Schivelbusch reading notes

He asserts that panoramic perception, In contrast to traditional perception. No longer belonged to the same space as the perceived objects: the traveler saw the objects, landscapes, etc. Through the apparatus which moved him through the world. He claims other roughly contemporary technologies, various optical devices and the like, set themselves up as affordable substitutes for the still-expensive panoramic experience of rail travel, yet he never seriously addresses, or indeed more than tangentially mentions, the other major technology that mediated perception through n apparatus: photography and ultimately film.

He Is concerned only with the effects of the railroad on perception, and thus misses, or refuses to see, the other train (I.

E. , film/ photographic perception) running on tracks parallel to his own story, which is especially unfortunate because it is moving in the same direction (modernity), and at more or less the same speed, so should have been in clear focus.

Nevertheless, Spicebush offers a number of insights on the experience of train travel, suggesting that the linkage In Europe between rail Journeys and reading perhaps as strong, in Its own way, as that between the American movie theater and popcorn) was a direct result of the disorienting and ultimately deadening effects of panoramic perception on travelers, as well as a result of the unique space of European trains.

Indeed, his careful comparison and analysis of European versus American experiments with railways remind us, among other things, of the locally

inflected nature of the experience of modernity (or In other words, that modernity came to Europe and the U. S. In deferent versions).

HIS account of the effect on reception and experience of the design of spaces on trains could potentially have huge implications for our understanding of how any and all experience is mediated by the space in which it occurs, though of course he chooses not to develop those ideas any further.

Chapter 5 (The Compartment): In brief, European trains were delved Into compartments, clearly modeled after the stage coach, and for decades were not connected inside the train by any kind of corridor, meaning that one could enter and exit the compartments only when the train was stopped. This immobility led to, or rather enabled, a handful of national murders, which in turn gave rise to clamor for change in the fundamental structure of European trains, though in the end, the model adopted was an internal corridor.

Spicebush suggests this decision was made partly on a loose generalization then in place about the nature of the European traveler, who would prefer privacy and silence to the raucous, though safer, camaraderie of American-style train-cars. Since each compartment held several people, it might not be immediately apparent how European travelers expected to achieve silence and rivalry, but the accelerated experience of time (hours by train instead of days by coach) meant that passengers no longer felt any need to befriend their fellow travelers, preferring to dispel the awkwardness of being thrown together by reading.

Moreover, medical experts of the day suggested that any attempt to read a serious work, or in other words to concentrate on what one read as opposed to casually reading or even giving only the appearance of reading, would be overly taxing on the eye and mind, both under strain already due to being on a train.

These notions about perception, Spicebush asserts, led to a rise in newspaper sales and a decline in book sales as reading material for train Journeys in Europe, as tracked by book stores located in train stations).

Chapter 6 (The American Railroad): America is always and ever the counterpoint to the European story of industrialization and modernity, the new versus the old. Yet Spicebush provides an argument that can actually ground such generalizations in specific peculiarities of the economic and geographic landscape of the two. One of his most important insights, so obvious as paradoxically to escape notice, is that in Europe rail lines were straight and level, but not so in America. The explanation is equally obvious: in Europe, there was a surplus of labor but land was costly, whereas in America land was dirt-cheap and labor in short supply.

As a result, it was much cheaper to build rail lines around obstacles in the U.

S. , because that would save enormous labor costs involved in building tunnels and so forth, but in Europe precisely the opposite was the case. This fundamental difference also had significant technological ramifications, such as dwindling supplies of wood led to serious attempts to unlock the potential of abundant coal. In Europe, railroads were straight because the economic

geography of Europe did not mandate the development of curved tracks, as it did in America.

Because tracks had to be curved, a new relationship between track and train car had to be developed, and developed it was. This, in turn, enabled Americans to devise a new (and much larger) type of train space, one that need have no relationship to compartments.

Moreover, American trains, often traveling through essentially inhabited areas, needed to have on board everything that passengers might need, including restrooms, food and so forth, unlike in Europe, much more heavily populated and featuring plenty of train stations, each with a full complement of amenities, along each route.

In essence, if European trains were consciously modeled after the space of the stagecoach, the dominant transportation method in Europe owing to fairly good roads, American trains adopted the riverboat as their spatial model, because in the nineteenth century the waterways provided a better transportation system than America's poor roads. Spicebush further asserts that this fundamental difference had major implications for subsequent developments in American train cars, with their rows of seats and open spaces, provided a forum for communal discussion that was at radical odds with the literal compartmentalizing of space in Europe.

This open seating arrangement also made for a more egalitarian, essentially classless spatial environment that was at odds with the well-upholstered compartments for higher-class travel in European trains. Panoramic View Definition/ Introduction of Reading on Trains: Eventually passengers loud

learn to adapt to the mechanization of perception and, instead of trying to accommodate the effects of the new technology within old modes of sensing, they began to internalize new ways of seeing.

A new mode of perception developed that took speed as the source of aesthetically pleasing experiences. Speed did not cause the landscape to disappear but instead put it in motion and made it attractive. Searching for a name that captured the new experience people found the concept of ' panorama', that popular optical gadget that put images in rapid succession, a fitting term. What made panoramic vision distinctive is that it ' no longer experienced evanescence: evanescent reality has become the new reality.

Passengers also learnt to cope with the proliferation of visual stimuli by adopting new habits while traveling, such as reading. Reading would have been unthinkable within the stagecoach whose design encouraged travelers to engage in intense conversation.

But the increase in the number of passengers in each carriage made such interaction in small groups difficult and reading emerged as a practical way to neutralize the embarrassment of silence.