Les Presses de Sciences Po, 2009, p. 69-71.
[4] Sandrine Wenglanski, "L'accessibilité au marché de l'emploi en Île-de-France: une function de la catégorie sociale," in Denise Pumain et Marie-Flore Mattei (ed.), Données urbaines, Paris, Economica, 2007, cited in Frédéric Gilli et Jean-Marc Offner, 2009, p.73.
[5] Beltrando, Yannick, Director of the Metropolis Work Group of the Atelier Parisien d'Urbanisme (APUR), "Les Enjeux de la Mobilité dans la Métropole Parisienne," presentation on November 4, 2010.

agglomeration functions but also what many public officials and urban economists believe to be a development model essential to strengthening Paris's competitive position in the context of globalization. The polycentric model – a city of multiple, complementary economic centers linked by high speed transportation and information networks – has been promoted by such institutions as the EU as the most efficient urban structure operating under new economic conditions of globalization and what Manuel Castells describes as the shift from production to an informational mode of development and a new primacy of advanced producer services.[6] In addition, the polycentric model is thought to offer a more sustainable alternative to urban sprawl, with the possibility of focusing development density on existing centers linked by collective transportation. Such economic and ecological hopes were the impetus of the recent EU-funded POLYNET Study led by Peter Hall, which studied the structure and economic functions of eight agglomerations in Europe thought to operate as multipolar regions, including among others Paris, London, the Ranstad, and the RhineRhur.[7]

Findings of the POLYNET study and other network city scholarship are echoed in economic development language, for example in this statement by Christian Blanc, former French State Secretary for the Development of the Capital Region:

> The force of the great metropolises comes from being situated where international and local networks meet, and from making these two dimensions coincide with exceptional transportation infrastructure... Links and networks [are] motors of the dynamism of agglomerations. In addition to mobility, several factors are at work in the new economic forms that are driving the organization around large metropolitan areas. Among these factors is the multiplication of externalities and the strength of networks.[8]

Meanwhile, Paris faces a conundrum. In the abstract, the city is confronting narratives of decline and the apprehension that it is losing its place in a global hierarchy of cities. This hierarchy, and the perception of Paris's tenuous position within it, was illustrated by Saskia Sassen in *The Global City*, in which she ranked Paris below London, New York and Tokyo as a global "command and

---

[6] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996.
[7] Peter Hall and Kathy Pain, *The Polycentric Metropolis: Learning from Mega-City Regions in Europe*, London, Earthscan, 2006.
[8] Christian Blanc, *Le Grand Paris du XXIe Siècle*, Paris, Le Cherche Midi, 2010, pp. 125-126.

control center" of world finance and related service industries.[9]   Another symbolic injury to the

city's global brand was Paris's loss to London in its bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games. But beyond

anxieties about narratives and symbolism, the city faces more concrete signs of trouble. Its regional

economy has been expanding more slowly than in prior decades – more slowly than other French

regions and than other world cities. In addition, it faces challenges such as rising unemployment and

living costs, a housing shortage, a strained public transport system, and growing social inequality.

Ostensibly to address these concerns about Paris's future, President Sarkozy initiated a

sweeping design and planning consultation in 2007, *Le Grand Pari de l'agglomération parisienne*, of

which the results were exhibited to the public for seven months at the Cité de l'Architecture in 2009.

In his address inaugurating the exhibition, Sarkozy stated the central goals of the consultation to be

achieving a city that is globally competitive, sustainable, and socially equitable. [10] Yet, in practice,

strategies to achieve each of these goals are often directly in conflict.

Narratives of Mobility: The Global City vs. the Just City

That different advocates of each of the three central goals of the *Grand Pari(s)* design

exploration – competitiveness, social equity, and environmental sustainability – should all adopt the

discourse of urban mobility speaks to how important the ability to move has become in an urban

context increasingly defined by networks, flows and exchange. And yet the map of a new rail

network is drawn very differently according to which of these objectives is given precedence.

Whose mobility should come first – that of global capital or disenfranchised residents? What

approach is likely to be most sustainable ecologically, socially, or economically?   Political struggles

over Paris's priorities and its future are currently playing out in the charting of a new rail system –

and the map of this system is, in effect, a map of these politics rather than of the rational

technocratic engineering that steered such proposals in the 1960s.

---

[9] Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1991
(Second edition published 2001).
[10] Nicholas Sarkozy, "Discours de Monsieur le Président de la République a l'inauguration de l'exposition sur le
Grand Pari(s)" at the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Wednesday April 29, 2009.

Coming somewhat as a surprise in his opening address at the *Grand Pari(s)* design exhibition at the Cité de l'Architecture in 2009, President Sarkozy announced a plan for a regional rail network and multipolar development scheme that had quietly been formulated under the direction of his Secretary of State for the development of the Capital Region, Christian Blanc, while the *Grand Pari(s)* design consultation was in progress. This scheme, dubbed the "*le Grand Huit*" or "Big Eight" because of its double-loop configuration, was in stark contrast to an existing rail proposal, *Arc Express*, already being advanced by the Regional Council and its metropolitan transportation authority, the STIF. Where the Region's *Arc Express* proposal emphasized connecting underserved communities in north-east Paris, a zone of intense rioting during the social unrest of 2005, The State's *Grand Huit* proposal largely bypassed the near north-east and instead focused upon connecting future economic development poles to international transport networks. In the wake of the *Grand Pari(s)* design consultation, the discourse of mobility and these two conflicting transportation proposals of the State and the Region soon became the primary focus of public action and debate over Paris's future.

The State's *Grand Huit* rail proposal aimed to enhance Paris's position as a global economic capital and to create real estate development potential. It consisted of two loops that would extend deep into the agglomeration and link the region's airports and TGV stations to seven new economic clusters. These specialized clusters were to be themed around research and development, film and media, biotech, aerospace, and sustainable construction industries. A key site in this scheme was the plateau of Saclay, currently the location of several scientific research facilities, technology firms and a future 'super campus' housing a dozen of Paris's elite technical universities that will transfer from their present facilities in central Paris. Although referencing polycentric development models from Europe and Asia, Secretary Blanc most frequently cited Silicon Valley as a precedent, with its confluence of suburban high tech firms and university campuses located within the orbit of the San Francisco metropolitan region. Indeed, a primary goal of the State is for Saclay to figure in the global innovation economy.

In contrast, the Region's *Arc Express* scheme focused on connecting existing zones of population density which were isolated and underserved by public transportation. This especially included areas of north-east Paris where geographic stigmatization emerged as a central theme during episodes of social unrest in 2005. Physical mobility and the right to equal public transportation access were central to this discussion. They are essential to reaching employment, training and other opportunities in an increasingly fluid metropolis.[11] Indeed, physical mobility is directly linked to social mobility, particularly in a context where jobs have become more dispersed. Limited access to the collective transportation network is also felt to be a denial of urban citizenship.

Meanwhile, interviews with residents of '*quartiers sensible*,' or at-risk neighborhoods in the banlieue highlight that spatial prejudice linked to mobility plays as much a role as racial prejudice in negative encounters with potential employers. One teenager interviewed during the public debates of the Greater Paris public transportation network recounted that unreliable public transit is a greater obstacle than racial or neighborhood stereotypes in the difficult search for employment:

> When you submit a CV you are obliged to include your address and when you are from Montfermeil and Clichy, it's said you are discriminated against because you come from Montfermeil and Clichy which are negatively perceived. Not necessarily. You are discriminated against because the employer knows that the probability that you'll be late to work is higher. You feel ashamed by this.[12]

Submitting a CV with an "improved" address is a common and crucial practice. In one case at Vaulx-en-Velin, a planning project director even went to the length of changing the precinct and street names of the disadvantaged quarter he was managing so that they would not be recognized by potential employers.[13]

Adding to a widespread sense of spatial injustice are stark inequalities inherent in the transportation system. Many station projects and transportation extensions that were planned along with the *Grands Ensembles* social housing estates in the 1960s were never realized, leaving

---

[11] Jean-Pierre Orfeuil, "Dix ans de 'droit a la mobilité' et maintenant?," posted on *metropolitiques.eu*, September 16, 2011.
[12] Brigitte Flamant, *Grand Paris: un débat public historique*, documentary film produced by the Stratis agency for the Société du Grand Paris, 2011.
[13] Mustafa Dikeç, interview with Bernard Brun, project director at Vaulx-en-Velin, in *Badlands of the Republic: Space, Politics and Urban Policy*, London, Blackwell, 2007, p. 156.

residents stranded far from work opportunities and with few travel options. This challenge becomes

acute as employment is dispersed throughout the region. And those with the least stable work must

be the most flexible and able to move to temporary opportunities around the region. Éric Le Breton

has documented this "dual fragmentation of work and territory" in the Paris region:

> Our society is being subject to two major transformations: the fragmentation of
> territory and the fragmentation of work, that are profoundly redefining the
> organization of time and the spaces of daily life. In this context, the capacity of
> mobility is becoming a determinant factor for social integration. But low income
> populations have the least mobility capacity at the same time that they are confronting
> a pronounced disorganization of their daily life....
>
> Today, the overlap between of zones of work and zones of residence has been
> disturbed. Employment is less sure, the locations of firms less perennial. Workers
> must seek out work wherever it may be located....The imperative of mobility is even
> stronger when persons are less skilled. In effect, teenagers, isolated women,
> immigrant workers often have access to work only through atypical employment
> (limited contract, interim, shift work). This fractioning of work, day and night,
> weekday and weekend, in one firm for a short period, then in another situated
> elsewhere, imposes upon them more numerous and more dispersed journeys. Yet
> they have limited means of transport with which to face this imperative. In the 2000s,
> more than half of the most modest households had no car.[14]

Furthermore, the fare structure and layout of the existing public rail system places the

highest cost burden on those who can least afford it. Some of Paris's poorest suburban residents

must pay the highest rates in the Metro/RER system as the fare scale is based upon distance

traveled. In addition, the star shaped network makes traveling within the periphery even more

costly because one is forced to travel to the center and outward again through multiple fare zones.

Such trips are long and expensive.

Claims of harassment by police also contribute to a sense of unequal treatment within the

transport system and restrictions on mobility. Suburban youths are regularly stopped by police for

identity checks at major stations without specified cause.[15] When police arrested a turnstile jumper

at the Gare du Nord on March 27, 2007, a simmering sense of injustice instantly flamed into a riot

involving hundreds of youths and passersby.

---

[14] Éric Le Breton, *Bouger pour s'en sortir: mobilité quotidienne et intégration sociale*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2005, pp. 18, 25, 43.
[15] See Fabien Jobard and René Lévy, *Profiling Minorities: A Study of Stop-and-Search Practices in Paris*, New York, Open Society Institute, 2009.

Finally, restricted access to the collective transportation network is an implied denial of urban and even national citizenship. Hughes Lagrange and Marco Oberti discuss this link between public service provision and collective identity in a study of the root causes of the 2005 riots in the Paris banlieue:

> French social cohesion rests on a national conception of citizenship that formally unites all individuals around one nation, one language, one State, one set of rights, independent of their social, religious, ethno-racial or territorial differences....More broadly, the welfare state constitutes a fundamental pillar of social solidarity through the strong presence of public services in the major domains of social life: education, health, family, transport, urban development and planning, housing....This posture (of a "national society") implies a guarantee of the same equality of opportunities to each individual, whatever his territorial situation. Because French society, through the State and its public services, claims to guarantee a relative homogeneity of the conditions necessary for integration and social success throughout its territory, this model has been able to have an indispensible legitimacy for maintaining strong social cohesion.[16]

This social compact breaks down when the provision of services such as transport becomes highly unequal. Car burning during riots in the banlieue is a symbolic act that communicates this breakdown in violating property, but it is also a fatalistic gesture, destroying what little means of mobility exist in isolated zones of the metropolis.

Le Grand Huit vs. *Arc Express*

The *Débat public sur le projet de Réseau de transport du Grand Paris*, the most extensive participatory planning effort ever undertaken in France, took place from September 2010 through January 2011. Its fifty-five meetings were attended by approximately fifteen thousand people. The objective of this process was to debate the merits of the Region's *Arc Express* versus the State's *Grand Huit* regional train proposals. Again, the first emphasized serving current needs and areas of population density, especially isolated communities impacted by poverty and social unrest. The latter emphasized establishing new economic poles further into the periphery, with efficient air and TGV connections. At the core of this debate, embodied by each proposal, are two conflicting

---

[16] Hughes Lagrange and Marco Oberti, "Intégration, Ségrégation, et Justice Sociale," in Hughes Lagrange and Marco Oberti,eds., *Émeutes Urbaines et Protestations: Une singularit*é *française*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2006, pp.19-20.

narratives of mobility – the "global city" versus the "just city." And indeed, themes arising in the

debate illustrate many of the dilemmas of the network city and its difficulty reconciling economic

growth priorities and social fairness.

A remark contributed at a public meeting by Patrick Braouezec, then Deputy of Seine-Saint-

Denis, highlights this dilemma:

> First, I appreciate enormously the fact that, for once, we're hearing from everyone's
> mouths that the question of the attractiveness and competitiveness of Paris and of
> the Ile-de-France region will come from the reduction of social and territorial
> inequalities, and that public transport is one of the essential threads with which to
> achieve this.[17]

In reality, the difficulty finding a nexus between global competitiveness and social justice has proved

the greatest challenge of contemporary urban development trends. Gabriel Dupuy recognizes

networked urbanism to be a condition generating both economic growth and widening inequality.[18]

Pierre Veltz also addresses this conundrum:

> One increasingly has the impression of an 'archipelago economy' in which
> horizontal, frequently transnational, relations increasingly outmatch traditional
> vertical relations with the hinterland. What explanation is there for such
> polarization at a time when the growing fluidity of communication and the volatile –
> in particular, uncapitalistic – character of the most remarkable activities in modern
> capitalism ought to be leading towards a more footloose economy, in which places
> and concentrations are a matter of indifference?[19]

Remarks at a meeting by Claude Bartolone, then President of the General Council of Seine-

Saint-Denis, more somberly describe what Graham and Marvin would analyze to be the "splintering"

effects of Paris's infrastructure network:

> In spite of the poverty of the Seine-Saint-Denis population, this is the department
> with the highest dependence on individual cars, because unfortunately, public
> transportation is so retrograde. Transportation from banlieue to banlieue poses the
> greatest difficulty.

---

[17] Patrick Braouezec, Deputy of Seine-Saint-Denis, remarks at a *Débat public sur le projet de Réseau de transport du Grand Paris* meeting in Saint-Denis, October 13, 2010.
[18] Gabriel Dupuy, *Urban Networks / Network Urbanism*, (English edition), Amsterdam, Techne Press, 2008.
[19] Pierre Veltz, "European cities in the world economy" in *Cities in Contemporary Europe*, Arnaldo Bagnasco and Patrick Le Gales (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000. pp. 33-34.

He also expressed concerns about potential "bypass" effects of the State's *Grand Huit*

proposal, another dynamic described by Graham and Marvin[20]:

> I would not want that under the feet of the residents of the most disadvantaged
> neighborhoods should run a high quality train permitting businessmen and women
> to travel from one airport to another but which would stir an odd feeling in those
> who are in so much need of transport, who would hear or even feel the metro
> running under their feet without having the possibility to imagine being able to take
> it one day.[21]

Bartolone's concern was not only that a proposed *super métro* might bypass a low-income

area that is badly in need of transit, but that it might be priced at a level that is unaffordable to many

riders. This concern is justified, as high-speed airport express trains like the connection proposed

are frequently priced as "premium network spaces" to attract global business with an infrastructural

space that is socially exclusive.[22]

Anxieties about "bypass" were evident in other contributions to the debate. Residents

questioned for whom the new network was being planned and expressed a sense of being passed

over in favor of global firms. Valerie Grémont, a resident of the Plaine Saint-Denis was among them:

> In the end, this district will be transversed by all sorts of transport, but I can assure
> you that if there are so few people in the room today, it is because they cannot get
> here. You do realize that we have 50,000 transportation projects proposed: Arc
> Express, Grand Paris, a mobilization plan... and me, from my home, I cannot get here
> on public transport. And the proposed transport plan will not address this. ...
>
> When we see in your document the station at La Defense, at the *pole* of La
> Defense!...
>
> Today, there are two buses [from the RER station - which in itself was only built as
> provisional]. And yet, when I say two buses, one is a bus that was canceled, was
> deviated ... so my neighborhood is not served. This is thus a bus and a half. You can
> already see the urgency to rethink what you're proposing, to have immediate and
> emblematic responses.[23]

---

[20] Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition*, London: Routledge, 2001.

[21] Claude Bartolone, President of the General Council of Seine-Saint-Denis, remarks at a *Débat public sur le projet de Réseau de transport du Grand Paris* meeting in Saint-Denis, October 13, 2010.

[22] See Stephen Graham, "Constructing Premium Network Spaces: Reflections on Infrastructure Networks and Contemporary Urban Development," in *the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Vol 24.1, March 2000.*

[23] Valerie Grémont, resident of La Plaine Saint-Denis, remarks at *Débat public sur le projet de réseau de transport public du Grand Paris*, "urbanisme et quartier" thematic meeting at La Plaine Saint-Denis, October 27, 2010.

Although many communities hoped the proposed network might draw new employment

opportunities into their own precincts, and offer isolated youth easier access to universities and

educational opportunities, they questioned the engineers' emphasis on speed and successfully

pressed authorities to increase the number of planned stops in order to distribute service more

fairly. Others stressed the need to connect residents of isolated housing estates to wider

metropolitan opportunities and the importance of a mobile workforce to Paris's long term economic

viability.[24]

Many of the concerns voiced in the public debate were not only focused on social fairness,

but also upon interrogating the validity of the economic cluster concept presented by the State's

Grand Huit proposal. This is how the project was presented to the public:

> The public authorities' goal is to encourage density and territorial polarization (and
> thus productivity) through a policy of structuring mobility. The Grand Paris project
> is, thanks to a transport scheme conceived on the principle of polarized
> territorialization, at the heart of a global growth strategy. The ambitious but
> realistic aim of the project is to double the level of tangential growth of the region to
> 4% and create a million jobs by 2035.[25]

Although certain community actors supported this vision, this global growth model of infrastructure

was also called into question. On one hand, cities including Neuilly-Sur-Seine, and the Versailles

Grand Parc regional authority, submitted statements reinforcing the State's global growth vision.

> The Grand Paris has foregrounded the necessity to change scale...in envisioning
> metropoles of the 21st century, where these no longer are defined around a center with
> its peripheries but around multipolarities… The double loop of Grand Paris, thanks to its
> interconnections with the rest of the world and its development of major poles around
> the Capital will permit this "world city" to reinforce its international attractiveness and
> ready itself for the emergence of new competitors."[26]

At the same time, this vision was heavily critiqued. For example, a video presentation of the *Grand*

Huit rail expansion highlighted the need for Paris to catch up to cities perceived to be pulling ahead

---

[24] See for illustration "Le droit a la mobilité, un véritable enjeu pour les habitants du territoire," *Cahier d'Acteurs 60*, Communauté d'agglomération Vallée de Montmorency, November 2010.
[25] CNDP presentation summary, *Débat public sur le projet de Réseau de transport du Grand Paris* meeting in Paris-Centre Marceau, October 13, 2010.
[26] *Cahier d'Acteurs 46*, Ville de Neuilly-Sur-Seine, submitted to the Commission Particulière du *Débat Public Réseau de transport public du Grand Paris*, November 2010.

in global rankings, such as London, New York, and Tokyo. However, Paris's transportation

infrastructure, even under its current strain is perceived to be at par with or superior to these other

cities. Alain Meyere, Director of Mobility and Transport at the Institut d'aménagement et

d'urbanisme d'Île-de-France (IAU), was among those questioning the logic of equating

transportation and global competitiveness:

> We use the example of greater London and its economic dynamism. But what
> London tells us is that the relationship between transport and economic dynamism
> must be extremely tenuous. Because London has a transit organizing authority that
> is unique among major world cities in that it does not cover the entire basin of
> travel….It …does not deal with commuter trains or a regional network. Imagine if the
> Paris authority were like this! The relationship is complex. It is not as simple as you
> would have us believe.[27]

While research studies were presented to support the cluster strategy, critics remarked that cluster

theories were either outdated or unobserved in France and that transportation individuation and

intermodal "weaving" rather than polarization would offer more economic gain and mobility

choice.[28]

For critics such as Cécile Duflot, recently appointed Minister of Territorial Equality and

Housing, the cluster concept was simply a global marketing strategy, divorced from concerns of an

existing metropolis or "costly problems of a hinterland" in the words of Pierre Veltz (2000). Duflot

offers a decidedly anti-splintering stance:

> The Grand Paris cannot simply remain a transportation project...we cannot consider
> that it will suffice, in order to respond to the expectations of 12 million Ile-de-France
> residents, to link together poles of excellence simply in the name of promoting their
> economic attractiveness for a territorial marketing campaign...The Grand Paris won't
> make sense if it is constructed for global competitors more than for its inhabitants.
> The Grand Paris will not become Dubai-sur-Seine.[29]

Yet, given the Paris region's pressing economic concerns, and its primary importance in France's

economy, Olivier Coutard would invite us to take into account the "other side of the coin" of the

---

[27]Alain Meyere, Director of Mobility and Transport at the Institut d'aménagement et d'urbanisme d'Île-de-France (IAU), comments at *Débat public sur le projet de réseau de transport public du Grand Paris*, "urbanism and neighborhood" thematic session at La Plaine Saint-Denis, October 27, 2010.

[28] See for example the comments of Alain Leikine, Vice-Président du Conseil général du Val d'Oise, *Débat public sur le projet de Réseau de transport du Grand Paris* meeting in Paris-Centre Marceau, October 13, 2010.

[29] Gilles Davoine and Jacques-Franck Degioanni, "Cécile Duflot – 'Le Grand Paris ne sera pas Dubai-sur-Seine'," *Le Moniteur*, June 26, 2012.

State's globalization-oriented infrastructure proposal by taking a wider view of its potential to socially redistribute income generated by growth:

> The issue then is not whether the "archipelago" pattern of contemporary capitalism is fairer or harsher to hinterlands than previous patterns of "nationally embedded" capitalism: it *is* harsher (Veltz 1996)...Rather, the issue is to compare the public policies that support the new pattern with their sustainable alternatives – in terms of both the overall income generated and the redistributive effects...locally, nationally and internationally.[30]

Design as Politics: from *Grands Projets* to *Grand Pari(s)*

The fundamental transformation of the city into a networked territory is not only shaping public space and mobility conflicts but it is radically altering how design is instrumentalized as a tool in metropolitan politics. It is changing the way that politicians and other urban actors employ architects in political maneuvers and also how architects themselves approach metropolitan projects.

Within the fragmented political context of the Paris agglomeration, architecture is playing a increasingly strategic role in helping politicians and other stakeholders (such as the region's transit authorities) create media interest and build public support for their proposed approach, even without control of institutional mechanisms necessary to implement it. For example, the *Grand Pari(s)* design consultation and exhibition allowed the State to gain control of the narrative about greater Paris's future, despite the fact that real institutional power had largely been transferred to regional and local authorities under decentralization policies first initiated in the 1980s.

This strategic role of architecture marks a shift away from its more symbolic function in politics, for example, during the era of President Francois Mitterrand's *Grands Projets*. In the 1980s and '90s, President Mitterrand and Mayor Jacques Chirac both employed architectural symbols in the struggle between socialists and neo-gaullists to control national politics. While Mitterrand sought to build great cultural monuments to the socialist collective, Chirac characterized these as

---

[30] Olivier Coutard, "Urban Space and the Development of Networks: A Discussion of the 'Splintering Urbanism' Thesis" in O. Coutard, R Hanley, and R. Zimmerman, *Sustaining Urban Networks: the social diffusion of large technical systems*, London, Routledge, 2005, pp. 56-57.

products of an aloof socialist elite and countered with a building program of "populist" projects. In the context of greater Paris, President Sarkozy's pragmatism could be characterized as a shift from deployment of architecture's symbolic power to its effective power in urban politics.

The State's initiative to direct development of the Paris agglomeration, loosely referred to as *Grand Paris*, began with an address by Sarkozy at the opening of the Roissy 3 air terminal in June, 2007 and continued at his inauguration of the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, national architecture museum and library in September, 2007. Responding to pressure to address social unrest in the *banlieue* and to accusations that he was callously disinterested in the plight of the suburbs, Sarkozy suggested that architecture be deployed to consider both city and periphery. Also on his mind was the upcoming mayoral election in Paris, in which he hoped a conservative party candidate would be successful and the relationship of Paris to the suburbs was a key issue. He further proposed that a new global plan for greater Paris to be the subject of an international design consultation. By mid-2008, ten interdisciplinary teams led by high-profile architects were commissioned by the Ministry of Culture to spend nine months studying the future development of the Paris agglomeration. The results of this consultation were internationally publicized and exhibited at the Cité from April to November of 2009.

Taking many of the architects and Regional authorities by surprise, toward the end of the work of the teams, Christian Blanc, Sarkozy's State Secretary for Development of the Capital Region unveiled his *Grand Huit* plan for a regional "*super métro"* and seven new economic development poles.[31] At the close of the exhibition, the *Grand Huit* plan was advanced by the State, and the architect teams complained bitterly that, after such extensive study, few if any of their recommendations were adopted.

Whether or not this was the original intention, the *Grand Pari(s)* design consultation permitted the State to retake control of planning for greater Paris from Regional authorities in order to promote its own priorities for the capital. Where the Region's emphasis was on rebalancing

---

[31] Conversation with architect Bernardo Secchi, October 29, 2011.

mobility inequities, particularly in disadvantages communities, the State's goal was to promote business interests and Paris's economic position on a global stage. The highly mediatized design consultation, in effect, allowed the State to appear to be directing the thinking process, and it also bought time for Secretary Blanc to formulate his own counter plan to the Region's.

A Changing Political Context

The differences of approach between the State and Regional propositions stem partly from the multiple roles of the Paris agglomeration and its fractured governance. Paris is at once a global city, a national capital, and a local municipality. To many, Paris *is* France. It contains by far the highest concentration of population and economic activity in the nation and is the country's economic and cultural engine. For this reason, the State is reluctant to cede control of the capital and prioritizes global interests. Meanwhile, the city's local interests are frequently in conflict with those of the State. France's presidents have often leaned to the political right of the Capital region, as they are elected primarily by the more conservative provinces. Meanwhile Paris and its concentration of workers have generally leaned left. This is particularly true of the regional municipalities in the Paris agglomeration that are the historic home of the industrial working class. The Regional Council has always been resistant to control by the right, putting it in direct conflict with Sarkozy's presidency. Such fragmented political interests make metropolitan governance a challenge.

In addition, Paris has been subject to a national policy of decentralization since the 1980s, which granted more autonomy to regional and local authorities and eroded the State's centralized technocracy. While Sarkozy made several gestures to return to centralization – such as the appointment of a Secretary of State for the Development of the Capital Region and creation of an autonomous authority, the *Société du Grand Paris*, charged with securing territory and financing for the *super métro* project – in the end most implementation mechanisms remain in the hands of the Region and local authorities.

In contrast to the era of Paris prefect Paul Delouvrier, when a handful of officials and engineers controlled decisions to construct the *Villes Nouvelles* and the RER rail system in the 1960s, political advocacy movements have also created requirements for extensive public participation. Indeed, the *Débat public sur le projet de Réseau de transport du Grand Paris,* to debate the State and Region's conflicting transportation proposals, was France's most complex participatory planning exercise to date. Another essential shift since the Delouvrier era is the dependence on the private sector partners to finance and construct urban projects.[32] Borrowing a term from Deleuze, State Secretary Christian Blanc appropriately described as a "rhizome" the open-ended plan and transportation network being assembled in this context of partnered, negotiated urbanism."[33]

Asked whether he views Sarkozy's *Grand Paris* initiative as an attempt at recentralization, Vincent Feltesse comments that there is a difference between a strategic semblance of centralization and actual institutional centralization, which he feel is in any case outmoded:

> First we have Nicolas Sarkozy who has borrowed the expression "Grand Paris" and launched it into the space of media and politics. His second successful step has employed an innovative methodology: an international consultation, with pluralist teams who really have carte blanche. But the mistake is to have believed that the State could advance without the regional authorities…
>
> The whole problem is to recreate a national centralized intelligence in a decentralized country. Today, it is the State who continues to give structure to things, but it no longer has the mechanisms for regional action. And the regional authorities, who have these mechanisms, don't have the capacity to integrate things at the national level…
>
> But in this mobile world, will the solution really come by way of a single, permanently fixed frame? Looking at our European neighbors, territorial governance takes on a variable geometry[34]

---

[32] For a discussion of public-private partnership in contemporary France, see Isabelle Baraud-Serfaty, "La nouvelle privatization des villes," in *Esprit No. 373*, March-April 2011.

[33] Christian Blanc, 2010, p. 149.

[34] Interview with Vincent Feltesse, founder of Les Métropolitaines think tank, president of the Bordeaux regional authority, president of the National Federation for Urbanism Agencies, "La métropolitisation honteuse" in *Esprit No. 373*, March-April 2011, p. 145.

From Architecture to Infrastructure

Also of interest is how the complexity of greater Paris influenced the work of the *Grand Pari(s)* architecture teams themselves. Stephen Graham begins a discussion of the relationship between architecture and networked urbanism with a provocative statement from Lars Lerup:

> Architecture has been pitilessly absorbed into the metropolis….The metropolis has replaced the city, and as a consequence architecture as a static enterprise has been displaced by architecture as a form of software.[35]

Graham surveys the work and writings of contemporary architectural theorists including Rem Koolhaas, Keller Easterling, Alex Wall and others and concludes that in the contemporary city, flows, infrastructure, architecture, and landscape are now considered together by designers as a single complex or field.[36]

Most of the *Grand Pari(s)* architects indeed opted to study urban systems and infrastructure rather than buildings, but approached these systems very differently. First, the team led by British architect Richard Rogers, offered a techno-utopian vision of Paris's green future with the transformation of the city's major rail corridors into a self-contained armature of the sustainable city. Proposing that train rights-of-way could be layered with multimodal transport, wind generators, water collectors, and linear parks, the Rogers scheme presented an ambitious, neo-metabolist vision of Paris – a flexible (yet top-down) megastructure.

Antoine Grumbach was also interested in territorial-scale armature, reading the existing landscape of the Seine River Basin as a system of infrastructure jointly engineered by man and nature. Weaving the river into an accompanying network of express and regional transportation lines, he de-centered Paris in its agglomeration to emphasize the city's relationship to a larger economic geography and represented the entire territory as a network map, appropriating the graphics of the London underground.

---

[35] Lars Lerup, *After the City*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2000, p.22 quoted in Stephen Graham, *Splintering Urbanism*, London, Routledge, 2001, p.32.
[36] Graham, 2001, p.32.

Grumbach's interpretation of the regional landscape as infrastructure shares an interest of other *Grand Pari(s)* architectural teams in reading the city as a complex system. Their objective is to study this system and its internal rules, in order to appropriate them and intervene. This is related to a parallel interest in the emergent metropolis – the city as a set of fragments and situations, unique or typological, with the seeds of a larger metropolitan order contained within them – a sort of metropolitan 'DNA' that directs a self-organizing, larger whole.

Nathalie Roseau observes this interest in complexity in her reading of how *Grand Pari(s)* architects represented the idea of the metropolis:

> It is also to this heterogeneous mosaïc that the AUC team addresses itself, adept, like team Lin, in a "philosophy of the discrete," which establishes conditions of a possible mutation of the metropolis starting from situations that are at once local and specific, but which carry within them important metropolitan potentialities.[37]

For example, in contrast to the Rogers team's techno-utopianism, the Jean Nouvel-Duthilleul partnership proposed an elegant solution of extreme pragmatism. With a close study of all modes of existing rail transportation in the region, and their existing travel times, Duthilleul (who contributed the proposal's subtlety through his experience as the architect of the French national railway) devised a micro-weaving of existing lines and a unified ticket for a merged Metro, commuter rail and TGV system that could reduce all trips across Paris to one half hour or less.

The L'AUC team's approach meanwhile refused what Michel de Certeau would term a "strategic" representation of greater Paris in its entirety, but depicted it rather as a matrix – an accumulated series of "tactics" and micro-situations. One such situation, TTGL (très très grand Louvre) looked at infrastructure as an intense generator of urban cosmopolitanism, depicting a mass of urban cultural, commercial, and leisure program incorporated into the vertical section of a regional metro station.

Similarly viewing the metropolis as an accumulation of specific conditions, Secchi and Vigano, explored the "porous city" with a series of close studies of permeability – the weave of

---

[37] Nathalie Roseau, "Le Grand Paris des infrastructures, un projet en crise?" in Dominique Rouillard, ed., *L'Infraville: Futures des infrastructures*, Paris, Archibooks + Sautereau, 2012, p. 59.

multiple scales of mobility flows into a patchwork of various urban tissues. In parallel, Studio Lin took an approach they called the "light city." This was a diffusion of multi-modal transport networks into a range of samples of existing urban conditions in the Parisian periphery.

The Negotiated Network

Although the *Grand Pari(s)* design consultation can be interpreted as a strategy through which the State regained control of the metropolitan narrative, this does not signal a return to the centralized planning of the 1960s. Instead, it makes apparent new political strategies required to operate in the fragmented, pluralist context of a complex agglomeration. Within this setting, an infrastructure project itself can become a form of emergent governance and negotiated planning. This appears to be the case of the *Grand Paris Express* regional rail proposal, the dominant project to issue from the *Grand Paris* initiative.

From its inception, *Grand Paris Express* embodied a very different approach to regional planning from the RER and Villes Nouvelles, which were realized during France's most technocratic era. The outlines of the early *Grand Huit* route traced a set of individual political deals struck by State Secretary Christian Blanc with regional mayors and local authorites – a map of politics, not of engineering.[38]

Its next phase incorporated the vast *Débat Public*, which though not its mission, coaxed a negotiation from the State and Region. In response to an impasse between the State Secretary and the Regional Council, the independent *Commission Nationale du Débat Public* launched the process to debate the *Arc Express* and *Grand Huit* rail proposals and greater Paris's public transportation future. The *Commission* was formed in the mid-1990s to facilitate public debate of urban planning initiatives. Among the issues discussed in public meetings held throughout the agglomeration over a four month period were mobility inequity, station locations, and financing strategies. The sessions were filmed, fully transcribed, summarized, and made available to the public. Towards the end of

---

[38] Interview with Yannick Beltrando, Director of the Metropolis Work Group at the Atelier Parisien de l'Urbanisme (APUR), November 12, 2010.

the public process, the Region and the State, feeling pressure from the debates' exposure of their

political paralysis, struck a compromise and issued a new plan, the *Grand Paris Express*.

The most significant innovation in the process has been the creation of the *Contrat de*

Développement Territorial (CDT) mechanism which, in effect, locally distributes development

responsibility. The law founding the *Société du Grand Paris*, the authority responsible for

establishing territory and financing for the project, also created CDT contracts allowing local and

regional authorities whose territory lies along the proposed route of the *Grand Paris Express*, to self

organize into groups and collectively propose local urban development plans. These must define a

development zone, address issues such as housing, transportation links, sustainability, public

participation, and financing and implementation strategies. In turn, many of these local plans rely

upon private sector partners, distributing development control even further. Through the CDT, local

authorities enter into an agreement with the State, who is represented by the prefect of the

Region.[39] Nearly twenty of such plans are currently underway, and the local collectives have been

given 18 months to complete them.[40]

Although still in an experimental stage, the CDTs may create an opening for what Coutard

and Guy describe as a "politics of hope" and urban readings employing the tools of science,

technology and society studies:

> Within an STS framework of analysis, therefore, a more plausible prediction might
> be that while in *some* instances both network and urban inequalities grow in a
> mutually-supporting process, in *other* instances this is not the case.[41]

They incorporate micro-struggles into the planning process and leave room for concepts that

Amin and Thrift term "performative improvisation" and for Georges Perec's

"everydayness."[42]

---

[39] *Décret n° 2011-724 du 24 juin 2011 relatif aux contrats de développement territorial prévus par l'article 21 de la loi n° 2010-597 du 3 juin 2010 relative au Grand Paris*.

[40] *Le Monde*, "Le Grand Paris dans les starting-blocks," September 14, 2011.

[41] Olivier Coutard and Simon Guy, "STS and the City: Politics and Practices of Hope" in *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, Vol. 32, No. 6, Middle-Range Theories in Science and Technology Studies (Nov., 2007, pp. 713-734.

[42] Ibid.

Other theorists explore how infrastructure networks engender indirect forms of governance and coordination in large, highly fragmented urban agglomerations. Sociologist Dominique Lorrain posits that, particularly in the developing world, "rather than a scenario of catastrophe," complex mega-cities "find themselves governed indirectly by network services. To construct and manage these technical systems, it is necessary, consciously or by default, to resolve institutional questions concerning legal status, organization and financing."[43] He further analyzes how infrastructure projects achieve this both by shaping space and by offering an opportunity that is easily recognized as extraordinary:

> Our argument is to consider how these objects (major infrastructure and networks…) represent an opening to address the problem of governing large metropoles. First, they form a backbone of the city… organizing space and avoiding a soup without hierarchy. Furthermore, these technical systems are put in place with operations that are out of the ordinary, either in their level of investment, technical feats, and irreversible consequences on the structure of cities. To realize them, urban governments are forced to resolve numerous institutional problems.[44]

Political scientist Paul Kantor, reads a parallel phenomenon in the New York region. According to Kantor, recent megaprojects in the New York area represent the most extensive infrastructure improvements since the top-down era of Robert Moses. However, these have been realized through a more decentralized process and very little direct cooperation between local authorities. Kantor believes that local governments prefer to "coordinate rather than cooperate" but that they are spurred to do so when they recognize an opportunity that is out of the ordinary, such as an infrastructure project presented to them by a public benefit corporation:

> Governments often get a lot done without cooperation, and they usually don't want to collaborate. Governments don't need a lot of cooperation to manage problems of regional scope. Political cooperation by local government arises from the fear of being left behind by public agencies and infrastructure builders.[45]

---

[43] Dominique Lorrain, "The Institutions of Urban Fabrication" in *Métropoles XXL en pays émergents*, Dominique Lorrain ed., Paris, Les Presses de Sciences Po, 2011, p. 14.

[44] Ibid, p. 15. See also Patrick Le Galès and Dominique Lorrain, "Gouverner les Très Grandes Métropoles?" *Revue Française d'administration publique*, March 2003 no107, p. 305-317.

[45] Paul Kantor, presentation to workshop on "Governance players," at *Paris, Metropoles, Le Defi de la Gouvernance* international seminar at Paris City Hall, December 1, 2011. See also Paul Kantor, Christian Lefèvre, Asato Saito, H. V. Savitch, and Andy Thornley, *Struggling Giants: Governance and Globalization in the London, New York, Paris, and Tokyo City Regions,* Minneapolis MN, University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Finally, sociologist philosopher Bruno Latour deploys actor-network theory to describe how objects themselves – such as infrastructure proposals and new technologies – become powerful actors in processes of metropolitan democracy. However, he also recounts how it is essential for new technology to respond to specific local political culture in order to be successful. [46]

In the context of greater Paris, the *Grand Paris Express* proposal is indeed an actor – an agent that is forcing negotiation between disparate parties in a vast and varied agglomeration. These parties include more than two hundred municipalities, local and regional collectives, the State, the Regional Council, and participants in the broadest participatory process in France's history. Added to the mix is the private sector, which has become a dominant player in the urban development of the Paris region as its primary source of financing. A proposed new network, a "super metro" recognized as a singular opportunity, is coaxing an incremental plan for the metropolis that is developing piece by piece, negotiation by negotiation. This represents an extreme departure from the totalizing visions of technocratic regional plans of the 1960s and '70s.

---

[46] Bruno Latour, *Aramis, or the Love of Technology*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1996. See also Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social, an introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.