

**TRACKS  
TO MODERNITY**

# TRACKS TO MODERNITY



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# FOREWORD

The fact that 2021 marks a number of railway anniversaries<sup>1</sup> offers a great opportunity for EUROPALIA to dedicate a festival to a world in itself, that of the railway train, an invention which shaped modern society and which looks set to take once again a leading role.

EUROPALIA TRAINS & TRACKS proposes a multidisciplinary programme around three themes: the impact of the railway on society, time and movement, meetings and farewells. More than 70 artistic projects, including many new creations and residences, are waiting to be discovered in cultural institutions across Belgium, and also on the ground, in stations and trains!

The festival kicks off with the exhibition *Tracks to Modernity*, offering a foray into the world of railways. From their arrival in the early years of the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, railways were a regular subject of artistic attention. Representations of them echo the attitudes and sensitivities of their day, both fear of and enthusiasm for a new, industrial world, launched at full speed but now, seemingly out of control. Artists focus their attention on stations and the cities redesigned to host them, and on new places associated with the also new possibility to travel. Fascinated by the lights and by the swirls of steam, veritable techno-worshippers hypnotized by the speed and the omnipotence of the steam engine, they seek to bring out the plastic beauty of its curves, its pistons and its marvellous mechanics. Feet firm on the ground, they represent the tool itself, or

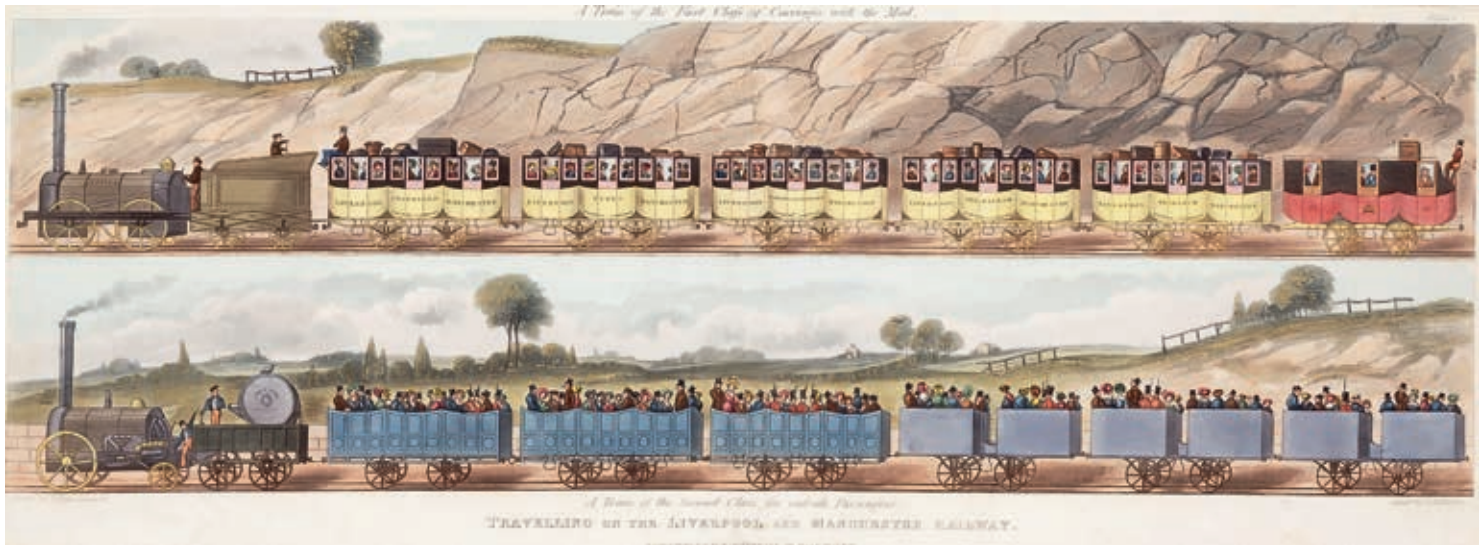
heads in the clouds, they portray the dreamlike universe of travel and inner adventure. *Tracks to Modernity* invites you to explore these universes, through the works of major nineteenth and twentieth-century artists, as well as less well-known works, shedding light on this theme from their specific angles.

For this edition, EUROPALIA sets aside for once its tradition of dedicating itself to the art and culture of a particular country. In offering a large artistic programme around the theme of the railway, from its historical, cultural and societal perspectives, the festival remains, however, true to one of its fundamental missions. EUROPALIA was created when the European Union was in its infancy, in the firm conviction of the ability of art to bring Europeans together. While the festival has since spread far beyond the borders of Europe, creating connections between people and communities through art remains a main driving force of the organization. And what tool has, better than the railway train, opened up the field of potential encounters?

EUROPALIA warmly thanks all those who have made this extraordinary edition possible: cultural, institutional and commercial partners but also the teams of SNCB/NMBS and Train World, as well as the general commissioner of this edition, Jan Baron Grauls.

**Georges Jacobs de Hagen**  
Chairman of the Board of Directors  
EUROPALIA ARTS FESTIVAL

1. These include the 175th anniversary of the Brussels-Paris rail link, the first to join two European capitals, the 40th anniversary of the HST, and the 25th anniversary of Thalys. 2021 has also been designated "European Year of Rail" by the European Commission.



**Fig. 2** Isaac Shaw, *Travelling on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, 1831*. First-class carriages with Jupiter locomotive; Second and third-class carriages with North Star locomotive, 1831  
Aquatint. World History Archive

## SETTING OUT TO CONQUER THE WORLD

The nineteenth century marks the triumph of the steam locomotive and railways. But in fact the history of railways goes back further in time. Horse-drawn wagons using (often wooden) rails had been used in England as early as the seventeenth century to transport coal between coal mines and nearby canals.<sup>2</sup> By the early nineteenth century, cast iron rails were increasingly used. In 1803, the first public railway, the *Surrey Iron Railway*, opened. This horse-operated line was reserved for freight transport only. A few years later, in 1807, a first line with horse traction was also opened in England for the transportation of people. Parallel with this, experiments were underway with self-propelled steam engines running on roads or on rails. It was ultimately the Briton George Stephenson who improved these forerunners of locomotives and who opened on 27 September 1825 the first freight railway with steam traction: the *Stockton & Darlington Railway*.<sup>3</sup> [fig. 1]

The first public railway to carry both goods and passengers on a regular basis was finally the Manchester to Liverpool line, which opened in 1830 [fig. 2]. After England, railways made their appearance in Europe and North America, and then also in South America, Asia and Africa. Belgium was the first country on the European

continent in which a public railway with steam traction was opened to the public in May 1835. Germany and France followed closely with the inauguration of railways on their territory.<sup>4</sup> Around 1850, more than 25,000 kilometres of railway lines were already laid in Europe. By 1900, the European rail network already covered more than 260,000 kilometres.<sup>5</sup>

The United States followed the English lead with the opening of the first line on the American continent, the *Baltimore & Ohio Railroad*, in 1828. But the first American railroad company operating with steam locomotives was the *Charleston & Hamburg Railroad* in 1833. The United States became the theatre of a veritable *railway mania*, which drew many European investors.<sup>6</sup> By 1850, the construction of railway lines was booming so fast that the country already boasted more miles of track than Great Britain, then the country with the greatest railway density.<sup>7</sup> The 1860s set the stage for the expansion of two major transcontinental lines connecting the US East and West Coasts, the *Union Pacific* and the *Central Pacific*. On 10 May 1869, the triumphant meeting between the two teams of railroad workers took place at Promontory Summit in Utah where the final connecting piece for the transcontinental line was laid [fig. 4]. At the time, the railway companies were the largest business enterprises in the country and were making fortunes for their

shareholders.<sup>8</sup> With labour in short supply in the western United States, workers were brought in from China, who quickly gained a reputation as hard workers.<sup>9</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, the mileage of the American rail network exceeded that of Europe.

Latin America began building railways in the 1850s.<sup>10</sup> At about the same time, the British began laying railways in British India.<sup>11</sup> In 1870 the lines reached what is today Myanmar and in the early twentieth century the British came close to the Chinese border. The Dutch started building railways in Java and Sumatra in the 1860s, and the French laid their first line in Indochina in the 1890s.

In Russia, after the development of railways in the European part of the country, the consolidation of Russian rule in Central Asia, Siberia and East Asia began at the end of the nineteenth century with the construction of railways. The Trans-Caspian Line, on which construction started in 1879, connected the Caspian Sea with Samarkand, in present-day Uzbekistan, and approached the Chinese border. The showpiece, however, was the construction of the 9,288 kilometres Trans-Siberian Railway eastward from the Urals to connect Moscow to Vladivostok, on the shores of the Pacific Ocean. In so doing, the Russians entered the spheres of influence of China and Japan, raising British concern about Russian expansion.

Meanwhile, in 1853 Japan was forced by the Americans to abandon its policy of isolation and to open the country to foreign trade. The attendant shock wave led to an accelerated modernization of the country on a western economic and industrial model. Railways were also part of the western technology to be taken on board. The first Japanese line was completed in 1872.<sup>12</sup> Initially, Japan used English and German technology, but very soon the country developed its own railway industry. In China, it was only very late that the immense importance of railways for the country itself was realized, and that these were not merely a Western threat to the sovereignty of the 'Middle Kingdom'. The first major line with a length of more than 1,200 kilometres was the work of a Belgian-French consortium headed by Jean Jadot [fig. 3].<sup>13</sup>



**Fig. 3** *China Railway Studies Company*, Franco-Belgian project for the construction of the first major railway in China, Beijing-Hankow line, 1899-1905. Train and tunnel near the bridge over the Yellow River. Université de Mons



**Fig. 4** Junction of the first transcontinental line in the United States of America, by the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific Railroad at the Promontory Summit, Utah, on 10 May 1869.

The last continent that railways would open up was Africa.<sup>14</sup> The first lines there were built in Egypt, by the British, with the goal of connecting the Mediterranean and the Red Sea by rail and facilitating the journey to India.<sup>15</sup> The British then went on to build lines in South Africa, Uganda and Nigeria. The French built lines in North Africa, especially Algeria, and in Senegal. Between 1890 and 1898 the first line was built in the Congo Free State between Leopoldville (present-day Kinshasa) and Matadi.<sup>16</sup> A significant difference with Europe and North America was that the railways built by the colonial powers in Asia and Africa did not form networks but consisted for the greater part of isolated lines connecting the interior with its mineral resources with the coast. Where a real network existed, as in India, it was isolated from the outside world.<sup>17</sup>



## RAILWAYS IN BELGIUM

In 1830, Belgium broke free from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, created by the European powers at the Congress of Vienna after the defeat of Napoleon. The newly independent state found itself in an unenviable economic position. Antwerp, its main port, was accessible only through the territory of the Netherlands and most rivers and waterways were also connected to this neighbouring country. It was not until 1839 that the Netherlands recognized Belgian independence in the Treaty of London, with a definitive settlement of the territorial disputes between the two countries. In the meantime, Belgium's emerging industry was threatened with collapse due to a lack of export opportunities and a proper connection with the Rhineland. In this Rhineland, then part of the largest German state, Prussia, there was also dissatisfaction with the high tolls exacted by the Netherlands for the transport of goods on the Rhine.

As early as 1830, Belgium experimented with horse-drawn railway lines for transporting coal at the *Bois-du-Luc* and *Grand Hornu* mines.<sup>18</sup> It is here that Victor Hugo, on his journey through Belgium in 1837, saw his first railway: *The day before yesterday, a few kilometres from Mons, I saw a railway for the first time. It was on the road. Two horses, replacing thirty horses, pulled five large four-wheeled wagons loaded with coal. It's very ugly.*<sup>19</sup>

Two engineers, Simons and De Ridder, who were studying railways in England, proposed building a railway network to connect the Rhineland and Antwerp.<sup>20</sup> The fear of such a network falling into the hands of foreign powers led the Belgian State to construct and operate the first north-south axis (from Antwerp to the French border) and east-west axis (from the Prussian border to Ostend) itself. The Paris-based Banque Rothschild came to the aid of the young Belgian State with the necessary financial resources for this construction work.<sup>21</sup> The first part of this railway network, the line from Brussels to Mechelen, was solemnly inaugurated on 5 May 1835 [cat. 5], making Belgium the first country on the European continent to open a railway with steam traction for passenger transport.

This railway made a completely different impression on Victor Hugo: *I have reconciled myself with the railway; it is really superb. The first I ever saw was no more than an ugly factory track.*<sup>22</sup> On 3 May 1836 followed the opening of the line between Mechelen and Antwerp. After it came in 1838 the Mechelen - Ghent - Bruges - connection. Leuven and Tienen were connected to the network in 1837, Waremmes and Ans in 1838, and in 1842 the centre of Liège was reached. In the same year of 1842, the French cities of Lille and Valenciennes were also connected to the Belgian network. In this way, these French cities were connected to Ghent and Brussels earlier than they were to Paris. The opening of the entire route between Brussels and Paris, the world's first rail link between two capitals, had to wait until June 1846. The construction of the state-planned network was completed in October 1843 with the reaching of the Prussian border and the connection to the line, meanwhile built on the German side, via Aachen to Cologne and Bonn. In 1846 the Belgian State set up a passenger steamship connection between Ostend and Dover, thereby linking in to the English railway network.<sup>23</sup> [fig. 5]

The first lines were so successful that the private sector exhibited great interest in the construction of further lines on Belgian territory.<sup>24</sup> Several applications for railway concessions were submitted. The first of these was awarded in 1841 to a group of Belgian investors.<sup>25</sup> After the completion of the first main axes, the Belgian State was forced to step back as a result of the economic crisis of the late 1830s and an agreement with the Netherlands on the division of the government debt of the former United Kingdom of the Netherlands. In this way the initiative for the further expansion of the network was left to the private sector, by means of 90-year concessions.

Between 1843 and 1870, some fifty private railway companies were established and more than 2,500 kilometres of lines were built. In the 1840s the British who were the main players here. But the majority of these companies perished in the financial and economic crisis that haunted Europe between 1846 and 1848. After 1851, the torch was taken over by Belgian investors. But the French were also active on Belgian territory.



**Cat. 5** Théodore Fourmois, *Inauguration of the first Belgian railway line on 5 May 1835 (view from near Brussels)*, undated  
Lithograph. Brussels, Royal Library, Print Room



**Fig. 12** Gino Severini, *Red Cross Train Passing a Village*, 1915  
Oil on canvas, 88.9 × 116.2 cm. New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Collection

## **EPILOGUE. THE INTERWAR PERIOD**

Once the armistice had been signed in 1918 in a *Compagnie des Wagons-Lits* carriage, the quest for reconstruction, economic recovery and a return to peace could begin. During the war, railway operations in most of the belligerent countries had been centralized in the hands of the state or the military leadership. During the 1920s and 1930s, railways in most countries were rationalized and governments strengthened their control or reorganized their railways in the form of state-owned companies.<sup>102</sup> This was the response to increased democratization, emerging competition from road transport, new public service undertakings, and the economic crisis of the 1930s.<sup>103</sup>

The 1920s and 1930s also saw the perfecting of steam locomotion. With aerodynamic designs, steam locomotives reached top speeds. But the same interwar period saw the breakthrough of the diesel and especially the electric locomotive and traction. This changed the outer appearance of the railways. In turn, these new technologies brought new speeds within reach. During these years, new social achievements reinforced the role of railways as a means of transport for leisure and holidays.

By the 1920s, railways were, of course, no longer revolutionary as they had been in the nineteenth century. Travel, transportation and speed had become very everyday for the general public. A society without railways was already inconceivable. The major role of the railways in the nineteenth century in opening national borders and spreading European culture was, however, coming under pressure. It is true that international train traffic resumed in the 1920s and that in 1923 the Brussels-Paris connection even became the first international train journey between two capitals that did not stop at a border.<sup>104</sup> But with the economic crisis of the 1930s, the decline of international trade and the rise of totalitarian and nationalist regimes, the international character of the railway came under constraint.

Only after a second world war in which the railways were even more at the service of the belligerents could trains resume their role with fast and comfortable international connections

for holiday destinations and business trips in a context of European rapprochement and blurring of borders on the European continent.

# NOTES

1. As early as the seventeenth century, there was an extensive network of barges in Holland (Brouwer 2008). Before the arrival of the railways, Belgium also had regular boat connections between, for example, Brussels and Antwerp (Hymans 1884, p. 111).
2. See Maggs 2014, pp. 7-12. However, according to Schivelbusch 2000, Brouwer 2008 and Hylton 2015, the use of wooden rails in mining dates back to the late Middle Ages.
3. Asmus 2020.
4. In Germany, the first line between Nuremberg and Fürth in Bavaria was opened in November 1835; while the first line in Prussia, running from Berlin to Potsdam, came into service in October 1838 (Asmus 2020). The first line in France, from Paris to Saint-Germain-en-Laye, was inaugurated on 24 August 1837 (Caron 1997). This was followed by openings of lines in Austria-Hungary (1837, the Nordbahn between Floridsdorf and Deutsch-Wagram), Russia (1837, from Saint Petersburg to Pavlovski), Italy, in 1839 (Naples-Portici), the Netherlands (1839, Amsterdam-Haarlem), Switzerland (1847, Zurich-Baden) and Spain in 1848 (Barcelona-Mataró).
5. Pecheux 1975.
6. Wolmar 2012 and White 2011 provide a good overview of American railroad *mania*, and the race to connect the Western and Eastern United States. See also Veenendaal 2016.
7. Burton 2018.
8. Wolmar 2012, White 2011.
9. Wolmar 2012, pp. 154-156.
10. The main countries that jumped into the railway adventure with the help of English engineers and capital were Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico (Burton 2012), followed later by Colombia and Peru. French and Belgian companies also played a major role in railway construction in Latin America.
11. Wolmar 2017.
12. Free 2008 and Burton 2012.
13. Gillieaux et al. 2021.
14. Australia's first railway opened to traffic in 1854, Burton 2012.
15. Burton 2012: the first line was inaugurated in 1854.
16. The construction of this line through the jungle took a particularly high toll on human lives, especially among African workers. In the 1920s, further lines were built to open up the Congolese interior. See Vanthemsche 2018.
17. This reflected the fear of a Russian military threat should the Indian network be connected to the railways in Central Asia.
18. Lamalle 1943, pp. 14-16.
19. Hugo 1837, p. 49.
20. Van der Hertten, Van Meerten and Verbeurgt 2001, and Van der Hertten 2004.
21. Buelens et al. 2016.
22. Hugo 1837, p. 42.
23. The connections with the Netherlands (Antwerp-Roosendaal) and Luxembourg (Arlon-Luxembourg border) were opened in 1854 and 1859 respectively.
24. Laffut 1985-1995, vol. 1, p. 201: in the first year of operation, 1835-1836, the number of travellers was seven and a half times as many as estimated at the time of construction, with revenues four times higher than foreseen at the opening of the line.
25. For the rail line for passenger transport between Antwerp and Ghent; see Van der Hertten & Van Meerten 1994.
26. The Belgian section of the company's lines from the French border to Mons, to Charleroi and to Namur, and the line between Namur and Liège, was known as the *Nord-belge*. Its operation was taken over by the NMBS/SNCB in 1940.
27. Laffut 1985-1995, vol. 217.
28. Hugo 1837, p.42.
29. Fishlow 1965, O'Brien 1983, Fremdling 2001: in recalculating for the United States and for European countries, several authors arrive at a much greater impact of railways on economic growth than Fogel.
30. Osterhammel 2009, Chapter 14.
31. Hylton 2015, p. 18. Dickens' description can be perfectly applied to the havoc that Brussels underwent when expropriations and demolition for the North-South connection began between 1904 and 1910 (see Van Meerten et al. 2002).
32. Engelen 1837, p. 81: *The total number of passengers when the train started moving was, according to the statement of the conductor, whom I saw no reason to distrust, nearly a thousand.*
33. Figs 2019: according to Figs, the railways played a key role in the development of a shared European culture and identity.
34. See Min 2013, Chapter 5: The adventure of *Les XX* and *La Libre Esthétique*. The first meeting of the group around Frantz Charlet which would become *Les XX* took place in a café close to Brussels' Gare du Nord. See also Ollinger-Zinque 1993.
35. Bradley 2014, p.99. Two stations were built in the vicinity of London's Crystal Palace to handle visitor transport.
36. Van Wesemael 2001, pp. 350-351.
37. Jaumain et al. 2010, p. 84.
38. In the eyes of contemporaries, the train represented a shrinking of the world; see Schivelbusch 2000, pp. 35-36.
39. Engelen 1848, p. 44: Engelen describes a heated debate at the Mille Colonnes café: *They seemed to be very busy with each other, questioning, it seems, the information in the French morning papers, which had arrived that evening by rail.* See also Bradsley 2015, pp. 119-120 on the importance of railways in the emergence and distribution of newspapers and magazines.
40. See, inter alia, Scholliers 2009, pp. 20 and 144.
41. See Beelaert 2013.
42. Verpoest 2001.
43. Engelen 1837, pp. 83-84.
44. Engelen 1847, p. 47: *The southern station building in Brussels is also inside the city, but is no more distinguished for its good looks than that of the northern railway, with which it is linked by a track running along the boulevards.*
45. See Van Meerten et al 2002 and Jaumain 2004.
46. Bertels 2008.
47. Engelen 1836, p.82: The train leaves *not one minute after the specified hour*. Bradley argues that the train sharpened people's sense of time, as one minute could make the difference between catching or missing a train (Bradley 2015, p.21).
48. Schivelbusch 2000, pp. 52-53. The rise of the individual motor car brought this control back again.
49. Maggs 2014, p.55.
50. This is the American model of railroad cars that Dickens also describes in his *American notes for general circulation of 1842*, see Bradley 2015, p. 115.

51. By way of comparison: the daily wage of a textile worker at that time was on average 1.50 francs: Bradley 2002, p.6. In 1836, however, Engelen made the point that a traveller on foot would spend about the same on stockings, footwear and beer in the estaminets en route (Engelen 1837, p. 82).
52. Engelen 1837, p. 82.
53. Polasky 2001, p. 327. In 1837, in the harsh winter cold, workers were allowed to sit in the second class.
54. Maggs 2014 p. 58.
55. Bradley 2015, p. 73: In 1874, 77% of train journeys in England were in third class; in 1913 96%.
56. Bradley 2015, p. 78.
57. Hylton 2015, p. 119; Bradley 2015, pp. 83-84.
58. Bradley 2015, pp.79-80.
59. Schivelbusch 2000, p.62: The stability of the railways was such that from the start travellers could read and even write during the journey, in contrast to the journeying with stagecoaches where the continuous shocks rendered such activity impossible.
60. Bradley 2015, p. 67. Victor Hugo also describes the cries, laughter and jeering of the travellers in a passing train (Hugo 1837), p. 42.
61. Hildebrand 1998: Hildebrand expects that the speed of the new means of transport will shorten the journey time to such an extent that the inconveniences with fellow travellers will not last long.
62. Bradley 2015, p. 115. Dickens sees that equality in American railroads does have its limits: there are separate carriages for Black Americans and the railroads played a role in the system of slavery with the transportation of slaves.
63. Hylton 2015, p. 32.
64. Bradley 2015, p. 75.
65. See Polasky 2001.
66. Polasky 2001, 328.
67. Adams 1841, p.133. The profit made on passenger transport came almost exclusively from the sale of second and first-class tickets.
68. Adams 1841, p.135.
69. Bradley 2015, pp. 88-93.
70. Hymans 1884, vol.3, p. 112.
71. Rellstab 1836, p.37. Rellstab's account first appeared in the *Zeitung für die Internationale Welt*, and then, after translation into Dutch, in the Dutch literary-cultural magazine *Vaderlansche Letteroefeningen*.
72. Rellstab 1836, p. 38.
73. Plieninger 1836, p. 21.
74. Hugo 1837 p. 42.
75. Plieninger 1836, p. 21.
76. Soete 2001, Gillieaux 2017: in less than 40 years, rail accounted for almost 80% of all freight transport in Belgium, while in 1840 road and shipping each accounted for 50% of freight transport.
77. Peyret 1949, p. 22-23. The French economist Victor Considerant 1808-1893 argued in 1838 that it was unreasonable to want to spend capital on railways when five-sixths of the population was suffering from hunger.
78. See the earlier Dickens quote from 1846.
79. Or as London physician and scientific publicist Dionysios Lardner put it in 1824: *Rail travel at high speed is not possible, because passengers, unable to breathe, will die of asphyxia*. Hylton 2015, p. 10.
80. Hylton 2015, p.17.
81. One of the most virulent opponents of the construction of railways in the Netherlands was a steamboat manufacturer and operator: Brouwer et al. 2008, p.155.
82. Lamalle 1932, p. 482 and Lamalle 1943, pp. 14-15.
83. Hugo 1837, p. 41.
84. Hymans 1884, vol. 3, p. 118.
85. Hildebrand 1998, pp. 317-318.
86. Hildebrand 1998, p. 318.
87. Hugo 1837, p. 42.
88. Heine 2014, LVII, 5 May 1843.
89. See Van den Berg 1998, p. 390: *Drinking success to a new railway (Stockton, 1824)*.
90. Schivelbusch 2000, pp. 68-69; and Coste 2017.
91. François Bartolony: *Du meilleur système à adopter pour l'exécution des grands travaux publics* 1837, quoted from Peyret 1949, p. 22.
92. Pecqueur 1839, p. 292.
93. See El Gammal 2017, Lamming 2007, Pecheux 1975, pp. 189-245.
94. See Neirinck 2006.
95. Peyret 1949, p. 28. See also Bremm 2013.
96. Pecheux 1975, pp. 189-245.
97. Burton 2018.
98. Burton 2018: After the Sikh uprising in 1845, the British army was convinced of the need to build railways for the rapid transport of troops. The British army would also take on the construction of a number of lines itself.
99. Van Heesvelde et al 2014 and Bremm 2013.
100. Hylton 2015, p. 113.
101. See Hylton 2015, p. 114.
102. In Belgium, in 1926, as part of the reorganization of the Belgian public finances, the NMBS/SNCB (*Belgian National Railways Company*) was founded, see Vanthemsche 2001, pp. 160-163. In France, the five regional railway companies were merged in 1938 with the French State network to form the *SNCF*. In Great Britain, the private companies were consolidated in 1923 into four major railway companies.
103. See Fremdling 2001.
104. Lamalle 1932, p. 511.

# WITH SPACE KILLED, ONLY TIME REMAINS

Michel Draguet

*We declare the splendour of the world  
to be enriched with a new beauty:  
the beauty of speed.*

F.T. Marinetti, *Manifesto of Futurism*, 1909

The train burst into the collective imagination in the form of a fulgurating machine<sup>1</sup> which, tearing the landscape apart, made palpable an atmosphere which, contrary to what the art of perspective told, was in no way empty space, rather a very particular place, the subjective experience of which seemed to indicate that it remained motionless in a universe shaken to disfigurement. In this latter context, the compartment window breaks with the window imagined in the fifteenth century by Renaissance architects and painters to rationalize space: it no longer has the means to carve out, within infinity, a universe reduced to a fixed one-eyed vision. This defines not just a space as Erwin Panofsky would have

had it<sup>2</sup>, but also the inscription in time of any action destined to be represented. On the contrary, as Heinrich Heine wrote in 1843 in *Lutetia*, having killed space, the railway leaves mankind only with time.<sup>3</sup> With its promise of endless acceleration, the railway figures the very heart of a modernity that will resonate both as a promise of liberation and as a curse. Classically assimilated to the intersection of the visual pyramid, the frame does not detail the portion of reality grasped from a distance, clothing it, by its very immobilization, with the permanence specific to the principle consecrated as reality. It is no longer a break in a wall, but the dreamlike threshold to an experience based on speed.<sup>4</sup>

**Opposite Page:**  
Léon Spilliaert, *Spring*,  
detail of cat. 56





**FASCINATING  
AND FRIG**

**II**

**G** The ultimate symbol of modernity, the railway train was a major tool of the industrial revolution and the transformation of Western societies. Bearer of the wildest hopes for development and enrichment, it also crystallized fears and rejection of change. At the same time, the railway disrupted people's relationship to time and space. Distant destinations become close, local timekeeping gradually disappears, incompatible with the accelerating pace of life.

# HTENING NVENTION



1 | Constantin Meunier  
*Black Country - Borinage*, undated  
Oil on canvas, 184 × 243 cm  
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium,  
inv. 10000 / 226



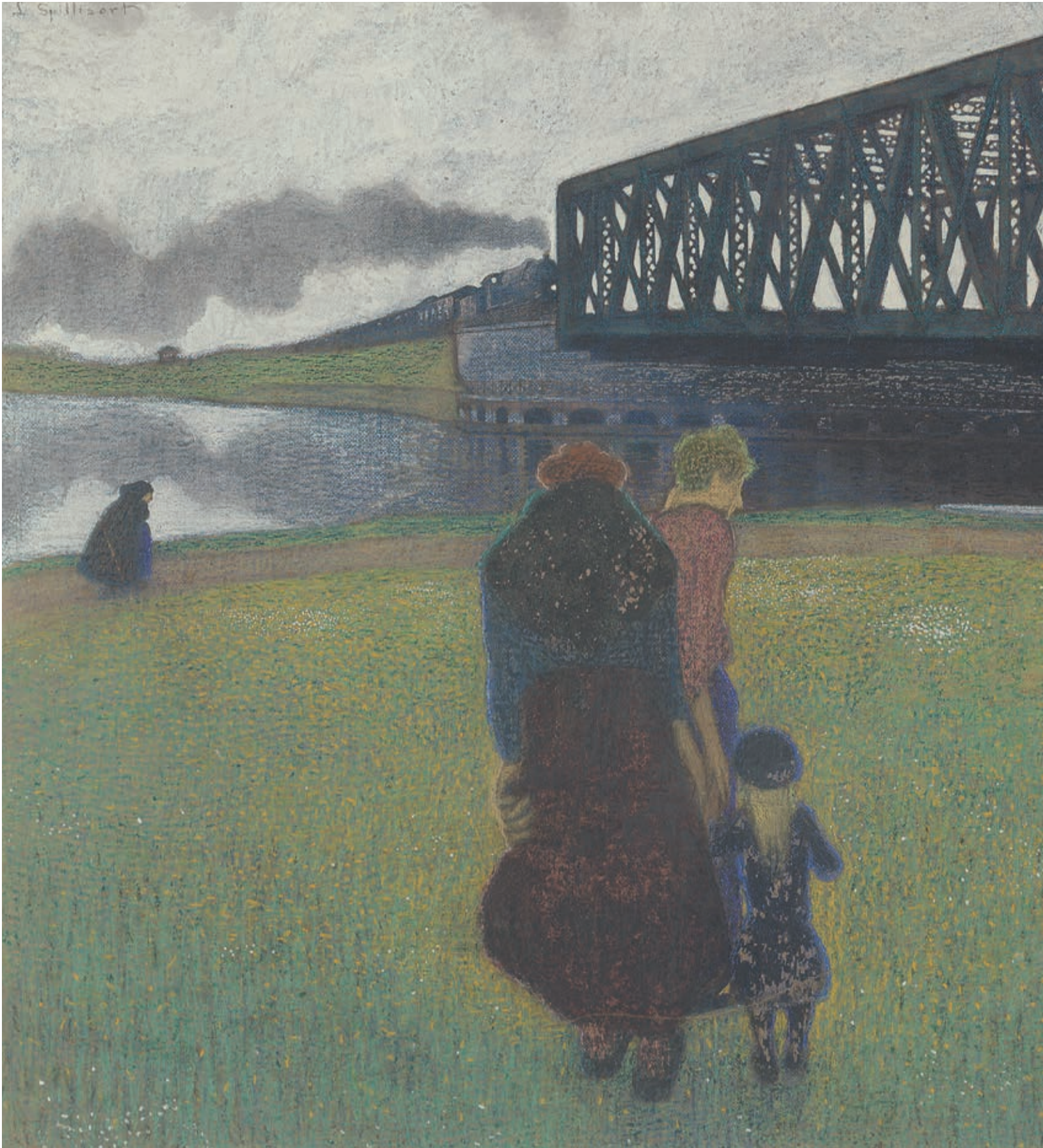
**2** | Constantin Meunier  
*Industrial landscape*, undated  
Oil on canvas, 69.8 × 103 cm  
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium,  
inv. 10000 / 719

- 4 | Jan Antoon Neuhuys  
*Inauguration of the first railway  
in Belgium on 5 May 1835, 1885*  
Oil on canvas, 265 × 360 cm  
SNCB/NMBS Collection -  
Train World Heritage, inv. 2509





J.A. Neuhof





**56** | Léon Spilliaert  
*Spring*, 1911  
Indian ink, gouache, pastel on heavy cardboard, 70.1 × 89.1 cm  
Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium,  
inv. 11224



- 57** | Maximilian Luce  
*The Seine at Issy-les-Moulineaux*, 1920  
Oil on canvas, 91 × 121 cm  
Issy-les-Moulineaux, Musée français de la Carte à Jouer,  
inv. IS.2014.1





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*Speeding Train* (detail), 1922,  
oil on canvas, 100 × 120 cm.  
Macerata, Fondazione Carima Macerata.  
See page 151.