This approach is brilliantly demonstrated by Antoine Picon’s analysis of the free-standing column in the 18th century. This object, a historical “monster” coming after the Renaissance pilaster and preceding modern “iron-and-steel” architecture, is first interpreted in a “symbolic,” that is, Panoškyan, perspective (the object as “reflection” or “double” of a given culture, in this case the fascination of a twofold heritage: Greek harmony and Gothic lightness, the first reflecting monarchical prestige, the latter suggesting the growing influence of the new classes) before this reading is contested by the study of competing, often contradictory historical influences and discourses (the claim of utility, the need of circulation, the desire of visibility, the seduction of the sublime, the longing for scale) and replaced by a new interpretation, by Picon himself, who discovers in the very contradictions displayed by the free-standing column the symptoms of the emerging split between structure and ornament, architecture and art, science and technology.

In short, Things That Talk is not only a book that will provide the reader with many and marvelous lesçons de choses, but also a publication that will change the reader’s very feelings about what an object may be.

**RAILROAD VISION: PHOTOGRAPHY, TRAVEL, AND VISION**


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This book is a very handsomely produced volume that is based on an exhibition of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum in 2002. The wonderful images are taken mainly from the museum collection and include ones from both the 19th and 20th centuries. The text provides an excellent outline of the histories of both the railroads and photography and the ways in which they were used together. For example, in order to promote rail travel, the railroad companies hired photographers to make images promoting exotic destinations and the engineering marvels associated with railroad construction. This is all a fascinating story, one very well presented in the book.

I was, however, intrigued by the title of the book, Railroad Vision. The author, Anne Lyden, did not choose something like “A History of Railroads and Photography.” Is there something special about the work that can only be captured by the title Railroad Vision? In the introduction Lyden describes railroad vision as not only the “social history of railroads as documented through photography” but also a “distinct way of looking at the world.” But what is this distinct way and how is it reflected in the photographs?

She begins by pointing out that with the introduction of the railroad, much greater speeds were possible than by previous means of transportation, such as the stagecoach. This situation resulted in a rapid sequence of images and greater differences in apparent speed of movement of near and far objects as a train moved along. These effects, of course, could not be captured directly in still photographs.

However, Lyden feels that other effects that define railroad vision can be seen in the images of the book. For instance, because one could sit in some comfort in the train, there was a greater sense of framing. This experience also resulted in a certain amount of detachment from the environment created by being in the railroad car.

There was an enhanced feeling of the observer looking at the world out there. Ever since perspective became a framework for painting in the Renaissance, this idea of looking out on the world through a window has been a dominant idea in the Western worldview. With the advent of the railroad, this view was available to all in a more compelling and immediate way. This is further enhanced by the use of the stereoscope to present more realistic views. Some stereoscopic images of railroads are included in the book.

Other related ideas are developed. The railroads created a smaller world. Places that were far away now became accessible. This was accomplished through the conquering and the domination of the natural environment by the railroads. The railroads, as human inventions, took on a kind of hero status and were glorified as triumphs of human intellect and ingenuity.

All of these ideas are, to some extent at least, exemplified in the photographs of and about the railroads in the book. The title Railroad Vision, however, suggests that these ideas are unique to railroads. But similar discussions could be developed for other inventions, such as the car and the airplane. They were also heralded as revolutionary and glorified in photography. So none of these characteristics seem unique to railroads, although railroads did come first.

A quite different approach to some of these issues was taken by Sara Danius in her book The Senses of Modernism, reviewed in Leonardo [1]. She discusses how certain literary texts can be used to understand some of the changes in perception that were related to technological change in the 19th and 20th centuries. I think the visual material from Railroad Vision also can be used to help understand larger questions of perceptual change. A study for another exhibition and book would be a comparison of photographs of and taken from cars, railroads and airplanes, for example.

In summary, the book is a valuable addition to the literature on railroad history, and a visual delight. However, I think the title implies a uniqueness of vision that is not apparent. The material would be better presented as part of a larger picture of modern perceptual change.

**Reference**


**KAZUO OHNO’S WORLD: FROM WITHOUT AND WITHIN**


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Butoh means to meander . . . to move in twists and turns and between the realms of the living and the dead.

—Kazuo Ohno (p. 205)