

Economic Investment and Railway Publicity. The Influence of Railway Photographs Circulation on French and Spanish Modern Painting in the 19th Century Second Half

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Probably, one of the issues that most polemic and interests could provoke when appear a new means of transport like it was the rail was the way of inserting and fitting it to the geography and topography of a country, with the aim of obtaining the maximum benefit wanting to achieve the main sources of material richness and population, there is: to design the lines and railway arteries by which citizens and the “capital” will flow.

In 1842, France established the legal basis for the setting up of what it would be its new territory organization based on the design of a train network. This was thought as a radial model that took the capital city as an starting point since it was its neural center, though not geographic. This organizing solution was chosen in great deal due to the Minister of Public Works proposal, Mr. Legrand, that is cause this project is known as Legrand’s star. The idea is not new, it is a well known formula amongst engineers and it appeared in old constructing and defensive treaties. Thus, Legrand took again Sebastián Preste de Vauban some strategic principles. He was a militar engineer from the XVII century and he proposed that the defensive principle must be established over the same as the attacking one⁴⁴. So, because of the law of the year 1842 the french territory was divided in six big railway lines, each one was controlled by six private companies – North, Est, Ouest, Sud, Paris- Orléans, Paris- Lyon- Méditerranée-. From these, it was thought to structure the secondary lines and some others of

⁴⁴ Cit. Pierre Larousse. *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX^e siècle français*. Paris, Vv^a. P. Larousse, 1867, p. 1131. Entrada *Chemin de fer*. «Sous le rapport de la stratégie, il ne fallait pas perdre de vue la maxime de Vauban, qu’on doit modeler el tracé de la défense sur le tracé de l’attaque ».

local character with the purpose of configuring in a few years a great web of rails and stations.

In Spain, the agreements and concessions of the railway exploitations of the territory started over 1844 with a Real Order in which Elizabeth II government kept important benefits of the exploitation but the main problem in order to face the modernization of the country, because the creation of a national railway transportation structure if a good future for the country was intended, was an economical one due to the lack of capita availability of the national investors.

In 1855, in Spain, the General Law of railways is pronounced; in that law, the draft of basic lines which will compose the Spanish railway web are established, also disposed in a radial way and with Madrid as the strategic center. In that way, the map of Spain was settled territorially divided and given for its exploitation to four big companies, creating in that way its own star with iron arms. All along the 1850's decade the lines were being constructed and in a few years the travellers and goods circulation began through them. The companies were the following ones: Líneas del Norte, Red Catalana, Ferrocarriles Andaluces y del Oeste y la Compañía de Ferrocarriles de Madrid- Zaragoza - Alicante (MZA). The participation of foreign capital was important above all in two lines. One of them was the Caminos de hierro del Norte de España, created in 1858 and with the participation of Pereire brothers among its main actionists through the Société de Crédit Mobiliaire that was funded by them in 1846. They also were the sponsors and managers of the French company Paris- Orléans. Furthermore they were important theorists saintsimonians in the first decades of the century. Other important personality in the world of the rail finances at that time was the Baron James Rotschild, president from the foundation of the Chemins de fer du Nord, Paris-Boulogne- sur-mèr and actionist of the MZA line, created in 1857. The line Paris- Boulougne- sur- mèr was considered by the contemporain experts as the most modern and fastest in France at that time, and the Baron himself did not doubt in exporting to other countries both his money and basic principle in which his fortune was sustained: the economic benefit could and should repercuter in the comfort of the travellers. But that

comfort, modern conquest by excellence of the bourgeoisie in the middle of the XIX century, not only should be manifested in the trains: wagons, compartments, services and staff, the stations or the security in the travels, but moreover they had to be advertised in order to encourage people to be a traveller. The best way to carry out such an enterprise was the photography, another great conquest that took place at the same time when the first trains started to flow. Daguerre showed in Paris his technique for taking and printing images in 1839, and since then trains and photography performed a perfect covenant. Thus, for more than a century, the Daguerre model will be to the steam train the same as instant photography to electric train, where bodies are no longer former by mass but as surfaces defined by minimum units of bright and colour.

II

In 1851, the magazine *La Lumière* is created in Paris, coinciding and encouraged by the organization of the first Heliographic Mission sponsorship by the Historic Monument Commission, turning on because of that in the greatest spreading vehicle, with scientific and divulgative character, of the recently born photography and in special the heliography.

Heliographers, photographers and redactors worked on demonstrating and showing as necessary and useful the collaboration between photography and art: "... Photography is a different thing and not only an industry. It has already opened and still can indefinitely open news horizons to art. Practised almost exclusively by artist and amateurs, it will also be of the safe guides of inspiration or composition. Because of the speed and cleanliness of its operation, and the straightening and infallibility of its lines, photography has, among many other things, the advantage of giving whole maps and so saving up from long trips"⁴⁵. The Heliographic Mission was born with the aim of censuring the French historic inheritance, to evaluate its own state and proceed to its restoration; it was then, the moment in which Napoleon III ambitious monumental and constructing pol-

⁴⁵ Henri de Lacretelle, "Revue de photographie. II", *La Lumière*, Deuxième année, n° 13, Samedi 20 mars 1852.

icy started. The accomplishment of that mission is possible due to the assignment to each of the five selected photographers – Hyppolite Bayar, Mestral, Gustave Le Gray, Le Secq, and Édouard Baldus- of a section of the country to collect proofs and views taking advantage of the main rail lines at that time. In the pages of *La Lumière* is promoted for the very first time a natural union between photography and train, even identifying photographers and heliographers, once the success of the mission was contrasted, with the trains that have taken them far away from the capital to go down the way of history. Ernest Lacan's article, main redactor of the magazine, with the eloquent title "La photographie et les chemins de fer"⁴⁶ refers to the photographic work about a railway line, made by Renard in 1852. This work was composed by ten plates taken all along the long travel made by the Chemins de fer de Strasbourg, which was also seem like a mission,. Then, Lacan thinks on the work together of photographers and railway companies as vital keys to the development of both industries; he claims that photography might work for landscape painters, because, in that way, they would come to represent the nature that has been reproduced with all its truth. In his opinion, artists, engineers and the public will save time in long and heavy travels since the photographers are the ones chosen to accomplish this modern task of portraying reality with the maximum accuracy. " [Photographies]... expose, explain, give a better measure of the engineers than the most carefully designed maps or the most skilfully written reports"⁴⁷.

The Baron Rotschild employed Édouard Baldus in 1855 to make a photograph album of the line Chemis de fer du Nord Paris- Boulougne-sur-mer, from which he was president, with the intention of giving as a present one of the twenty-five albums published to his majesties the Queen Victoria and the Prince Albert of England. It was a remembering present from the trip that the monarchs had made by train since they landed in Boulougne until they arrived to the Capital for visiting the Universal Exposition celebrated that year. The success of this

⁴⁶ Ernest Lacan, "La photographie et les chemins de fer", *La Lumière*, deuxième année, n° 11, samedi 11 juillet 1852, p. 122.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

diplomatic and propagandistic detail was unquestionable; both the photographer and the Baron were able to show the Queen a part of France that due to traveling by train they were unable to see. The views taken from the trains by the photographers would work since that moment as useful tools to reconstruct the travels: what it was seen through the wagon windows- landscapes and stations- as what it could not be seen: inside of cities and towns, romanic churches, gothic cathedrals, theatres and roman bridges, fishing ports, etc. This is the activity and reality which was at both sides of the railway and where trains could not circulate, becoming hidden to the traveller's view. The photographer, thanks to trains, is able and has the technical ability to put together with his camera the present and the past. Thus, today and history become visible to modern men and the traces of past are shown with the same dimension than the present ones. This album is completed with a two pages- map with the itinerary of the line: an abstract graphic which meant a territory crossed by railways and smoke, a smoke that does not appear in the photographs. The map is made of points inside a line: these points, cities and towns, appear with the coming of steaming trains which need of the photographer's vision as a proof- an exceptional witness of this birth- to exist as places, to become real. That is the brilliant conclusion to which Théophile Gautier got to in 1865: "In these train times, does the travel still exist?... we go, we arrive... Cities pass by, move away, horizons go one after another"⁴⁸.

In 1861, due to his reputation as a photographer and especially to his dedication to the train theme, the Compagnie des Chemins de fer Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée, asked Baldus the realization of an album about the line to celebrate the ending of the Marseille- Toulon passage. The views taken are in the same line as those he took for the Baron Rotschild and many others that he had taken all along those six years. It has been said about them that they are surprisingly modern because of the idea of accuracy and cleanliness that made them perfect abstract composed images.

⁴⁸ Théophile Gautier. *Quand on voyage*, Paris, Michel Lévy Frères, Librairies Éditeurs, 1865, p. 112.

In this work we see again that Baldus' photographs are an invitation to the travel, but to the home travel, to go and visit with the imagination the captured monuments, the stations and the sights of the cities that fastly disappeared on the other side of the windows, always distant, they appear in a panoramic way, as not inhabited places and almost inhabitable places. In short, they are images of the time in which is shown the perfect insertion of the railway lines and the stations inside nature- standing out the railway investors labour- with the aim of establishing the thread by which history goes.

This is highlighted in the careful election of the points of view and motifs which should be photographed. In this way, Baldus makes believable the idea of the train as a modern vector that writes history when composing and comparing the tunnels with the galleries of the gothic cloisters, the fronts of cathedrals with the roofs of the stations, or roman bridges with the iron viaducts, etc.

III

Photography becomes the advertising expression of the new and modern means of transport; in painting, as in photography, the train claims since its origins the attention of the artists conscious and consequent with their age, that is to say, the attention of those who identify themselves with the modern times that the train opened. It is the realization of a new reality that affects a new way of seeing and noticing: the peaceful- urban or countryside- landscape crossed by a smoking machine, and painters, who did not want to scorn what it is defintory of their time, answer pictorially including them in their pictures. What is Pontoise? In these photographs, a non inhabited city and station; a town where Camille Pissarro spent a long season in the '60's decade, in the pictures made there he left the testimony of the crossing of the train by those places, also by the Sena in its way to the Ocean. "The strangeness of a train cutting as it moves flowers and vegetables", this was written by Émile Verhaeren when dealing with another Pissarro's work with the train as theme, *Le Chemin de fer de Dieppe* (1882). Shy were the steam machines followed by wagons that he painted at the beginning of the 70's: posts, level-crossing and bridges demanded the presence of a train, denounced its eruption. To his eyes this

landscape was still suspiciously simple, like the photographs taken by Baldus or Collard: *La route au bord du chemin de fer, effet de neige* (1873); *Bords de l'Oise* (1873); *Environs de Sydenham Hill* (1871), during his travel to London; *Le pont du chemin de fer* (1873-74); *La barrière du chemin de fer aux Pâtis, près de Pontoise* (1873-74). However, in the pictures of these years what is more present are the chimneys of the first factories that were setting up in the riverbanks of the Oise and the Sena: smoking chimneys that were integrated in the landscape just because of being static elements; smoking backgrounds that had appeared a decade before in Degas paintings about horse races and that a decade later still appeared in Georges Seurat pictures; the train, though, was an element of perturbation but not unexpected- since it had marked its time tables and its coming stopped the everyday activity of the farmers when it troughs the level crossing. This more local attitude of trains in Pissarro was in contrast with Claude Monet's one, more urban⁴⁹, who in 1872 was also starting to be given himself to trains in the station of Argenteuil, while Manet do the same in the rue de Rome with his *Chemin de fer* (1874). Few years later, Monet unchained himself completely and pictorially to the spectacle of the steam below the roofs of Saint Lazare (1877) and Gustave Caillebotte over the *Pont d'Europe* (1877-1880).

What did Pissarro, Manet and Monet make of locomotives? They took advantage of the bleeding wound that the way of the train supposed to be for recomposing the landscape. With them and their paintbrushes the locomotive was going to turn into another natural element of the landscape, still serene and in equilibrium. The series of wagons will place in parallel to the horizon line; the steam with the clouds and the bridges will give meaning to trains and viceversa. They will make them able to paint rowing scenes and picnics by the riverside of the Sena. In these first moments, we appreciate a surprisingly correspondence between photographs and those first railway pictures. A theme practised and

⁴⁹ Cfr. Richard R. Brettell, *Pissarro and Pontoise. The painter in a landscape*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1990, p. 70.

that interested to “modern painters” by the fact of portraying themselves, their lives, free time, etc.

In photographs as in pictures, trains appeared, arose and hide and so made possibly a new conception of the landscape. In this way Françoise Hielbrun calls the attention on the way in which seeing Baldus photographic views - such as *Groupe dans le parc de la Falaise*, or most of all in the *Moulin de Enghien*, in the *Album des Chemins de fer du Nord* (1855)- we can not forget that those give an idea of the landscape that in those years the so called “modern” painters would give, this is, in the Impressionists, and stand out the influence of the photographic vision in the work of a complete generation of artists⁵⁰: the scheduling, the monumental treatment of nature, the simplification until coming to nearly abstract treatment of the objects and characters of the compositions. Thus, these painters also worked on painting the Sena riversides with its Sunday swimmers who had also taken the train in Saint Lazare station to go there.

IV

In Spain, due to the same wish of advertising the gradual modernization of the country and because of the presence of foreign capital in the national railway companies, it was also incentivated and sponsored the realization of photographic albums.

The first photographic corpus of a Spanish railway line was made by the English engineer William Atkinson in 1857: it was a photographic memory of the Alar del Rey- Reinosa sector construction and it was a gift for the Queen Elizabeth II. In general it is bigger the presence of locomotives in Spanish albums than in the French ones, perhaps the reason, in this case specifically, is that the photographer was the engineer himself. Soon, important photographers stood out all along the national geography; among them stands out J. Laurent; originally from France but who lived in Madrid since 1843. He was able to create his own photography study and founded an arising photographic industry when he and José

Martínez Sánchez became partners and created a photographic inheritance of more than 20.000 proofs. The MZA company entrusted him in 1858 a work named "Camino de Hierro de Madrid a Alicante. Vistas principales de la línea" and it was thought as a luxury present given to the Spanish Queen. Here, like in French works, barely appeared any train or traveller; because of that Carlos Teixidor points out to the prints made from these photographs to be published in the press to inform about those inaugurations had added in persons and locomotives⁵¹.

So, in the 1860's decade there was a photographer in each line: Laurent and Martínez Sánchez dealt with the section Madrid- Zaragoza in 1864, in these years they pictured the line Tudela- Bilbao. Also in 1864 the company "Camino de Hierro del Norte de España" asked Auguste Muriel to take pictures of this line to make a album, from Madrid to Bilbao. José Spreafico worked on the Cordoba-Málaga line. In his pictures the presence of locomotives is more habitual though the underlying dominant style of the French artist it is also generally present in the Spanish photographs proofs. How aesthetically far is the Marseille station from the Valladolid one, which were taken by Baldus and Muriel respectively? This dedication to railways and the investment and impulse given in public constructions provoked that the last ones were advertised. In Spain, Laurent and Martínez Sánchez are entrusted to make a big census of civil works: they are organized in three books, one of them dedicated to the railway. In 1867, this photographic album was presented in the Paris Universal Exposition. It is the raising of the engineer and the effort of the Spanish Government to industrialize the country as fast as the most modern world and European nations, overcoming all kind of difficulties and dominating at the end the vast and brutal national orography. These are bridges, viaducts and tunnels, but again few are the steaming locomotives, the travellers getting on and off the wagons

⁵⁰ Françoise Heilbrun, cat. ex. *Les paysages des impressionnistes*, Paris, Éditions Hazan, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1986, p. 10.

⁵¹ Carlos Teixidor Cadenas. "J. Laurent y el ferrocarril" en catálogo exposición *J. Laurent. Un fotógrafo francés en la España del siglo XIX*, Madrid, Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, 1996, p. 37.

and the gates crowded with people... by now it is about putting human conquests on record and with which effort they were able to tame the iron machines. In 1883, the Baron Rotschild sponsored, in France, the realization of a magnificent album making known the huge tasks and public projects: those were the times of great constructors.

These photographers- Baldus, Collard, Muriel, Spreafico, Martínez Sánchez, etc.- in which we have focused here were the ones called at that time to create an image of the age to glorify the engineers and investors capacity but hiding the evidence and reason for these photographs. The locomotive must be in its role! This is the key: if there are no trains nor travellers there will not be any possibility of being derailed, if there are no machines there is no pollution too. In these photographs we realized that the presence of the train in modern life is the answer to the logical evolution and necessity of that times, and the other mission of the photographers, very aesthetical ones, was to erase and eliminate everything that could give evidence of the dangers that this mean of transport implies. So, this photographs help up to configurate the family tree and the direct line that lie the roman engineers, gothic project managers and modern engineers of the iron and concret age. Is it not that under the main railway lines we find the roman ways, both in France and Spain? Photographers were redoing the ways of history, the railway lines were over those already existing. Maps: such as the one included by J. Laurent in his catalogue book for selling images in 1879, and as the map of the communication ways in the Spanish territory of the roman times. The Spanish railway views taken by these photographers also use the subterfuge of looking for roman bridges, aqueducts, panoramic sights of the cities, etc, outside the railway lines but at same time inside of the cities and of History. However, it seems that in all these works it has been obviated to analyze or treat the railway with all of the hardness, like the violent irruption of a terrible and noisy machine in a landscape that until then was untouched and inhabited by nymphs.

If we have to stand out one who contributed to the Spanish painting renovation was the Asturian Dario de Regoyos, he installed himself in Brussels in 1879,

this Capital was one of the centers with a bigger artist activity in the last quarter of the 19th century, from there many artists and writers were getting together asking for a new kind of art, an art of their time and far away from any school or academy. They took French impressionist painters as a reference. In this artistic circle stood out Émile Verhaeren whose articles were filled with renewing ideas for the Belgian painting in particular and to the world in general. So, in 1882, and due to the Salon de Paris, he wrote this: "It seems to me that Paris annual exposition resumes the artistic work of the whole world during the whole year... There is in this art manifestation a great character, a character of universality and fraternity between countries. France leads the movement; its artists make school further away from their frontiers; their names worked as a flag to the "fighters" who were in the secondary art centers: Brussels, Amsterdam, Madrid, Rome, London". Camille Pissarro, Paul Signac, Georges Seurat, Claude Monet, etc., were habitual guests and claimed references in texts and organized expositions by the group of "Les XX", from which the Spaniard Regoyos was part of. He went from time to time to Paris to be in the latest tendencies; there he went with his friend Adolfo Guiard who was also a painter, Pissarro's friend too, they were fervent admirers of him. The french lection was present in their countryside landscapes, crossed by more smoking locomotives than those that crossed the countryside of Pontoise: *El viaducto de Ormaztegui* (1898) *EL tren de las 16 horas. Noviembre. San Sebastián* (1900); *Marea viva. Bidasoa* (1900); *El tren que pasa* (1905); *Cucaña en el Bidasoa* (1905); *Las Arenas y el trasbordador* (1909); *La ría de Bilbao* (1909); *Puente de Bilbao* (1910); *Pancorbo, Mañana en Pasajes*.

Photographers and then painters and writers affected in the idea of the train as something more than the modern means of transport for masses; in their works railway turns into the thread used to construct history and became the key to recognize the modernity. Regoyos, travelling through Spain with his friend Verhaeren noticed the several possibilities that the train offered: "Is the world travelled all around to collect statistics, discover the most fashionable hotels or to

get deep into the history studying?”⁵². They are formally and aesthetically in the same line as French examples, and very possibly share the same message: writing to History and legitimate engineers’ intromission into nature to benefit the modernization of economy, industry and society. In both case, in both countries, artists will be there, next to the railway lines to tell us about it: next to bridges and to the long steam queues, that annoying steam that painters will rise to the aesthetical category of ephemeral and not materialized and that erases the steps that bodies left.

⁵² Darío de Regoyos. Émile Verhaeren. *La España Negra* Barcelona, José J. de Olañeta Editor, Hesperus, 1989 [1899].