

At Home by the Tracks. Domesticity in Proximity of Railway Space in (Early) Modern Art

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Abstract

The relationship railway space – domestic space is both an old and a topical issue at the same time, one that cannot be thoroughly understood in the absence of complex research. The focus of this paper is on art's power of expressing and criticizing urban realities, assuming the premise that it is possible to understand art history as a mirror of urban history and to read certain works of art as expressions of collective perceptions of urban reality. Evoking and interpreting images by (early) modern artists as Gustave Doré, Claude Monet, Eduard Manet, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and others, we study the ways in which aspects of domesticity are - if at all - embedded representations of the railway space. Thereby, implicit positive and negative assessments about the sustainability of housing in the proximity of railway space, as recorded by nineteenth and early twentieth century artists, are highlighted and nuanced. Railway mobility evolves from an age when space was conquered under the sign of the extraordinary, through an age of eclipse and oblivion under the sign of the common or the everyday and towards a recent phase when the place of mobility in space is critically reassessed. Although this paper only addresses the first phase, it shows that art history does not merely register this evolution in a linear way. Rather, a diversity of relations between railway space and domestic space are identified, including aggressive intrusion, mutual exclusion, ambiguous complementarity, overt confrontation but also peaceful coexistence.

Rezumat

Relația cale ferată – spațiu domestic e o problemă deopotrivă veche și actuală, o temă care nu poate fi pe deplin înțeleasă în absența unor cercetări complexe. Această lucrare pune accentul pe puterea artei de a exprima și de a critica realitățile urbane, asumând premisa că istoria artei poate fi înțeleasă ca o oglindă a istoriei urbane și că unele opere pot fi interpretate ca expresii ale unor percepții colective despre realitatea urbană. Evocând și analizând imagini ale artei moderne (timpurii) de Gustave Doré, Claude Monet, Eduard Manet, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner și alții, sunt studiate modurile în care aspecte ale domesticului sunt – sau nu – încorporate în reprezentări ale căii ferate. Astfel, sunt evidențiate și nuanțate evaluări implicite, pozitive sau negative, privind sustenabilitatea locuirii în proximitatea spațiului feroviar, așa cum au fost înregistrate de artiști în secolul al XIX-lea și la începutul secolului XX. Mobilitatea feroviară a evoluat dinspre o vârstă când spațiul era cucerit sub semnul extraordinarului, trecând printr-o vârstă a eclipsei și uitării sub semnul obișnuitului și al cotidianului, spre o fază recentă în care locul mobilității în spațiu e reconfigurat critic. Deși prezenta lucrare tratează doar prima fază, se arată că istoria artei nu reprezintă această evoluție în mod liniar, ci mai degrabă printr-o diversitate de relații între spațiul feroviar și cel domestic, incluzând intruziunea agresivă, excluderea reciprocă, complementaritatea ambiguă, confruntarea deschisă dar și coexistența pașnică.

Keywords: railways and domesticity; railway space in art; art history as mirror of urban history;

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Gustave Doré, Claude Monet, Eduard Manet, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.

1. Living with the railway: an old, contemporary issue

Railways and dwellings do not seem to make the perfect pair. Yet their proximity and intertwining is common reality in many cities. Usually, the home represents the familiar, the stable, the private, the nearby, the sense of belonging and safety. At the same time, the railway usually stands for the distant, the public, the mobile and the unknown, for a sense of displacement, placelessness or homelessness. The underlying question of this study is whether a sustainable relationship between railway space and domestic space could be developed. Rather than intending to provide definitive answers, the paper attempts to highlight the complexities of the problem, using art history as a valuable lens through which relevant insights into urban history can be gained.

After more than one and a half century of railways in urban history, the problematic relationship between railways and housing appears to be equally relevant for the contemporary city. Soon after the railway advent, around mid-nineteenth century, (housing) areas in the proximity of stations and railway lines have usually become associated with promiscuity, segregation, lack of safety, physical decline and different kinds of pollution, including visual pollution. In English, the segregation often introduced by the railway between different parts of the city is emphasized by the expression “on the wrong side of the tracks”, implying an inferior standard of the living conditions on one side of the railway compared to the other, depreciation caused by the railway’s barrier effect.[1] Meanwhile, the twentieth century - still on-going - de-industrialization process transformed large urban areas, on both sides of railway corridors and close to city centers, into derelict sites. Restructured and/or adaptively reused, these brown-fields clearly could constitute a sustainable infill alternative to urban sprawl in the detriment of natural-area reserves at the city’s outskirts. Indeed, in many cities including Romanian ones, mixed residential developments are planned to replace decaying industrial sites, all the while railway corridors would remain the structuring axes of these urban renewal areas.[2]

In Romania, the railway system is going through difficult times: railway mobility of both passengers and goods has drastically decreased over the last decades. The effects of this crisis are visible in the poor railway connectivity between cities, in the non-competitive journey durations, in the decay or state of abandonment of many railway buildings and structures. The situation is quite unlike the general European trend, wherein a genuine “railway revival” can be noticed, as advocated by the international and EU recommendations and policies that promote the reappraisal of railway transport in contemporary mobility, as a more economic, more ecologic and more democratic means of transportation.[3][4] As example, an noteworthy step forward has been made in a country with a highly performing railway system, Canada, where a trans-sectorial dialog and collaboration platform between railway authorities and local authorities has been active since 2003.² This partnership works towards finding methods for developing quality-vicinity strategies between the railways and adjoining urban areas. With a title alluding to the railway tracks’ power of structuring urban development, the *Guidelines for New Development in Proximity to Railway Operations* have been issued by this partnership in 2013, with housing as one of the main issues at stake.[5]

Nevertheless, a more sustainable relationship between mobility and the city can only be achieved by replacing the prevailing, reductive understanding of the railway as merely technologic and utilitarian object, with an understanding that also recognizes its formative and transformative impact on the traversed places as well as its cultural meanings. Thus, this paper argues that the relationship railway space – urban space is an old and topical issue at the same time, one that cannot

² Railway Association of Canada on the one hand and Federation of Canadian Municipalities on the other hand.

be thoroughly understood in the absence of complex research. Studying the precedents of the relationship between the home and the railway in art-, architecture- and urban history can be insightful. The specific relationship railway - housing is scarcely addressed in both art history and in architectural and urban history: H.J.Dyos in Great Britain is one notable exception.[6] Relevant issues are nevertheless touched upon in daily-life histories.[7] Some recent doctoral theses in the national context do address the topic without specifically focusing on it.[8] Moreover, at the European level it is relevant to signal an emerging field of studies which, rather than studying railway history *per se*, approaches the railway as a research instrument, as a “lens” through which the actual study objects are investigated: architecture, the city, urban culture and urban development.[9]

The focus of this paper is on fine art’s power of expressing and criticizing urban realities, assuming the premise that it is possible to read art history as a mirror of urban history and to read certain works of art as expressions of collective perceptions of urban reality. By interpreting work by artists as diverse as Gustave Doré, Claude Monet, Eduard Manet, Ludwig Kirchner and others, this study highlights the way in which aspects of domesticity are - if at all - embedded in artistic representations of railway space and/or of railway imagery. Thereby, positive and negative, implicit and straightforward assessments about the sustainability of housing in the (proximity of) railway space are highlighted. While allowing for more in-depth case studies, the choice of focusing the present article on just four works of art brings along the assumed limitation of restricting the period under focus to the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century in three European metropolises: London, Paris and Berlin. Further studies will bring into discussion the post WWI period too, allowing for comparative analysis with works that are only mentioned here.

2. Looking down on them: the merciless intruder

In one of his famous engravings published in 1872 as illustrations of journalist Blanchard Jerrold’s text *London. A Pilgrimage*, Gustave Doré staged the very proximity between railways and housing, in order to outline a harsh critique of living conditions in Victorian London.[10] In “Over London by Rail” (Fig.1), a bird’s eye view of a curvilinear sequence of narrow, extremely dense terraced worker houses is encompassed by the arch of a railway viaduct, while in the distance, a steaming locomotive is captured running over the three arches of another viaduct, closing the perspective. The railway structures thus circumscribe the domestic scene, while the locomotive smoke seems to spread out into the over-crowded backyards. While clearly based on the physical realities of Victorian London, allegedly the image is not an accurate depiction of a real location, rather an imagined typical site of railway-and-housing proximity. The very way in which the view is constructed suggests the lower status of these residential areas, both literally - below the railway’s inexorably horizontal right-of-way - and figuratively - as housing the poorest classes.

At closer look, there are several idiosyncrasies within the image, suggesting the importance of the railway proximity in denouncing the bleak living conditions of the working class. It can be noticed that the horizontal parallel lines, such as the cornice line of the left hand house flank, the virtual line connecting the tops of the lower chimneys, or the roof tops of the right-hand house flank, do not converge in the same point. Rather, as interestingly noted by Adam Roberts, house morphologies seem to echo railway morphologies.[11] The curvature of the tenement terrace, the repetitive rhythm of chimneys, windows and drainage pipes, especially of the lateral backyard walls appear as if contaminated by railway geometry, as if lateral walls were track sleepers, while the rounded first-floor house windows seem to echo the viaduct arches, just like their chimneys seem to echo the locomotive steam. In other words, in Doré’s image, domestic space appears as if stigmatized by railway space:

“[t]he railway theme [...] is repeated in the physical architecture of the world in which Londoners of this class live, as if the train system so dominates their lives as to have possessed it, warped and bent it physically out of shape.”[11]

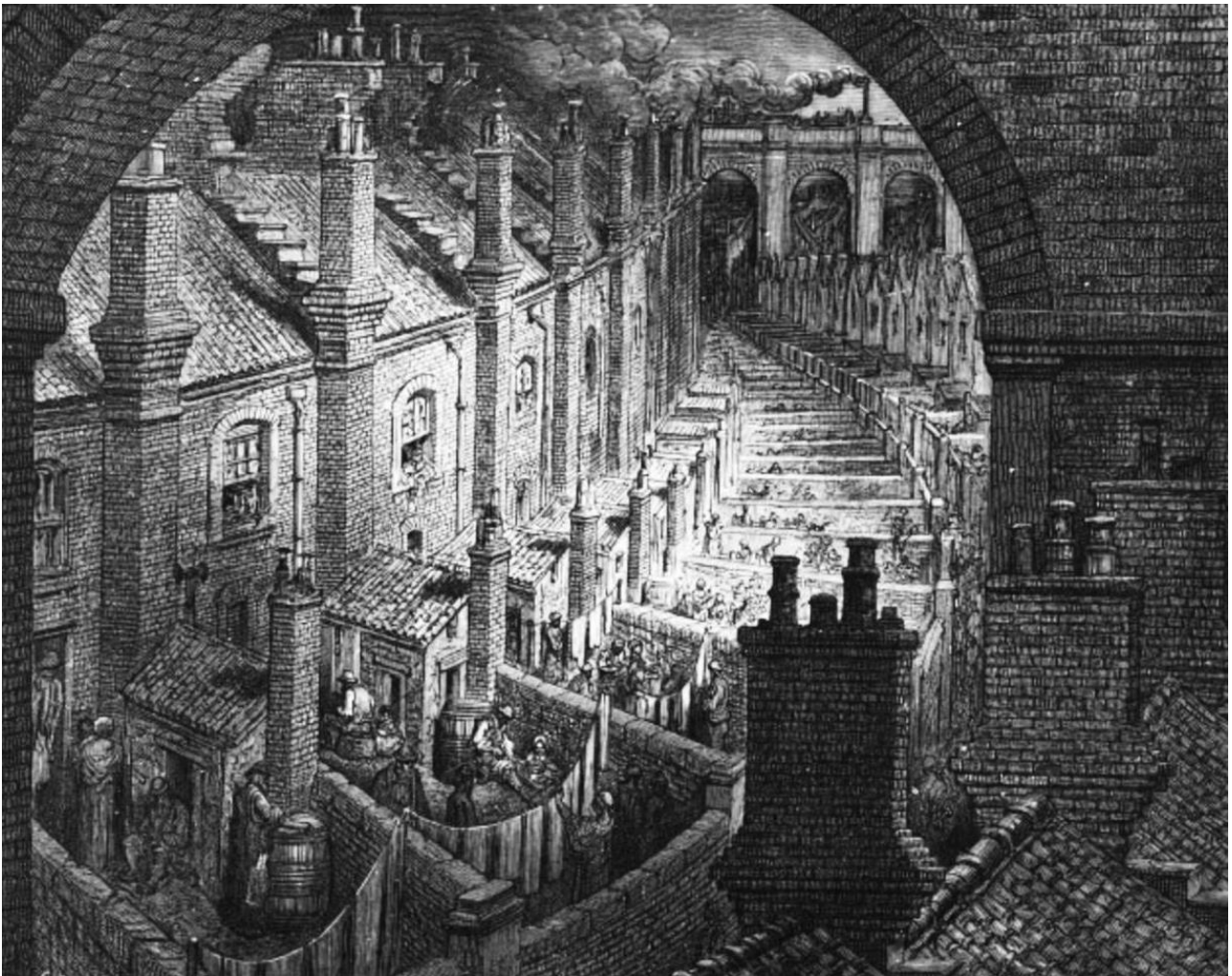


Figure 1. Gustave Doré: *Over London by Rail*. From Blanchard Jerrold, *London: A Pilgrimage*, London, 1872. Engraving facing p.120.

Even if Jerrold and Doré’s critique was deemed exaggerated by contemporaries, mid-twentieth century historian Michel Ragon, has nevertheless used Doré’s images as powerful visual arguments of a discourse that explains the birth of modern architecture and urban planning as remedies to the housing crisis of the large industrial city.[12] In his *Histoire de l’architecture et de l’urbanisme modernes*, Ragon describes how this crisis was generated precisely by the association between the three elements making up the industrial city: railways, factories and poor residential areas (slums): “[t]enement houses (“*maisons de rapport*”), were built on terrains that were the least appropriate for living, that is, between the factory and the railway.”[12:30] In this narrative, the railway is portrayed as a merciless intruder, a detestable nuisance, performing the “massacre” of the city by penetrating ever closer to the urban core and being closely followed by industries and the working class housing areas: “leveling everything under its track, devastating centuries of history and art, multiplying its marshaling yards, warehouses, coal hills.”[12:30] As depicted in Doré’s visual critique, residential space is virtually consumed, devoid of its protective intimacy and sheltering calm by the incisive tentacles of the railway system.



Figure 2. Claude Monet: *Arrival of the Normandy Train, Gare Saint-Lazare*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 60,3x80,2cm, Art Institute of Chicago.

3. *Ad infinitum*: “[T]he station is the sea. It is the port, the unknown, the faraway”[13]

In art but also literature, railway space is often portrayed as a promise, as the symbol of a hope, as the potential means for reaching a distant, yet desired destination or indeed, a desired ideal. It may stand as an allegory for distance, for the unknown, for adventure - as famously in *Rain, Steam, Speed* (William Turner, 1844) - but also for a disruptive, revolutionary movement towards progress, - as in futurist art, for instance: *States of Mind I. The Farewells* (Umberto Boccioni, 1911). These un-homely meanings are usually emphasized by the elimination or by the (literal or metaphorical) blurring of potential references to domestic space.

Sometimes, in the vast, uncanny space dominated by trains, virtually prolonged *ad infinitum* along the railway tracks, the silhouette of a signaling box and/or of a human figure is used as contrapuntal composition technique, precisely in order to provide a balancing sense of warmth, familiarity to the otherwise cold railway landscape – for example in *Train at night* (Lionel Walden, c1890) or *Railway* (Arthur Segal, 1910). Other tropes of the unfamiliar depict the station as public space by excellence - crowded, noisy, dynamic, as in *The Railway Station* (William Powell Frit, 1862). Another family of images represents the waiting platforms as the silent places of departure, staging tropes of estrangement, separation or indifference, as in *Leaving Home* (Frank Holl, 1872) or *Off to the Front* (Sir Frank Brangwyn, before 1919).

Tropes of distance are evoked by Impressionist representations of railway space, too. The large, glass-covered train hall, filled by locomotive steam, was one major pictorial motive for Claude Monet, whose 1877 *Gare Saint-Lazare* series of eleven paintings is among his finest creations representing modern urban life. Like his fellow Realist and Impressionist artists, Monet was inspired by contemporary everyday life and desired to be “a painter of modern life”, following Baudelaire’s famous homonymous text.[14] A modern urban site by excellence, around 1870, the Saint-Lazare railway station was the most important railway terminus of Paris.[15] Together with the surrounding *Quartier de l’Europe*, the construction of which began in the 1830s and was still ongoing in the 1870s, the area provided the perfect motive for celebrating the dynamism of contemporary urban life. By exploring the atmospheric effects of light upon this site of movement, Monet’s images seem to convey the most un-homely of values, such as dematerialization, evanescence or transience, a sense of infinite spatial expansion and atmospheric dissolution.

By representing the railway station as the very site of displacement, indeed as placelessness, in Monet’s railway series any potential references to the domestic realm are either completely suppressed or obscured. The dissolution of figures and ground into the all-embracing airy texture, uniting both solids and voids into transient luminous space, uncannily evoke Marx’s “all that is solid melts into air.”[16] However, in Monet’s railway images, the apparent opposition between home – understood as the solid, stable and reassuring center of the world - and the outside world of the distant and the unknown seems to dissolve. When modernity is assumed “as a struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world” as in Marshall Bermann’s words [17], feeling at home in the railway space can be seen as the very expression of the modern condition.

Monet’s railway paintings, together with the work of his fellow “painters of modern life” represent a striking conjunction between art history and urban history. As revealed by a 1998 exhibition held at Washington’s National Gallery, in the 1870s, not only Monet, but also painters Edouard Manet, Gustave Caillebotte, Norbert Goeneutte and poet Stéphane Mallarmé actually lived and/or worked in the very streets surrounding *Gare Saint-Lazare*.[18]



Figure 3. Auguste Lamy, *Paris. Bridge Erected on the Place de l’Europe, over the Western Region Railway*. Published in *L’illustration*, 11.04.1868.

This dynamic area of Paris (Fig.3) is representative of the mid-nineteenth-century urban transformations of the city into a modern metropolis during the Second Empire. It was not only a

preferred subject for these artists' realist art, but also a desired place to live and work. The four-five floored apartment buildings aligned along the streets of *Quartier de l'Europe*, converging into the star-shaped *Place de l'Europe*, built in the 1860s across the railway tracks, constitute a successful case of an urban residential area in the proximity of railway space, sought after by the progressive bourgeoisie and cultured elites. If paintings like *Le chemin de fer* (Manet, 1873), *Le Pont de l'Europe* (Caillebotte, 1876), *La gare Saint-Lazare*, *Le Pont de l'Europe* (Monet, 1877), *La Rue Mosnier aux drapeaux* (Manet, 1878) etc., are highlights of modern art depicting urban modernity as fleetingness, they are, at the same time, representations of these artists' familiar places, of their own homes in the vicinity of the railway.

4. Through the rails, across the tracks

In Manet's 1873 masterpiece *Le chemin de fer* (Fig.4), the station's enclosure is both firm and transparent; it separates and allows for continuity at the same time. The railway realm is merely suggested by the cloud of steam figured behind the iron grill and by the picture's name. The two elegantly dressed feminine characters portrayed in the foreground, along with the sleeping dog can all be read as allegories of domesticity.



Figure 4. Edouard Manet: *The railway*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 93.3x111.5cm, National Gallery of Art Washington DC.

Le chemin de fer can be read as a profound commentary on the impact of the railway on modern urban life, particularly on living near the railway. Although this image, like Manet's art in general, resists any unequivocal interpretation and it does not offer much explicit information as to the place

from which the view was taken, it is known that Manet painted this scene in the very neighbourhood of the studio he rented between 1872-1878 on 4 *Rue de Saint-Petersburg*. The view is from the back yard of a painter friend of Manet, who lived in a newly constructed apartment building, 58 *Rue de Rome*. [18] In the 1830s plans for the new *Quartier de l'Europe*, this north-south street was intended to cross right through the center of the star-shaped *Place de l'Europe*. However, the arrival of the railway resulted in a change of plans, as *Rue de Rome* was moved westward, while the railway was given "the lion's share", becoming the area's north-south line of force: the trains approached the *Gare Saint-Lazare* along a wide trench, opening below the street level from the *Boulevard des Batignolles* on the north, onto the railway terminal on *Rue Saint-Lazare* on the south (Fig.3). The depicted view was thus from the tiny backyard behind 58 *Rue de Rome*, while the black iron grill fenced this space off from the railway cutting below. A green branch on the upper right corner of the image indicates that this space is a garden. Moreover, it has been discovered that the door and window Manet sketchily represented in the upper left corner of the picture are those of his very studio, as perceived across the railway cutting. Thus, the painting actually represents the view from Manet's studio, in reverse. [18]

Through the prism of this papers' topic, one possible interpretation of *Le chemin de fer* is to read it as a commentary on the ubiquity of the railway in Manet's contemporary city, especially on the railway's impact on the residential areas adjoining it. In the case of many new apartment buildings of Haussmannian Paris, whether one gazes through one's front windows or, through one's backyard windows, one had to face the railway, one had *to live with the railway*. Contemporary visitors to Manet's studio remarked that the proximity of the railway lines was felt in the building's trembling as trains passed by. [18] Inexorably cutting through the urban fabric, the railway opened what should have been private space – the backyard – to the public venue that is the railway station. It cut through what should be the closed building blocks, distorting the normal front-back (read public-private) spatial relationships, by generating incongruous situations in which main rooms on the front facades open onto other buildings' backyards, usually not intended to be part of the publicly-perceived spaces. The reversed poses of the two feminine characters can be read as an echo of the front-to-back relationship of the *maisons de rapport* on both sides of the depicted railway trench. *Mise en abyme* of a troublesome relationship: living *with* the railway - living *in* modernity?

The seizing gaze of Victorine Meurant (Manet's favorite model and a painter herself) leading the eye from her face, along the girl's arm to the girl's figure and onto the vast railway space beyond, is emotionally and intellectually both convincing and intriguing. The interrogative, yet calm and natural pose of the woman, having interrupted her peaceful reading time in the sun to face at the viewer, the curiosity of the girl, having left her stem of grapes aside, as she is seized by the spectacle of a passing locomotive, the warm light of the scene - provide a sense of serene fascination to the image, conveying the impression of harmonious coexistence of railway and housing.

5. "View from the window": subjectivity at the crossroads

In the art of German expressionist, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), the railway is a recurrent presence. The painter was born in 1880 in a house facing the railway station, in Aschaffenburg, a border railway station on the Bavarian-Prussian frontier. [19] Mapping Kirchner's subsequent addresses in Dresden, Berlin and Davos, it is striking to find out a railway-proximate urban geography. [20] While his very first drawings, carefully kept by parents, captured the daily spectacle of trains as perceived from the child's room windows, later on in his life Kirchner also acknowledged the profound influence of railway space on his art:

"I was born at the railway station. The first things that I saw in my life were the

driving locomotives and trains; it is them that I drew when I was three years old. Perhaps this is why the observation of movement is especially inspiring to me. From it stems an increased awareness of life, which is the art work's origin.”[19]

Urban landscapes depicting the railway space appear in Kirchner's painting from the early phase of his career, as co-founder of the group *Die Brücke* in Dresden (1905-1913), through the years spent in Berlin between 1911-1917 and onto the Swiss mountain landscapes painted during his later years in Davos (1917-1938). Some examples are *Zwei Eisenbahn Brücke in Dresden* (1909), *Eisenbahnbrücke über die Löbtauer Strasse, Dresden* (1909), *Gasometer und Vorortbahn* (1912), *Gasometer in Schöneberg* (1912), *Hallesches Tor, Berlin* (1913), *Rheinbrücke in Köln* (1914), *Königstein und Eisenbahn* (1916), *Bahnhof Davos* (1925), etc.



Figure 5. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: *Railway overcrossing (in Berlin)*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 79 x 99,5 cm, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Köln.

Kirchner's signature style could be considered as being defined by his pre-WWI Berlin street scenes, such as *Scene on a Berlin Street* (1913) or *Potsdamer Platz* (1914), with their distorted perspectives, crude colors and sharply-angled silhouettes of women and men, with their alienated-*blasé* attitude, described by Georg Simmel in his famous 1903 essay *The Metropolis and Mental Life*. Like Paris and London, in the beginning of the 20th century, Berlin was a two-million-inhabitant metropolis, with all the goods and evils brought by industrialization, technological advance and the ensuing urban transformations. In Simmel's vision, an all-pervading "reduction of qualitative values to quantitative terms" comes together with the individual freedom, made possible in large cities by the "most advanced economic division of labor." [21] These result in a specific mentality of the metropolitan type, the *blasé* outlook, which is a protective shield developed by the inhabitants of the metropolis, in order to resist the emotional overstimulation triggered by a highly

fragmented, discontinuous living environment.[21]

In 1914, Kirchner also painted several representations of railway space in Berlin, such as *Die Eisenbahnüberführung, Strassenbahn und Eisenbahn, Ansicht von dem Fenster*, all framing a bird's eye view taken from the higher level of his apartment adjoining the road bridge over a railway trench (Fig.5). These descending, abrupt, yet distant views are different from Kirchner's more famous eye-level street views, with their close-up focus of the mask-like faces of stridently dressed *cocottes* and surrounding men. Despite their physical proximity, the passing metropolitans are rather marked by indifference and loneliness; they seem to *co-occupy*, rather than *share* the public space. The birds-eye level railway images depict the city as a place of rupture, of discontinuity, staging the railway trench as a large gap within the urban fabric, bordered by the residual, informal blind walls of the interrupted street front. At the same time, these images from the window imply the private, domestic space from which the views are taken. Thus, the two families of Berlin paintings are complementary: close-ups on loneliness and alienation in the central streets on the one hand, distant views from the home windows onto the incessant flux of people, trains and trams below, on the other hand. If railway lines seen from one's window made up a familiar sight for Kirchner, evoking childhood memories, the road-and-railway crossing, repeatedly represented in the above mentioned paintings, can also be read as a site of confrontation. Kirchner's attitude towards the modern city is both engaged and skeptical and his Berlin railway landscapes are utmost expressions of this tension.

Wilhelm Wörringer's 1908 essay, *Abstraction and Empathy*, delineates abstract from representational art, in terms of withdrawal, respectively of engagement with a threatening outside world.[22] Drawing on this, art historian Hal Foster notes that "[j]ust as, according to Wörringer, the natural world appeared chaotic to primitives, so too, according to Kirchner, did the urban world appear chaotic to moderns" and that Kirchner "expressed the urban world as a place of primitive vitality." [23] In this vision of the metropolis as wilderness, the railway seems to play the threatening role of brute elemental forces. Yet, as stated above, Kirchner's vision of modern urbanity is not purely critical. His rough, distorted, apparently naïvely-drawn shapes with their strident coloring do depict urban modernity as "primitive", but also show a profound empathy with modern city's compelling vitality. Recurring to distortion (of figures, spaces, colors) Kirchner does not seek a way of withdrawal from an overly stimulating world, but rather a means of heightening and embracing that stimulation.[23] His intense coloration and deformation of the urban scene can be read against Simmel's "de-coloring of things" cause by "money, with its colorlessness and its indifferent quality [...] hollow[ing] out the core of things, their peculiarities, their specific values and their uniqueness and incomparability in a way which is beyond repair." [21] Kirchner's harsh juxtaposition of railway and housing composes a simultaneously childhood-redolent and anxiety-generating marginal situation, which is everything but *blasé*.

Kirchner's sustained interest in painting the view from his apartment on to the *Friedenauer Brücke* crossing the railway suggests the great importance he places on the symbolism of the juxtaposition of domestic space and railway space. In his art, the physical situation of living near the railway is sublimated into a spiritual struggle of coming to terms with modernity, indeed of being at home in modernity. In the urban fabric of the metropolitan periphery that Kirchner inhabited, buildings such as the ones he paints appear as mere residues, traumatic leftovers by the crisscrossing of railways and thoroughfares. In these railway-neighboring sites, the homes of metropolitans appear brutally exposed to noise, smoke and trepidation and their sheltering role seems damaged by an aggressive external environment. In the railway periphery motive, expressionist aesthetic discovers beauty in anxiety and tension, asserting individual freedom not necessarily as a pleasant experience (as also Simmel reminds) but rather as an ever-painful seeking of authenticity, here and now.

6. Competing visions on living with the railway

Other major modern artworks would equally deserve being brought into discussion. However, given the limited extent of this paper, their study will constitute the subject of further work. In Edward Hopper's magic realism for instance (*House by the Railroad*, 1925) the harsh house-and-railway juxtaposition becomes an allegory of loneliness and decay. There is a tension between the home and the railway route and many symbolic meanings can be retrieved. The railway may be read as a cause for the house's bleak appearance. To express loneliness through the image of an empty house next to the railway means to acknowledge the incongruity of the pair in collective imaginary. The surrealists would actually overtly exploit the railway-and-home improbable association, in order to create a poetics of mystery through their incongruous juxtaposition. René Magritte's 1938 *La durée poignardée / Time Transfixed* is an example of his research on the mystery of thought: indeed the capacity of thought to bring together apparently disparate notions – locomotive and fireplace. Another Belgian surrealist, Paul Delvaux is famous for his railway spaces by night, populated by female nudes or young girls depicted from the back. In *Loneliness* (1956), the image and indeed the depicted neighborhood too, are structured along the railway line. Interestingly, only a tiny, transparent enclosure separates the two, contrasting realms: realm of the domestic – house, street and girl – realm of the railway – train and passenger building. Even more interestingly, the crossing footbridge connects the two: is it possible home and railway work well together, not only in the surrealist image? More recently, in the landscapes of British painter David Hockney (*Saltmill, Saltaire, Yorkshire*, 1997) the railway is depicted as small, silent, almost ornamental element within the postindustrial landscape. The railway line, now discretely insinuating itself along the intensely-green gardening allotments, almost idyllically relates the former factory, now converted into cultural-industry, with the housing rows of what is now the World Heritage Site of the textile industry city Saltaire: ironic reversing of Gustave Doré's visual critique?

If Monet's railway images privilege the longitudinal perspective, pointing outward, from the railway station, as the epitome of departure, along the railway lines towards infinity, Manet's only railway painting brings forth the transversal, perpendicular view, thus problematizing the nearby and the local. While Monet seems to celebrate the railway as the means to conquer distance, Manet, conversely, seems to reflect on the impact of the railway, locally. Kirchner's expressionist paintings occasion a reflexion on the place of subjectivity in a constantly changing and stimulating urban environment, an oblique view from the home onto the city, which is seen as a place of contrasts and discontinuity. If in Doré's contemporary *Over London by Rail*, housing is tightly packed in between dominating (read oppressive) railway structures, the same bracketing device is reversed in Manet's *The Railway*, as the railway is set in between (half visible, half implied) housing structures. The iron grill is omnipresent in the painting: boldly and parallel to the image plane in the foreground and subtly, at the image's left and right margins, as the rail fence on *Rue de Saint-Petersburg* and the structure of the star-shaped *Place de l'Europe*. Just like the metal grill both visually connects and separates distinct urban areas, the railway is both a vector of regional connections and a cause of local fragmentation and discontinuity. Ultimately, the contiguous, opposite directions of Manet's characters sight lines seem to suggest that the sustainable cohabitation of the two realms, the home and the railway, is both attractive and problematic.

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8. Image sources

- Fig. 1 Image courtesy Victorian web: <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/dore/london/30.html>, visited 10.09.2015.
- Fig. 2 Public domain image. Source: The Yorck Project: 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei. DVD-ROM, 2002, Distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH.
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- Fig. 5 Public domain image. Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kirchner_eisenbahnueberfuehrung_oel.jpg, visited 10.09.2015.