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A visual regime of urban mobility? Interventions in passenger “misconduct” on Tokyo’s public transport network

Talk by Christoph Schimkowsky, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo, Japan. A visual regime of urban mobility? Interventions in passenger “misconduct” on Tokyo’s public transport network Human movement often becomes the subject of efforts to shape, guide and control it due to mobilities’ potential be disruptive or otherwise problematic. Such regulatory and administrative interventions in movement have been described as regimes of mobility: authorities’ endeavours to constrain, manage and scrutinize flows of movement, thus affecting individual mobility practices and potentials (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Wang 2004). While the notion of regimes of mobility has been predominately been employed to look at matters of migration, this lecture takes the idea of mobility regimes as a starting point to examine interventions in passenger conduct on urban public transport. Taking up the case of transit etiquette poster campaigns – media initiatives that problematise passenger “misbehaviour” by graphically inscribing behavioural expectations into public transport environments – as well as similar signage by public transport providers on the urban railway network in Tokyo, it highlights the visual character of official endeavours to shape urban mobility practices. The lecture then goes on to introduce other visual strategies of engaging with problematic passenger behaviour, identifying visuality as a core dimension of the management of mobility practices. It closes by inquiring into the factors that drive this apparent visual regime of urban mobility. Christoph Schimkowsky was awarded a PhD in Sociological Studies from the University of Sheffield (UK) in 2022 for his work on poster campaigns employed by Japanese railway companies to inscribe behavioural expectations into public transport environments. Building on this, his current postdoctoral project explores the development of codes of transit etiquette on Tokyo’s urban railway network since 1945. Christoph was previously a Visiting Research Fellow on the HERA-funded PUTSPACE (Public Transport as a Public Space) project and holds degrees from SOAS

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(University of London), Waseda University, and the University of Göttingen. His research has appeared in Mobilities, Transfers, and Visual Communication, among others.

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