

Do not machines create humans as much as humans create machines?

First subject: Trains

Carefully study the following documents – a visual element, primary quotations, and an analysis by an expert – so you may account for the extent to which trains had a dramatic impact on humans, altering their lives, their social structures, their consciousness, their thinking processes.

You will have to sum up your ideas and explain your findings to the rest of the class.

You may work in groups to organize your synthesis.

Work through the documents in the particular order you are given them, as they are becoming more and more explicit. Analyse each of them chronologically and only then move on to the next to see how right you were.

Document A: William Turner, *Rain, Steam and Speed (The Great Western Railway)*, 1844



Notes and analysis:

Document B: Quotations

« [...] [A]s we emerged in a few moments from a dark tunnel, whirling out of the town, big drops of rain came slanting in upon us. [...] The road ran through a deep cutting, with only occasionally such depressions of its green-sodded bank, that we could, through the dusty glass, get glimpses of the country. In successive gleams: A market garden, with rows of early cabbages, and lettuce, and peas; Over a hedge, a nice new stone villa, with the gardener shoving up the sashes of the conservatory, and the maids tearing clothes from the drying-lines; A bridge, with children shouting and waving hats; A field of wheat, in drills as precisely straight, and in earth as clean and finely-tilled, as if it were a garden-plant ; A bit of broad pasture, with colts and cows turning tail to the squall; long hills in the back, with some trees and a steeple rising beyond them; Another few minutes of green bank; A jerk - a stop.»

Frederick Law Olmsted, *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*, 1852

« No one would travel in that manner who could help it [...]. The railroad is in all its relations a matter of earnest business, to be got through as soon as possible. It transmutes a man from a traveller into a living parcel. For the time he has parted with the nobler characteristics of his humanity for the sake of a planetary power of locomotion. Do not ask him to admire anything. »

John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 1849

Notes and analysis :

Document C: Analysis by an expert

When railways were introduced in England, they not only changed the face of the country, but also the ways it was perceived. A great number of contemporaries disliked the new perception of the landscapes offered by the experience of railway journeys, which seemed indeed to shatter the principles of this vision as they were established by picturesque and romantic theories and practices. Railways were thus blamed for offering fragmented, monotonous, whirling landscapes, and for creating a gap between the observer and the object of its admiration. Hence the criticism made by the fiercest opponents of railway travel, who denounced its destruction of a real knowledge of the country by its inhabitants, thus damaging a particular definition of English national identity.

Charles-François Mathis, Abstract of « Chemins de fer et vision des paysages anglais », 2005

Notes and analysis :