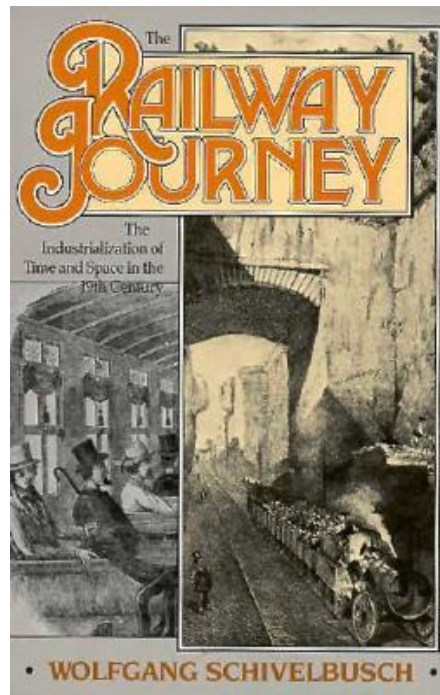




The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space

Wolfgang Schivelbusch

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The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space Wolfgang Schivelbusch
"Delving into urban planning, psychology, architecture, and economics, as well as the history of technology, Schivelbusch paints a revealing portrait of the role of the railroad in shaping the 19th-century mind."

The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space Details

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Goran Ov?ari?ek says

Outstanding book, but the writing style could have been a bit easier.

Matt says

An interesting look at how cultures project themselves onto technological advances. Also I enjoyed the idea of decimating space-time in travel and reducing it to an departure and an arrival. I wonder about a parallel universe in which travel never evolved: would the geographical intermingling with travelers and residents around the country cause a political shift toward centrism? Would our ideas normalize more from being exposed to each other more?

Amanda says

Oh, I loved this. With his usual deft handling and gift for synthesis, Schivelbusch tells a complex, engaging story. The more abstract sections (namely those on fatigue and shock) were a trifle harder to grasp than the rest of the text, but overall it is entirely readable. I particularly enjoyed the comparisons between European and American railways, his discussion of upholstery, and the last chapter - this last seems like a thematic diversion at first, but manages to pull together most of his major themes in a very interesting way.

James says

I thought this was rather bland, but insightful. I just could not latch onto the topic. The concept of train travel and the idea of the rail station as a portal to another place were really cool, but most of it was just not that accessible to me. The author is trying to tell me about how big a change horse and carriage to trains was, but trains are obsolete to me, too. Maybe I needed more grounding in today and more links to the subject matter. Perhaps the idea would have been clearer and more insightful 70 years ago, but now we need a book to tell the change between trains and freeways and planes.

ambyr says

I liked this best when it was focused on, well, railroads, and least when it shifted to being a general Marxist critique of industrialization. I mean, I am in fact interested in Marxist critiques of industrialization, but if that's what you want to write, I think you need a longer book, not a few chapters pasted on at the end. Likewise I found the discussion of "shock" as a medical phenomenon valuable, but I wish it had been better-integrated into the rest of the book.

But the railroad chapters were pretty great. There's a lot of things about modern life that I take for granted--

upholstered furniture, say, or reading on the subway--and it was interesting to see that these are constructed phenomenon, and to trace that construction back to its origins via primary sources. Schivelbusch cites both broadly and deeply, and I can see my to-read list growing from his footnotes.

I also appreciated all the explicit discussion about how American and European railroad development differed, and why. It's helpful to understand the historic reasons behind America's curving, twisting railroads vs. European straight-line tracks, which (although Schivelbusch never explicitly mentions this, because he is of course writing in the 1970s when it's not yet relevant) probably has a lot to do with why Europe has been able to embrace high-speed railway travel to an extent the United States has not. Any book that not only helps me understand the era in which it was written, but also helps me understand the present, 40 years later, is worth reading.

Tero Nauha says

I came accross this book kind of by accident, but it turned out to be very good read and very useful reference. Not only about railroads, but about the development of modern idea of trauma and accident.

Arlie says

Great book about trains and the way they changed 19th century European and American riders' perceptions of landscapes, accidents, and the self within this new greater railway system context. The railroad both shrank space by speeding the time it took to get there, while also enlarging space by making new places/countries accessible to people other than the super-rich. It separated riders from nature, from the experience of localities and independent vignettes (replaced by the new continuous panorama), from acknowledging the cost and exhaustion of resources necessary for travel (horses and feed vs. coal), and from the jostling and physicality of travel by carriage. The experience was different for the different classes, and different for Europeans and Americans. The cost was fear, anxiety and stress, new nervous illnesses (railway spine), and the shock of surviving crashes and accidents as the system, which represented our technological "progress" toward overcoming nature, malfunctioned. This book deals with the tale of trains not as a positivist argument, or as a set of necessary events that led to the conclusion of the railway. Instead, it takes a very modern approach to how certain circumstances, at particular times and places, made it possible for the railway to develop in the way that it did in different parts of the world. Oh, and there is Dickens!

Jochen says

Ein überaus erfreuliches Buch, das dem Autor vermutlich zu einem viel höheren Prestige verholfen hätte, wenn er es in einer vernebelnden Sprache à la Kittler geschrieben hätte. Außerdem stützt er sich auf Archivarbeit. Daß man einmal Pumpen gebaut hat, um Wasserräder mit Wasser zu versorgen, daß man jahrelang Zahnräder benutzt hat, weil man dachte, Räder würden auf Schienen rutschen, daß die Menschen Angst hatten, in den Abteilen ermordet zu werden und deshalb Fenster zu den anderen Abteilen eingebaut wurden und später der Seitengang erfunden, daß die ersten Bahnhofsbuchhandlungen in England ein gehobeneres Angebot hatten als sonstige Buchhandlungen, daß in Amerika die Dampfschiffahrt lange den Straßenbau ersetzt hat, warum die Eisenbahn dort um die Hügel herumfährt, statt mitten durch, die Analogie zwischen Schaffner und Gefängniswärter, die Gründe für die Polstermanie des 19.Jahrhunderts.

J.M. Hushour says

When Wolfie sticks to the nitty-gritty, the experience of industrialized travel and how it changed the way people felt and thought about space, time, and all that shit, this book is endlessly fascinating. The panorama, the way visual perception fields had to adapt, the standardization of time, the shift in how we conceive of the relationship between energy production and conveyance--examinations of all these are the core of the book. Wolfie gets a little happy with his discussion of the new traumas, physical and psychological associated with the new technology of movement, and strays into weird territory, invoking Marx and Freud in what one could only describe as some sort of commisexual comedy of terrors. There are whole chapters on the history of "shock" and the relation of its military application to travel anxieties. This sucks up the momentum of the book and falls rather flat. Also, his section on Hausmann and the ways that railroads changed the nature of cities is all too brief and could've been extended greatly.

But the good outshines the crappy. Here you can learn about the insidious train compartment and how it generated waves of terror throughout Europe, a study of the American railway (also sadly truncated), and other wacky stuff.

All in all, this is a tale of how people's ways of moving through and apprehending the world were changed by the advent of a new technological situation.

Yi Jin says

Excellent Work!

Debra says

I find nineteenth century social history ridiculously fascinating. Perhaps it's because we live at a time, similar to the nineteenth century industrial revolution, when technological change is suddenly fundamentally altering our understanding of the world we live in. Although written well before the current revolution in communications technology, Schivelbusch's study of how railways changed European and American consciousness is both quite readable and theoretically grounded. Using a few thinkers that I love (Marx, Benjamin and, at the very end, Foucault) and a truly impressive collection of primary source quotes, Schivelbusch argues quite convincingly that railways represented the space-time compression that is emblematic of the nineteenth century.

Schivelbusch does a great job of explaining how things we take for granted now were once completely mind-boggling. These include the idea that mechanical power is inexhaustible, that the same entity that controls the rails should also control the cars (instead of just letting whoever run their individual stagecoach style rail cars whenever they want, safety be damned ...), and that industrial and post-industrial roads tend to run in straight lines because they exist for circulation (whereas previous cities had roads with more complex uses). Schivelbusch also makes a fascinating comparison between the change in perspective from a stagecoach to a train, and how this relates to the panorama, development of photography and ultimately, the department store. All of these new technologies shift the focus from the foreground to the distance. Or, in the case of photography and department stores, to the realm of representation, both aesthetic and that of capitalist alienation. Railways are a great topic for political economy, and Schivelbusch touches on that with his comparison of European vs American railway construction methods being shaped by the cheap labour and

expensive land in Europe and conversely expensive labour and cheap land in the US. But, while alluding to it in places, his study nearly entirely leaves out the almost conspiratorial corporate capitalism that drove railway construction in both Europe and the US and, to me, that leaves the political-economy argument inexcusably underdeveloped.

Where Schivelbusch gets derailed (sorry, couldn't resist), I think, is when he gets Freudian in his discussion of fear and pathology on the railway journey. I did find his exploration of the differences between European and American compartment design both chilling and hilarious (basically Europeans were so obsessed with privacy and class that they designed train compartments that could only be entered from outside so they a) didn't have access to washrooms, and b) ran the risk of getting murdered by their fellow travellers, or at least worried about that). But, the chapters about accidents, fear of accidents and the invention of the concept of shock, while interesting, didn't really seem to relate to the rest of this book very well. As a result, I felt like the book lost a bit of steam (sorry, couldn't resist) in this part. I was also not convinced by how Schivelbusch used Freud's concept of the stimulus shield to explain the mechanism by which all of these inventions changed the collective consciousness. Finally, the development of nineteenth century railways is a huge topic and Shivelbusch's study is focused very narrowly on a handful of European countries and the US. Clearly, if you're looking for comprehensiveness, this is a big shortcoming.

Despite its imperfections, I think there's a reason this book is still available and being read 40 years on: it provides an interesting and easy to grasp interpretation of an important period in history. It wasn't gripping in the way that so much novelistic social history is these days. But, in addition to liking to read about the nineteenth century, I have a thing for trains and an art history degree, so have a high tolerance for critical theory being applied with a broad brush to narrow questions (especially when it's Marx and Benjamin!). If that sounds like you, get on board (sorry! couldn't resist that terrible pun, either.)

David Monroe says

3.5 stars rounded up to 4.

The impact of constant technological change upon our perception of the world is so pervasive and have become commonplace in our society. But this wasn't always the case; as Schivelbusch points out, our adaptation to technological change was very much a learned behavior. In *The Railway Journey*, he examines the origins of industrialized consciousness by exploring the reactions to the many cultural and sociological changes brought about by the railroad.

Adryan Glasgow says

Compulsively readable. An academic book, to be sure, with clear and careful arguments, but simply fascinating in scope. Plus, by comparing British, US, French and German cultural changes, he really shows just how culturally specific technology and it's impact are.

Jan-Maat says

Since I read this book with twinkling eyes and a smile on my face I tenderly recommend it to other readers, at least those who are interested in trains.

What this is, is a cultural history, culture very broadly understood, of the railway.

At first everything seemed so familiar that I could hardly perceive the insight. It helped to remember that this book has been rattling around since 1977. Long enough for others to have drawn from it and for its messages to have passed through many stations.

It builds up steam towards the industrialisation of travel, with the traveller as product, delivered to their destination. Unless you are in the USA, in which case you are shipped. And that distinction is one of the points of the book. Schivelbusch tells us that rail travel was for many people their only experience of an industrial process. The violence, disruption, overthrow of traditional approaches, alien discipline and structure, all experienced by workers in industrial workplaces was shared in by the travel experience of rail travellers.

At the same time as all this newness existed there was also no blank slate, no white page. Even a new technology – and you may have noticed this if you have switched from a paper system to an electronic one in your working life – does not start out to realise its own potential but instead seeks to replicate what already exists.

You travel from a form of warehouse to another warehouse, at a given time - not traditional time determined by the position of the Sun - but one decided by the Rail company (as many as four different times applied in a Pittsburgh station which served multiple companies).

The arrival of the railway industrialised the layout of cities by creating new intense flows of traffic to and from the station. Stations, particularly the great terminus stations on the verges of major cities, needed arterial roads capable of servicing them with goods and passengers. At the same time the need for storage and sidings turned the areas around stations into industrialised zones.

However all the same in Europe railway carriages were constructed like coaches (as in coaches and horses). There was a deliberate intention to make the new mode of transport look like one familiar to upper-classes travellers, even though it was profoundly different to what they were familiar with. Now the traveller was to have no voice in the transport process - while on a coach you could bang on the roof to get the driver's attention for him to pull over for you to be sick by the road side, this was not an option on the early train services which had no communication cords.

The train maintained traditional class divisions, nowadays only two classes remain, but originally there were up to four. In Europe the railway ran as straight as possible, cuttings were dug, embankments built up, tunnels and viaducts constructed because land was expensive while labour was cheap. In the USA, the opposite was true. Labour was expensive, while land was everywhere. There the railroad conformed to the contours of the landscape, it brought the passenger to the wild places of the country (while in Europe it reduced the landscape to make industrialised travel possible), it was a form of industrialisation that made the settlement of much of the country practicable while in all ways it sought to reproduce the familiar feel of steamboat travel, an influence still built into language – hence items are shipped in the USA while in the rest of the English speaking world we are a bit drier and prefer dispatching or even plain sending.

Lets go back a bit. A train journey and a book are similar in that set off with a destination in mind with a number of stops en route. Reaching the destination is only possible by at least travelling through those stops, in this case a series of chapters. Alternatively this book is like being on a station concourse. You come in through an imposing entrance to a different kind of space, open, enclosed, industrial, are buffeted as you watch the departure board, there is a book shop concession, platforms. One can experience each part separately or in relation to the whole.

spoiler), Baron Hausseman (view spoiler), Hachette (view spoiler), the meaning of the word shock, the violence of the language used to describe the early train journeys revealing the early fears of the travellers, the fear of going off the rails, the transformative role of the railways in business, in architecture, in industrialisation, as an industrial process itself with the passenger as product, creating standardised time...Anyhow read this read, I recommend it, tenderly, with amusement, with a violent pop of fizzing ideas and inter-linkages, literature, architecture, politics...the physical transformation of the city, the creation of the wrong side of the tracks...

Implicit in Schivelbusch's discussion is how we understand the world through metaphor and simile, however the new phenomena is coloured, or perhaps take on the flavour, of the object of comparison. By creating or applying simile and metaphor we create new ways of thinking about things, so railway accidents led to the creation of the concept of metal fatigue, which was an adoption of the earlier notion of the fatigue that the traveller experienced on those early journeys on trains without suspension. The phenomena of the shock experienced on physically uninjured survivors of train accidents led to the creation of a concept of physic shock which was then on a siding, ready for the First World War, to be rolled out as shell shock, but this isn't a purely medical issue - it has legal implications. This is the joy of the book, the railway journey steams through swathes of nineteenth century consciousness. It is as a book in every way unlike the railway journey I was engaged upon when I finished reading it as I found myself waiting at a rural station without facilities when my train was cancelled (view spoiler). Still at least I had another book to start once I had finished this one...since as Schivelbusch observes the train journey led to the death of conversation – at least in the upper class compartments – the open box cars used to carry Fourth class passengers where apparently jolly places – no doubt resulting from the shared experience of the wind and rain.

The book concludes with the notion of circulation. Schivelbusch has already earlier mentioned how in Europe the upper classes retreated beyond the points made accessible by rail. Since they withdrew beyond the circulation of the rail-network they *appeared diseased, medieval, subversive, threatening* (p195). In this new bourgeois world *communication, exchange, motion bring to humanity enlightenment and progress* (p197). To take my favourite example, which I have mentioned possibly in a good half-dozen goodreads reviews already, in Tess of the D'urbervilles, Tess is outside the modern world of circulation, she is trapped in prehistory, at the same time the milk she has coaxed from bovine udders is rushed up to London on trains - it is part of the world of circulation, it can only exist as a commodity because of the railway since it is only the railway that makes milk production in the far west country to serve the London market commercially viable. Equally one can consider Bleak House, the Lincolnshire great house was in the past a nexus of influence but in the Victorian present is another dinosaur. Aristocratic values are opposed to the new industrial world with bourgeois ideals.

The rail-network is both a crucial part of the physical infrastructure of the country and of the mind.

Not that we readers are to left to imagine that there was no more than what was claimed of it, as Schivelbusch concludes: *the railroad, the destroyer of time and space, thus also destroyed the educational experience of the Grand Tour. Henceforth, the localities were no longer spatially individual or autonomous: they were points in the circulation of traffic that made them accessible. As we have seen, that traffic was the physical manifestation of the circulation of goods. From that time on, the places visited by the traveller became increasingly similar to the commodities that were part of the same circulation system. For the twentieth-century tourist, the world has become one huge department store of countrysides and cities* (p197)

Dirk says

An excellent book by Schivelbusch that contains a number of surprising observations for those not that familiar with the history of railways and railway travel. He makes fascinating links between scholarly

debates (Freud, Marx, Simmel and others) and contemporary development like industrialisation, urbanisation and capitalist economy (department store etc). I highly recommend this very interesting and entertaining book.
