

STS.007 Fall 2010

Class 17 Questions for discussion

Questions on Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*

The subtitle of the book is *The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*. What does Schivelbusch mean by this? How does his use of the term “industrialization” in the context of world experience suggest some reasons for the emergence of the word and concept “technology” about the same time?

The epigraph at the beginning of the chapter, by Ralph Waldo Emerson, begins “Dreamlike traveling on the railroad.” What does Emerson mean by this? Why does Schivelbusch quote it in this prominent position? How are “dreamlike” and “industrialization” connected? (Note that the quote from “an American traveler” of 1853 also emphasizes the dreamlike quality of railway travel.)

What are some characteristics of railway travel that Schivelbusch emphasizes?

What are some characteristics of travel by air that you would emphasize, if you were writing a similar study of airplane journeys?

Of automotive travel?

Of bicycle riding?

What other things about this chapter especially impressed you—because they surprised you, or because they confirmed similar experiences you have had, or because they caught your attention for any other reason?

Questions on Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*

The subtitle of the book is *The Industrialization of Light in the 19th Century*. What does Schivelbusch mean by this? How does his use of the term “industrialization” in the context of world experience suggest some reasons for the emergence of the word and concept “technology” about the same time?

How does Schivelbusch contrast 19th century and 20th century modes of illumination? What does he mean by claiming that with the tungsten filament “Twentieth-century illumination had begun”?

There is the electric lamp, and then there is “Electrification” (section beginning on p. 64). What is the distinction between them? How may a similar distinction be applied to other developments in technological history?

Schivelbusch suggests that there is an analogy between the dominant technological system of the day (electrical networks) and the prevailing social philosophy. How are they similar? Do you see any similarities between prevailing social philosophy today and the dominant technological system of the internet?

Once again, as with the railway journey, new technologies make possible new sensory experiences. What are some of the most important media of illusion for which light began to be used in the 19th century? What other new light-based experiences emerged in the 20th and 21st centuries? Do you believe they are radically different from those discussed in the selection from Schivelbusch, or are they more or less extensions of 19th century ones?

Once again (as in his chapter on the railway journey) Schivelbusch refers to the dream world made possible through modern technologies. Compare his discussion of the way darkness heightens individual perceptions (at the end of the book, p. 221) with the way early humans used lamps and created images in the darkness of caves to stimulate experiences beyond the range of ordinary consciousness. Are there any contemporary sites and situations that are designed to have similar effects on human consciousness?

What other things about this chapter especially impressed you—because they surprised you, or because they confirmed similar experiences you have had, or because they caught your attention for any other reason?

Questions on Chapter I (Bourgeois and Proletarians), *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)

Have you ever read anything remotely resembling this manifesto? In particular, have you read, or do you know of, other manifestos? If you were to write one, what would it proclaim?

What are the main historical events that Marx and Engels claim, in the Manifesto, to have led to the replacement of feudal society by industrial society?

The Manifesto claims that there are three revolutionary facts in the world of 1848: the replacement of manufacturing by Modern Industry; the replacement of the industrial middle class by wealthier and more powerful industrial millionaires; and the emergence of a world market. What are the comparable revolutionary facts of the world of 2010?

This sentence -- “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind” — is one of the most famous of the 19th century. Why? Read it in context (going back to where the bourgeoisie is introduced as a “revolutionary” class, and forward to where it is claimed that “it creates a world after its own image”) and explain what this means. What is the attitude of Marx and Engels regarding this revolutionary class?

Much of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of the world-changing powers of the bourgeois class. How does this discussion resemble current talk of “globalization”? How is it different?

The bourgeoisie create immense and hitherto unknown forces of production. They also create immense and hitherto unknown dangers and crises. What are some of those dangers and crises? How will it all end, according to Marx and Engels?

Have you ever read anything like this Manifesto? What elements of it seem outdated and irrelevant to the present? What elements seem to have more lasting value and relevance?

What other things about this chapter especially impressed you—because they surprised you, or because they confirmed similar experiences you have had, or because they caught your attention for any other reason?

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