



Power, Resistances and Tensions. History of Electric Mobilities (XIXth-XXIth Centuries)

International conference – June, 28th 2012

Call for papers

Electricity has been used as a source of energy for various kinds of mobility since a long time : from the *Jamais contente* of 1899 to the future Parisian *Autolib'*, from the undergrounds of the late XIXth century to the contemporary tramways. However, when electricity largely dominates home uses, mobility is a field where it still appears as marginal. Of course some sectors, like railways, have been conquered by electricity. But it still seems odd in many others, particularly motorcar industry. This must not hide long-established uses in many sectors of mobility, but that most often have remained marginal.

Nowadays electricity seems to be able to conquer these new sectors because of the diminishing hydrocarbons reserves and of the effect on climate of their combustion. It is then relevant to reflect on the historical uses and perceptions of electricity as energy of mobility. Historians must not just explain that contemporary innovations are most of the time a rephrasing in modern terms of older ideas and devices, that have already existed. The general purpose must be broader and aims at understanding the relationships between electricity and the world of mobility in its various aspects. Relationships which are ancient, symbolic, aesthetic, but also industrial and technical.

Electricity has enjoyed multiples qualities, as the reputation of being a clean energy for female. These attributes have contributed to draw a rather unified image, despite the different forms of production of this energy. But historians have to revisit this picture of electricity. For instance, the idea of a national energy able to guarantee energy self-sufficiency of France during the 1930s and 1940s, or the idea of electricity as a renewable energy deserves historical analysis. To what extent are these images at the origin of the recurrent disrepute of various electric system of mobility ? From the discussed aesthetic of overhead wires of tramways to the lack of efficiency of batteries, is it possible to identify the very reasons of the refusal of electricity by industrial societies using most commonly other energy sources ?

Among the attributes of electricity, one seems to be recurrent : the electricity is the energy of tomorrow. Regularly presented as due to win, electricity rather seems to wait for its success in a sector or another. Here, researches have to address the dimension of dream supported by electricity, but also to take into account disappointments and failures in the electric world.

But electricity as a source of mobility is also an actual reality for many systems. Can scholars identify specific territories more easily dominated by electricity ? Local territories as it is the case for urban

transport in relationships to hydroelectricity. Or looser territories with a morphology matching the electric network, as it is the case for railways.

But, besides images and territories, to what extent do industrial stakes over-determine energetic choices ? How to draw a link between national choices on electricity production – such as nuclear power in France – and energetic choices of mobility systems ? Is the history of electricity uses in the world of mobility also the history of the interest and disinterest of electric companies for a sector among many others ?

The shifts from an energy to another lead to investigate the changes in the practices of designers as well as users. Is there a specific aesthetic of electric mobility ? Specific ways of moving on electric systems ? What happens at the frontiers of the electric world ? What are the forms of hybridisation that can be found, from the Krieger motorbus of 1905 to the Toyota Prius ?

Finally, electricity can also be analysed not as a motive power but for its indirect effects on mobility, particularly as a source of light (maritime lighthouses, street lights, lights for bikes, etc.).

Contributions may address one or various axes proposed here or give other ideas for reflection. They can give French or foreign case studies or propose more synthetic or theoretical analyses. They are encouraged to cross various disciplines, such as history, geography or sociology.

The conference is organized by Mathieu Flonneau (Paris I – Panthéon-Sorbonne University) and Arnaud Passalacqua (Paris Diderot University).

Abstracts of a maximal length of **3000 signs** should be sent to the address **arnaud.passalacqua@m4x.org** before **January, 15th 2012**. Authors should join a short presentation of themselves. Organizers plan a publication of papers in a special volume of a scientific journal.

Papers will be in English or in French.

The conference will be held in Paris (France).

The conference will take place at the Institut des sciences de la communication du CNRS – 20, rue Berbier-du-Mets – 75013 Paris – France.