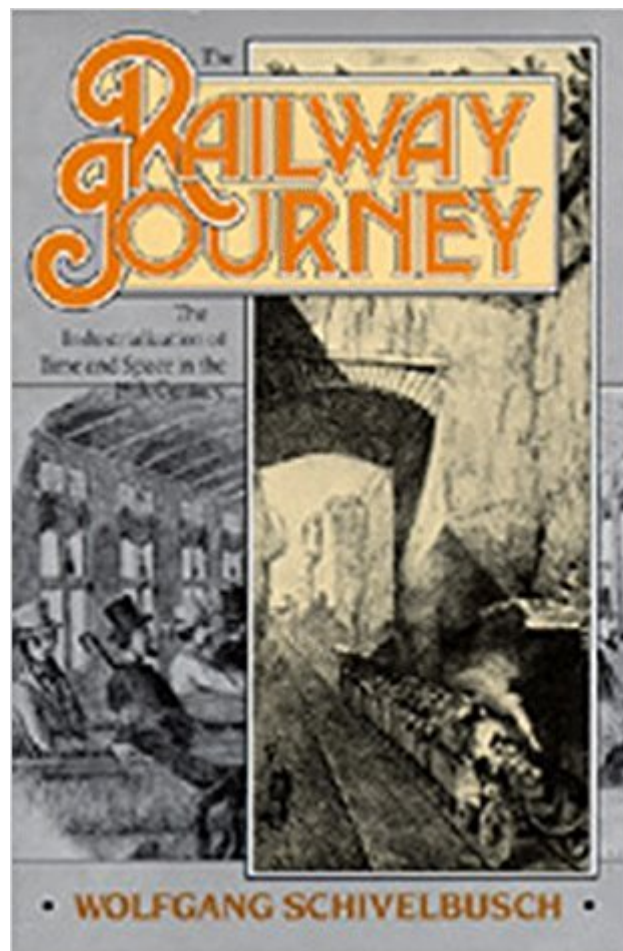




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The Railway Journey: The Industrialization Of Time And Space In The 19th Century



Synopsis

The impact of constant technological change upon our perception of the world is so pervasive as to have become a commonplace of modern society. But this was not always the case; as Wolfgang Schivelbusch points out in this fascinating study, our adaptation to technological change¹;the development of our modern, industrialized consciousness²;was very much a learned behavior. In *The Railway Journey*, Schivelbusch examines the origins of this industrialized consciousness by exploring the reaction in the nineteenth century to the first dramatic avatar of technological change, the railroad. In a highly original and engaging fashion, Schivelbusch discusses the ways in which our perceptions of distance, time, autonomy, speed, and risk were altered by railway travel. As a history of the surprising ways in which technology and culture interact, this book covers a wide range of topics, including the changing perception of landscapes, the death of conversation while traveling, the problematic nature of the railway compartment, the space of glass architecture, the pathology of the railway journey, industrial fatigue and the history of shock, and the railroad and the city. Belonging to a distinguished European tradition of critical sociology best exemplified by the work of Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, *The Railway Journey* is anchored in rich empirical data and full of striking insights about railway travel, the industrial revolution, and technological change. Now updated with a new preface,³ *The Railway Journey* is an invaluable resource for readers interested in nineteenth-century culture and technology and the prehistory of modern media and digitalization. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Book Information

Paperback: 219 pages

Publisher: University of California Press; 49991st edition (February 6, 1987)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520059298

ISBN-13: 978-0520059290

Product Dimensions: 8.2 x 5.5 x 0.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #188,496 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #25 in Books > Travel > Food, Lodging & Transportation > Railroad Travel #28 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Transportation > History > Railroads #47 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Transportation > Railroads

Customer Reviews

Because it made possible rapid movement and shipping across large distances, joining far-off towns to economic and cultural capitals, many people who lived in the early 19th century regarded the railroad as an instrument of progress. Because anyone with the price of a ticket could board a train, regardless of social class, the railroad was also seen as a democratizing technology. But, Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes in this vivid history of early rail travel, the promise of progress and democracy was swiftly compromised. The railroads became an agency for the concentration of wealth in a few hands, and they created a class of passive consumers who simply got aboard and waited to arrive at their destinations. The railroads, Schivelbusch writes, changed the 19th-century world for good and ill. They helped rewrite the industrializing world's sense of time, for now precise schedules had to be kept; they reinforced a sense of forward-plunging movement into the future; they even introduced the reality of mass disaster, for railroads were always crashing, sometimes taking hundreds of riders to their deaths. 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. --Gregory McNamee

This delightful, probing, and very quirky book is, surprisingly, a pioneering work in the sociology and psychopathology of the railway revolution. . . . Whats more, its a gas. -- The Village Voice

Some of the best and most sparkling scholarship I've ever encountered. Schivelbusch will transform your understanding of modernity.

Very interesting perspective going beyond the rails into many contributing factors of change.

Easy read, super fascinating--even for weekend locomotive lovers.

Fascinating cultural study.

The book had a lot of interesting information on the original trains, and that was worth the read, but some of this theories just don't make any sense. I get the feeling he's too willing to dislike modernization, it's one thing to say how some people disliked or were afraid of the train (the "railway spine" disease made me chuckle) but it's quite another thing to blame the railroads for everything from loss of culture to ruining cities. That is a very powerful claim but he does not seem to back it up

with any real evidence. I want to see pictures of what the cities looked before and after, some statistics on income, something. You cannot make that claim without some sort of evidence. As for the alleged social side effects, I don't know how he would know that. I think that's a sweeping generalization even in its best form, and I can't really see how there could be any sort of means to show, definitively, that EVERY city that has a railroad has lost its culture due only to the railroad being there. I can't even imagine what kind of evidence would back that up. I really like the history part of it, the facts are painstakingly researched and captivating to read. If it were truly a history book I would have given it five stars, easily. But the book is about his theories of time and space and the railroad, so, unfortunately, I can't give him a good rating, because the central purpose of his novel is far too undersupported and weakly argued.

The Railway Journey is a straightforward but deceptively sophisticated work of social/cultural history that chronicles the rise of train travel and the effect this had on perceptions of space, time, travel, commerce, and ultimately 'modernity' (though the author avoids that loaded term). Schivelbusch draws mainly from primary sources and presents arguments about how significantly train travel affect the consciousness of 19th century travelers, and how the effects differed in America and Europe. The strength of the book lies in Schivelbusch's mastery of the details; the reader discovers exactly why British rails were straight while American rails curved around the landscape... the answers are rooted firmly in the economic differences between the two nations. And you learn about how the imprints of class structure differed for British and American train passengers, because British train cars evolved from stagecoaches while American train cars emulated river steamships. The goal of so many histories of science and technology is to show the connections between the physical, technical world of scientists and engineers and the broader cultural world, and how the connections run both ways. Of course it is usually easy to show how science and technology change culture, but much harder to show profound influences of culture on science and technology. But Schivelbusch does just that, and does so with crisp writing and very clear evidence; his conclusions are often profound, yet it is very hard to take issue with the connections he makes. Another reviewer recommends Kern's Culture of Time and Space over this book; while Kern takes a much broader view of the connections between culture and science, his work is so loosely constructed that it is hard to take his overreaching conclusions seriously. In particular, Kern has a very thin understanding of the history of science (especially regarding the technical details), which frequently undermines his narrative. The Railway Journey is far more satisfying; it is a model of how cultural history of science can be done without ignoring the actual history of actual science.

Recently I've developed a taste for cultural histories that examine the influence of new technologies on the perception of nature, space, time, individuality (etc., etc.) The railroad is a prime example of a technology that, once adopted, profoundly altered how people perceived and interacted with their world. (And, in a very real sense, created a new world.) The railroad 'collapsed' space and time, opened up new lands to settlement (and new resources to exploitation), and inaugurated a new era of technologically-mediated experiences of nature. Wolfgang Schivelbusch's book is not only a good, concise history of the railroad (focusing on England and the United States), but a pioneering study in the cultural impacts of new technologies. It's a bit old, and in places shows its age, but is an excellent place to start for readers who share my interest in the culture/technology interface. What is particularly valuable is the realization that many of the cultural shifts associated with 'postmodernity' today (particularly 'time-space compression') are in fact rooted in such eminently modernist achievements as the railroad and (contemporaneously) the telegraph. Also valuable is Schivelbusch's discussion of resistance to the railroad. While early promoters had the idea of reorganizing transportation (of both goods and people) through a widespread adoption of rail, there were just as many - and just as vocal - dissenters. Opponents of this new technology were concerned that it would further isolate people from nature. The relentless motion of the train displaced the feelings of fatigue and physical exertion that come with long-distance travel; the speed of the train turned landscape into simply passing scenery. (In other words: the same arguments that people had and continue to have about the cultural impacts of the automobile were already taking place nearly 200 years ago!) To continue a thread of discussion in these reviews, I suggest that a book like this (and Schivelbusch's other excellent work on technology: "Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century") be read alongside broader histories like Stephen Kern's "The Culture of Time and Space", and more focused studies of technology like David Landes' "Revolution in Time." The weakness and strength of Schivelbusch's study, when read along with these other works, is its conciseness. Schivelbusch does not delve very deeply into concurrent technologies; nor does he make broad generalizations or indulge in speculation (however warranted that may be). Instead he culls nuggets of insight from original sources and provides enough interpretation to whet the reader's appetite - perhaps for their own researches. Well written, well argued, and a quick read.

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