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# Defoe and the Project of "Neighbors Fare"

## **Abstract**

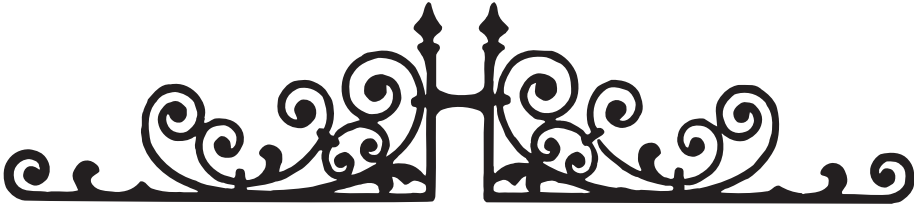
This article argues that Daniel Defoe's essay, *Upon Projects* (1695), works to imagine and restore neighborly connections amongst people increasingly distances from one another due to social and economic changes in Restoration life. Although Defoe's novels are often understood to promote a typically modern individualism, his social-improvement projects present an alternative view of Defoe as committed to a robust sociability.

## **Keywords**

Upon Projects, Defoe, neighbors, restoration, individualism

## **Disciplines**

English Language and Literature | Literature in English, British Isles



## Defoe and the Project of “Neighbours Fare”

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Before the long eighteenth century was “the Age of Reason” or “the Age of Enlightenment,” Daniel Defoe dubbed his “the Projecting Age.” A recent seminar at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library and an accompanying volume of essays on “The Age of Projects” have sought to reclaim Defoe’s title. Projecting’s vitality, Maximillian E. Novak points out, highlights the dynamism of the late Restoration and its “belief that human thought and action could transform history” (7). That dynamism is evident in the pages of Defoe’s *Essay upon Projects*, his first significant prose work, whose proposed reforms range from the revamping of highways and bankruptcy laws to the creation of benevolent societies and academies to improve the English language and educate soldiers and women. The *Essay*’s optimism is striking given that its publication followed hard on the heels of the failure of Defoe’s own schemes to farm civet cats and retrieve sunken treasure with the help of a diving bell. Though more extensive in scope than most projecting texts, the *Essay*’s ambition is nonetheless representative of the flood of schemes that poured from the presses following the expiration of the Licensing Act in 1694-95, proposing everything from banks and lotteries to taxes on bedposts and libraries for the godless Scots. As a form of ad hoc social planning, projects form a lively part of the Restoration’s print marketplace.

Although ubiquitous, projects were viewed ambivalently by contemporaries. As Novak observes, the term “project” for Restoration readers “had a distinctly unsavoury connotation, being associated with unscrupulous schemes for getting money” (3). Projecting was associated with Renaissance monopoly-mongering and contemporary stock-jobbing. In Samuel Butler’s *Characters*, “A Projector” is said to prefer “the public Good before his own Advantage, until he has joined them both in some Monopoly, and then he thinks he has done

his Part, and may be allowed to look after his own Affairs in the second Place” (116). Defoe was a committed projector all his life, lauding the marriage of “Invention” to the daughter of “Projector” in the pages of his *Review* and publishing *An Effectual Scheme for the Immediate Preventing of Street Robberies* just months before he died, but he could lash projectors with the best of them. In *The Complete English Tradesmen*, he observes that “projectors . . . are indeed amongst tradesmen as birds of prey are amongst the innocent fowls, (*viz.*) devourers and destroyers” (31). When he put pen to paper to write the *Essay*, though, Defoe would have known not only that he would be suspected of financial opportunism, but also that he ran the risk of inviting a further, more threatening accusation. Though Novak does not discuss it, one widespread stereotype presented the projector as nothing more than a latter-day enthusiast. Conjuring the anarchic inspiration that had fuelled the civil wars, enthusiasm provokes deep anxiety in the Restoration, and its association with projecting is frequent. When Damaris Masham, Defoe’s near-contemporary, disparages the female seminary projected by Mary Astell in 1694, she charges that the plan “will turn to as wild an Enthusiasm as any that has been yet seen” (129). Jonathan Swift, perhaps projecting’s most famous critic, alludes to the connection when *The Tale of a Tub*’s Lord Peter, elsewhere typed as an enthusiast, “cast[s] about to turn projector” (50).<sup>1</sup> In later years, Defoe himself would be charged by one detractor of being a “*Ibrasonick Zoilus*,” while another attacked the “*Fanaticism*” of his financial proposals, demanding “How in the Name of Wonder shou’d this Creature know anything of Trade, unless it was by *Inspiration*?”<sup>2</sup>

Why does projecting evoke the specter of enthusiasm, and why does the practice nonetheless persist throughout the Restoration and into the eighteenth century, which sees the publication of projects by Defoe, George Berkeley, and even Swift himself? This article uses Defoe’s *Essay* to begin to answer these questions and to explore how projecting matters in Defoe’s career and in the period more broadly. At the heart of a sophisticated projecting text such as the *Essay*, I argue, lies the desire to project not only individual improvement schemes but, more broadly, a sociable subject who does not recede into mere particularity. The *Essay*’s varied schemes are united by their commitment to the proverbial “Neighbours Fare,” the notion that one’s own experiences and fortunes are inevitably bound to those of one’s fellows. Defoe introduces the idea when he argues early in the *Essay* that, unlike the “meer Projector,” the “honest Projector” is someone who will benefit the nation by helping to establish a state in which “Plain English and Plain Dealing be practis’d indifferently,” where “Tradesmen and Landed men shou’d have Neighbours Fare, as we call it” (ix). In the service of “Neighbours Fare,” the *Essay* promotes belief in

persons' similitude, their capacity to be motivated and moved in like ways—in short, belief in their openness to being known.

This commitment to similitude, however, provokes fears of enthusiasm because it threatens to disturb the Restoration tendency to circumscribe knowledge claims by attributing an indissoluble particularity, even privacy, to the experience that grounds those claims. Gaining in influence as the Restoration wears on, this tendency was partly due, as Richard Kroll has shown, to a desire to restore an ethics of tolerance by emphasizing the contingency of knowledge claims (49-79). The skepticism that is a hallmark of Enlightenment epistemology relies on the priority of experience to counter the kind of sweeping claims mounted by enthusiasts. The implicit individualism of the skeptical Enlightenment outlook registers not only in the rise of Baconian and Lockean empiricism but in the extension of empiricism's experimental emphasis to the realm of religious experience and the development of a consumer economy that privileges the claims of subjective desire.<sup>3</sup> In emphasizing similitude rather than difference, the projector sets himself against important trends of his age and, like an enthusiast, threatens to inflict his views forcefully on others. Projectors characteristically plunge ahead with assertions about the common good that assume their ability to penetrate individual circumstances and dictate, with aggressive prescriptiveness—like the narrator of *A Modest Proposal*—what all should believe and do. As Lawrence E. Klein has argued, "enthusiasm" in this period can mean not only solipsistic obsession with private inspiration but also an excess of sociability (153-77), referred to later by Shaftesbury as "swarm[ing]" (358) in a phrasing echoed by Kant's "*schwärmerei*" (38). The accusation of enthusiasm groups projectors with those who fail to respect the notion that the claims of competing beliefs must be carefully negotiated.

At the same time, projects' persistence suggests a felt cultural need to resist what critics have tended to describe as the increasingly inward, even private characterization of belief, or its modulation into polite, non-dogmatic modes. The *Essay*, by contrast, both assumes and produces a vision of neighborliness predicated on the fundamental likeness or similarity of persons. If occasionally the text betrays a Mandevillean impulse—"the *Essential Ends of a Project*," Defoe insists at one point, involve "both *Publick Good*, and *Private Advantage*" (28)—overall the *Essay* makes the stronger case that individual interests are not merely complementary but are genuinely "equivalent." This commitment to equivalence allows the text to imagine the nation as a self-similar space in which contingent differences are suspended by imaginative acts of connection. Defoe thus presses "Neighbours Fare" beyond metaphor to figure a proximity of persons that verges on their interchangeability.

While most critics have been content to attribute contemporary disdain for projecting to its ties to financial speculation, projecting's perceived enthusiastic potential helps to explain the depth of negative feeling the practice evokes. The reaction against projecting is so excessive that it is hard to ascribe the problem to the opportunism of some garret-bound hacks. In using the *Essay* to explore the role that accusations of enthusiasm play in Restoration culture, this article builds on work by critics who have suggested that the charge of enthusiasm cannot be accepted as transparent, and that uncovering its polemical stakes can help to shed light on accounts of the self, social life, and the social role of belief that were marginalized in the transition to modernity. Work by Lawrence F. Klein and Anthony La Vopa, Jon Mee, and Paula McDowell has borne out J. G. A. Pocock's insight that enthusiasm is "the antiself of Enlightenment"—not only a vestige of the coercive energies of the Civil War period, but a constitutive other against which modernity defines itself.<sup>4</sup> Our grasp of the stakes of charges of enthusiasm, McDowell suggests, has been limited because our critical paradigms tend not to be attuned to the contemporary ramifications of complex subjects like belief. It is easy to understand contempt for projector-as-stock-jobbers, but the danger posed by the projector-as-enthusiast is harder to appreciate. As Michael Heyd and others have shown, however, the charge of enthusiasm could be used strategically to dismiss uncongenial metaphysical claims. Unrecovered, such claims constitute what McDowell terms an "absent presence" in our understanding of the period ("Enlightenment Enthusiasms" 518).

As a projector, Defoe cuts a somewhat unexpected figure. Critical focus on Defoe's fictional output often positions him at the vanguard of modernity, for his novels are often seen to endorse what has been typed as a distinctively modern pull towards individualism and skepticism. Yet as Peter Hulme notes, Defoe stands poised between two ages, seemingly at home in a secularizing enlightenment even as he remains steeped in an older vocabulary of sin, depravity, and grace (179). This article's suggestion that we attend to his career as a projector builds on the considerable body of work that acknowledges tensions in representing him unproblematically as a modern figure.<sup>5</sup> The "Neighbours Fare" promoted by the *Essay* implicitly—and sometimes literally—trespasses on the autonomy Defoe's fictional heroes and heroines are often seen to pursue. Though Defoe the projector has thus chiefly been an "absent presence" in critical accounts, he offers us another way to bridge the gap between Defoe's two worlds: neither an assured modern nor a retrograde enthusiast, he modernizes enthusiasm in order to imagine how persons can inhabit a space that lies between indissoluble particularity and enthusiastic collectivity.

### Neighbors and Strangers

Defoe surely had pragmatic motives for trying to press the case that projecting was publicly useful. If by the mid-1690s he was a reformed bankrupt, he was only a doubtfully reformed projector. An owner of a pantile manufactory, an enterprise tied to seventeenth-century monopoly projects, Defoe seems to have benefited in 1696-7 from the patronage of Dalby Thomas, commissioner of the glass tax, a published projector, and the *Essay's* dedicatee. Enlisting projects in the service of "Neighbours Fare" helps to deflect the charge of interest-edness, and Defoe invokes the ideal specifically in the course of rebuking the wealthy. Funds raised by projecting, he argues, will offset shortfalls in the land tax that have arisen because the rich have failed to pay their share. Appealing to this time-honored ideal of broad and sturdy sociability is an easy way, then, for Defoe to claim to serve the common good. But summoning the value of neighborliness is also salient in a historical moment when ideals of sociability are shifting away from the kind of intimacy that neighborliness connotes towards what has been termed "an ethics of estrangement" (Warner 113).

Neighborliness, whether actual or potential, was of course a venerable ideal. As Sidney and Beatrice Webb noted, the parish-based system of poor relief that had long structured charity in England—and on which Defoe relies in his highway project—is grounded in the Christian imperative of almsgiving, which is in turn linked to the injunction to care for one's neighbor as oneself (1-16). Implicit in such a system is the notion that one's neighbor, as Matthew Hale puts it in 1688, "includes every Person, of what Relation, or Condition soever" (448). Contemporary explications of the parable of the good Samaritan, the classic Biblical text for defining the scope of neighborliness, reinforce the concept's breadth, showing "all man-kind to be so linked together by one common Nature, that every man in necessity is to be counted for a *Neighbour*, and the hand of reliefe to be reached out to him" (Rogers 2). To be a neighbor, then, is to be linked naturally and inevitably to one's fellows, broadly conceived.

The dynamism of the Restoration, however, also provokes a reevaluation of how best to structure social ties and obligations.<sup>6</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees has suggested that until about 1800 a consensus about the duty to be charitable remained widespread, keeping "strangers" in "solidarit[y]" with one another. Yet as early as 1670 Josiah Child characterizes the parochial system as "a *radical Error*" in the pursuit of poor relief (86). More broadly, conditions are shifting such that by 1761 Horace Walpole has to explain his traditionally expansive use of the term to a correspondent: "I shall irritate my neighbours," he writes in one of the *Oxford English Dictionary's* exemplary sentences, "I don't mean those at next door, but in the scripture-sense of neighbour, anybody" (s.v. "neighbour"). Underlying these shifts, critics have proposed, is a more general reorientation



of public life around increasingly impersonal modes of exchange.<sup>7</sup> As economic and political change made rank and status less definitive of one's social position, assumptions and institutions that had structured social relationships had to be renegotiated.<sup>8</sup>

Largely, the effects of this reorientation have been seen as positive. In the realm of print, the democratizing, even liberating potential implicit in the production of a "public sphere" that aids communication by disembedding participants from their particular circumstances has been widely heralded.<sup>9</sup> Recently, though, critics have also stressed that one task of the emergent public sphere was to neutralize the threat of enthusiasm by ruling certain sorts of speaking out of bounds.<sup>10</sup> One way to accomplish this end was to give participants in the public sphere ways to imagine themselves that would enable disinterested exchange. As Michael Warner has shown, "stranger sociability"—a generalized understanding of others as distant and different from the self—is a key imaginative strategy for framing participation in the public sphere (105). The estrangement that such sociability assumes, Warner proposes, can be seen as a space of possibility: "An environment of strangerhood," he writes, "is the necessary premise of some of our most prized ways of being" (75). Warner does not explain the appeal of this "strangerhood" in light of contemporary fears about enthusiasm, but the premise of estrangement might well seem an attractive solution to the threat of enthusiastic coercion. By enforcing attention to the rhetoric of public address and thereby calling into question the enthusiast's claim that the truth needs no mediation, an impersonal public sphere seems able to defuse much of that claim's danger.

Nevertheless, even figures often seen as spokespersons for such a public sphere are not always sanguine about its "ethic of estrangement" (113). The *Spectator* is consistently seen to be key to the development of the public sphere, but in its pages Mr. Spectator can be found lamenting that the world is riddled with "Disguise and Imposture," such that "you hardly see one who is not, as the Player is, in an assumed Character" (594). The trope is familiar, but Michael Ketcham has suggested that its prevalence in the *Spectator* is designed to compensate for uncertainty about the basis of what he terms "social knowledge" in the period (63). Ketcham argues that one of the *Spectator's* key aims is to strengthen such knowledge by teaching readers how to overcome "the dichotomy of inside and outside" that the paper often highlights (63). Despite its misgivings, the *Spectator* clearly disseminates a politeness in which are embedded all kinds of social distance. Clement Hawes, though, has described the persistence through this period of a "manic style" that aims to preserve "a transindividual framework" for conceiving social personality (14). Such traces of competing models of public address suggest that the emergence



of an impersonal realm of public discourse was not wholly uncontested, and that accounts emphasizing a ready movement towards, in McDowell's words, "bourgeois individualism and secular reason," simplify actual conditions on the ground (*Women of Grub Street* 22). Warner stresses the emancipatory potential of stranger sociability, but contemporary voices also hint at what gets lost when neighbors become estranged.

Defoe's own standing in the marketplace of print and a secular "public sphere" is ambiguous. While John Richetti describes Defoe as "prominent among those who articulate what has come to be called the bourgeois public sphere" (70), he also points out that the controversy over his *Shortest Way with Dissenters* highlights the limits of such a putatively public sphere to encompass genuine difference of opinion (470).<sup>11</sup> Defoe wrote a number of oft-neglected books in which he appears more reactionary than progressive: in *Mere Nature Delineated*, he protests the eclipse of religious mystery by secular reason, chiding readers for being "Ante-Enthusiastick": "As to that Truth called Religion, I reckon no time at all to that Part," he grumbles, "in which I know I please many of my Sceptical, Deistical, Ante-Enthusiastick Readers" (83). Though hyperbolic, Defoe's comment places him at a more skeptical distance from his age than Mary Poovey allows when she characterizes the *Essay* as a modernizing text that is ahead of its time in theorizing "government by taste" (160). For Poovey, the chief burden of the *Essay* is to manage rather than coordinate "the subjective responses of individuals," responses whose divergence is both inevitable and unproblematic (158). From this perspective, the *Essay's* invocation of "Neighbours Fare" might look like a ploy, an opportunistic gesture not especially uncharacteristic of Defoe. Nevertheless, elsewhere in Defoe's works, and even in his fiction—where the critical consensus has been that he appears the most "modern"<sup>12</sup>—we can see traces of uneasiness about the modern potential for estrangement. Though Ian Watt argues that *Robinson Crusoe* fails adequately to convey the costs of isolation, he still identifies in its paradigmatic hero "an anguished sense of personal loneliness" (91) that is echoed in H.F.'s isolation in plague-stricken London in *A Journal of the Plague Year*. The pursuit of Roxana by her daughter Susan typifies the way that Defoe's fictional protagonists are also often haunted by the social ties they otherwise seem eager to evade. In what follows, I will argue that, despite the real attractions for Defoe of individualism and even "strangerhood," the important place of projecting in his career allows us to see his real if not uncomplicated interest in conserving a genuinely "Neighbourly" sensibility.

### Neighborliness and “Speaking Sense”

In context, the *Essay*'s call for “Neighbours Fare” advances the argument that projecting can restore continuity among private interests. As the argument develops, it becomes clear that Defoe thinks “Neighbours Fare” will arise only through acts of relationship in which individuals hold one another responsible for the good of the whole. In working to produce a mutuality that is its own reward, the *Essay* implicitly resists an instrumental account of social life as simply a means to gratify one's private ends. Though Kimberly Latta proposes that the *Essay* “foreshadows the ... view that individual avarice could actually promote the common good,” the text does not always look anachronistically Mandevillian (144). In the project for a language academy, the *Essay* proposes that fostering “Plain English” is a shared undertaking that also supports social life. In this scheme, Defoe's outrage over the corruptions of contemporary speech and his insistence on the need for “speaking Sense” both indicate that here the *Essay* is fundamentally concerned not with the tension between the individual and society but with the pressure exerted on claims of shared value by the relativizing dynamics of the market.

Justifying his call for an academy to regulate language, Defoe laments the poverty of modern conversation, highlighting for special scorn the prevalence of profanity in daily speech. In a text peppered with commentary on various social ills, Defoe expresses a singular outrage over debased conversation. The speech of his contemporaries, Defoe storms, is “a mere Frenzy of the Tongue, a Vomit of the Brain, which works by putting a Contrary upon the Course of Nature,” and must be accounted as “Folly acted for the sake of Folly, which is a thing even the Devil himself don't practice” (247-48). The man who swears “makes Conversation unpleasant,” but more seriously he renders “Discourse ... perfect *Nonsense*” (240-41). Tacitly invoking a linguistic rule of “Nature” and “sense,” the argument turns its attention to “speaking Sense,” a concept that mediates between mere “Custom” and the “Truth” to serve as a standard and rule for social intercourse. In her reading of the *Essay*, Poovey argues that the language academy project cannot point to “an obvious linguistic marker of difference” between sense and nonsense (165), a lack that betokens “the limit of epistemological resources available to the would-be theorist of human motivation at the turn of the eighteenth century” (163). For Poovey, Defoe is already in a Mandevillian world that forecloses appeal to values or norms that transcend individual interest. But in the language academy project Defoe relies on a resource beyond “Custom”: “Sense,” which marks the place at which individuals bring truth into the world of conversation. The *Essay* focuses not so much on managing “Custom” as bringing it under the government of this “Sense.” “There is a direct Signification of Words, or a *Cadence in Expression*,

which we call speaking *Sense*," Defoe writes; "this, like Truth, is sullen and the same, ever was and will be so, in what manner, and in what Language soever 'tis express'd" (244). Here, truth transcends but also checks speech, guiding conversation away from "perfect *Nonsense*." And to do so, truth must be realized in "speaking": the context is interpersonal, relational.

The *Essay*'s attention to "speaking *Sense*" thus rebukes the authority of custom by an appeal to language's social uses. "'Tis true," Defoe notes,

Custom is allow'd to be our best Authority for Words, and 'tis fit it should be so; but Reason must be the Judge of Sense in Language, and Custom can never prevail over it. *Words*, indeed, like Ceremonies in Religion, may be submitted to the Magistrate; but *Sense*, like the Essentials, is positive, unalterable, and cannot be submitted to any Jurisdiction; 'tis a law to it self, 'tis ever the same, even an Act of Parliament cannot alter it. (243)

Defoe's argument thus takes away as much as it gives to "Custom," and the appeal to "*Sense*" restores a normative understanding of how speech can body forth "Essential" truth. Poovey suggests that the *Essay* elsewhere undermines such assertions by appealing to relativizing market dynamics (164). Yet the argument that an act of "direct Signification" allows words to approximate and thus become equivalent to or indistinguishably "like" the truth foreshadows the highway project's use of proximity to figure likeness. This overlap between the two projects betokens the *Essay*'s commitment to connecting persons in ways that are not merely instrumental. Put another way, the *Essay* can here be seen to suggest ways in which persons really are connected despite the dissociating forces of an emerging market economy. If sense is like the truth to the extent that it is partly indifferent to context—it "is positive, unalterable"—it is only realizable *in a context*, through its performance in "a *Cadence in Expression*."

The contextual, interpersonal nature of "Sense" helps to illuminate why Defoe is so exercised by profanity. The free flow of "*Nonsense*" renders public life sterile, a pure but pointless performance that suspends attention to the common good. As the project develops, Defoe is clearly exasperated by the fact that people have refused to rein in the problem by insisting on the exchange of "Sense" and have instead allowed "a superfluous crowding in of insignificant Words" (245). In so doing, they have behaved not as "Neighbours" united by a shared sense of value, but self-interested agents in love with their own "Folly." The *Essay* protests against lewd speech's breach of "Good Manners" (246) and, in a brief foray into verse, Defoe laments that "few are Sound and Orthodox:/ They hate *Conformity*, tho' 'tis in Vice" (251). If Defoe could inveigh against occasional conformity in his religious pamphlets, here conformity in mannerly

speech emerges as a positive solidarity against “Vice.” The language academy’s attempt to rescue social life from degradation by preserving the force of “Sense” proposes that our shared life together both demands and enables a shared commitment to values that are not idiosyncratic and that must have a real purchase on behavior. If strangers might let one another get away with “Folly acted for the sake of Folly,” neighbors should not.

### Equivalence and the Highways Project

If the neighborliness that can sponsor sensible, truthful conversation is a key concept for the *Essay*, how is it to be made thinkable? Producing neighborliness by imagining both land and persons as fundamentally “equivalent” is the chief burden of the highways project. To be sure, the *Essay* focuses on the material benefits that will accrue from widening, re-grading, and ditching the highways. The scheme, however, also reveals an underlying commitment to producing a certain kind of subject: a fundamentally social person whose neighborliness is defined not only by his imagined proximity to others but also by his ultimate commensurability with them. In this project, “equivalence” mediates difference as “Sense” mediates the exchange of truth in the language academy scheme. Equivalence is the assertion of identity across difference; it is a functional identity for which difference is not insuperable, not a sign of identity’s failure. To achieve equivalence, sameness must be discerned within apparent difference. Like sense in the earlier project, equivalence in the highways project is thus inextricable from relationships. Producing equivalence requires relying on a social and even imaginative commitment to see how particulars can be linked for the sake of the common good.

Perhaps the *Essay*’s most ambitious project, the scheme to rehabilitate the nation’s roads was certainly needed, for “the condition of England’s highways was abominable and the administration of their rates and repairs hopeless.”<sup>13</sup> Problems with the roads continued to preoccupy Defoe: he laments their condition most famously in the appendix to the second volume of his *Tour Thro’ the whole Island of Great Britain*, in which he describes the “deep stiff clay, or marly kind” of ground prevalent in the Midlands to be “so surprisingly soft that it is perfectly frightful to travelers,” producing “sloughs and holes, which no horse could wade through” (429, 435). While this may sound dire, economic historian John A. Chartres emphasizes that Defoe’s commitment to reforming rather than simply documenting the wretched state of England’s roads is a bright spot in the “almost unremitting gloom” that pervades seventeenth-century accounts of the highways (73). When Defoe was writing, only a single turnpike authority had been established, on the New Great North Road in 1663, and the heyday of turnpike development—which Defoe would hail in the *Tour* as

"worth recording, for the honour of the present age"—was still to come (qtd. Albert 140). The *Essay* does not itself promote turnpikes; early in the project, Defoe observes that "Tolls and Impositions upon Passengers and Travellers" are one evil his proposal seeks to mend (69). Nevertheless, the project does seek to mitigate the problem of parochialism in the upkeep of the nation's highway system. Since Tudor times, control of both the funds and manpower for highway maintenance had lain with local parishes, and their ability and efforts were uneven.<sup>14</sup> The *Essay* proposes expanding the government's ability to enforce maintenance standards, a recourse to authority that, Poovey suggests, signals Defoe's imperfect grasp of how to regulate an economy of taste (159-64). When he sets out to describe the value of the project, however, what Defoe emphasizes is not its ability to further individual interests but the fact that it "promotes universal Correspondence" (73). In the highways project, the promotion of trade also promotes a vision in which everyone is "Neighbour" to everyone else.

The England imagined in the highways project is not fractured by local interest but united by its inhabitants' underlying likeness. That likeness is both manifested in what the scheme describes as their common interest and produced by the very highway system proposed. The goal of a "universal Correspondence" of persons is actually carried over from a prior project in the *Essay*, a scheme for a network of county banks. In that project, Defoe imagines a strong central bank and a series of "many Banks [that] could without clashing maintain a constant Correspondence" (58). The commensurability of local interests extends to the commensurability of persons as Defoe speculates that, in a nation integrated by systems of exchange,

A man who has Cash at *Plymouth*, and wants Money at *Berwick*, may transfer his Cash at *Plymouth* to *Newcastle* in half an hours time. . . . Or if he wants Money at *Newcastle*, and has Goods at *Worcester*, or at any other Clothing-Town, sending his Goods to be sold by the Factory of the Bank of *Worcester*, he may remit by the Bank to *Newcastle*, or any where else, as readily as if his Goods were sold and paid for. (62-63)

If the person here envisioned is in essence the man who can be anywhere that business demands because his cash flows freely through the improved banking system, that man's specificity is partly suspended as the *Essay* allows readers to imagine that "corresponding" persons as well as funds are located at each node of the network. Here, local specificity cannot efface underlying likeness—so that, in effect, a man at Berwick might as well be a man at Plymouth as a man at Worcester.

The banking project, though, may seem to leave open the possibility that this dissolution of individual specificity is driven by a desire for profit, thus raising questions about the *Essay's* instrumental use of ideals of commonality. As the highways project develops, however, its emphasis on “equivalence” calls into question its commitment to private interest as it dwells on resemblance and continuity rather than difference. Equivalence in the *Essay* is not quite identity, but it does imply a larger logic of commensuration. Equivalence pervades the highways project, underlying the massive transubstantiation of matter that Defoe envisions when he proposes

That an Act of Parliament be made, with Liberty for the Undertakers to Dig and Trench, to cut down Hedges and Trees, or whatever is needful for ditching, dreining, and carrying off Water, cleaning, enlarging, and leveling the Roads, with Power to lay open or inclose Lands; to incroach into Lands, dig, raise, and level Fences, plant and pull up Hedges or Trees, for the enlarging, widening, and dreining the High-Ways, with Power to turn either the Roads, or Water-Courses, Rivers and Brooks, as by the Directors of the Works shall be found needful, *always allowing* satisfaction to be first made to the Owners of such Lands, either by assigning to them equivalent Lands, or Payment in Money . . . . (75)

Here at the outset of the project, two assumptions about equivalence appear that go on to structure its development. First, land can apparently be worked on such a scale in part because it is conceived of as everywhere “equivalent” to itself, so that there is no parcel of land for which a substitute cannot be found. Embedded in that assumption is the further suggestion that persons themselves can agree on the “equivalence” of their situations, so that “Owners” will “*always*” accept the compensation offered for their contribution to the greater good.

While this introduction to the project showcases Defoe’s trademark attention to particulars, that particularism is balanced by a commensurating view of how individual parts of the nation, the raw materials for the project, and even persons themselves, can be networked into a unified and cooperative whole. Further equivalences are repeatedly implied and entailed: part of the “Stock” of the project, the resources it needs to get underway, “must be Hands: for a Stock of Men is a Stock of Money” (81); to raise funds, “every County, City, Town, and Parish, shall be Rated at a Set Price, equivalent to Eight Years Payment for the Repair of High-Ways” (81); to hasten construction, criminal punishments “might be easily transmitted to a certain number of Days Works on the High-Ways” (82); and farmers unable to fulfill their annual obligation to lend out horses and equipment for a whole week to assist the project “may spare



it at sundry times, or agree to be Assess'd, and pay the Assessment at sundry payments" (91-92). Moreover, "the Work of the Farmers' Teams... must be accounted as Money, and is equivalent to it" (93). The project will employ both the able-bodied poor and those unfit for labor: "to those who cannot work," the works' supervisors "may allow Pensions for Overseeing, Supervising, and the like, which will be more than Equivalent" to a paying job (83).

By returning to the theme of equivalence, the *Essay* resists making difference central to the identity of either the nation or its inhabitants. Instead, the project describes persons in a way that presupposes a context of relationship and imaginative exchange. As "Sense" had bridged the gap between "Truth" and "Custom," "equivalence" bridges the absolutes of identity and non-identity implicit in the highways project. To do so, though, requires seeing persons in relation to one another: as a functional identity, equivalence requires some sort of agreement to render ostensibly different things like; as an imaginative identity, it requires both a perceiver and a context for its discernment. Several times, the highways project invokes such imaginative equivalences. Describing how to render wasteland useful, Defoe describes how "in most places there is a convenient distance of Land left open" on the roads' shoulders, "which though it be us'd of course by Cattle and Travellers on occasion, is indeed no Benefit at all either to the Traveller as a Road; or to the Poor as a Common, or to the Lord of the Mannor a Waste" (79-80). Proposing to finance his scheme by improving this land for sale, Defoe argues that it is "as good Land as any of the Neighbouring Enclosures, as capable of Improvement, and to as good purpose" (80). Here, the proposed conversion of nothing into something via its potential to be *like* something—"as capable of Improvement"—requires an eye that can see similitude. Once imaginatively grasped, that similitude can then perpetuate the ongoing conversion of only apparently disparate particulars into an integrated whole structured by a series of equivalences.

If parcels of land can be made equivalent, and if people, money, and forms of work are also presumed to be commensurable, what about persons themselves? The assumption that landowners will readily surrender their land in exchange for "equivalent" acreage or payment implies an equivalence of motives: the *Essay* consistently assumes that "satisfaction" can be achieved because no residual private interest allows individuals to hive themselves off from the shared aim of improving the nation. Towards the beginning of the project, Defoe acknowledges that "the liberty" of the project's overseers to appropriate land "seems very large, and some may think 'tis too great a Power to be granted to any Body of Men over their Neighbours" (76-77). Nevertheless, he argues, the scale of appropriation "is absolutely necessary, or the Work cannot be done; and the doing of the Work is of much greater Benefit than the Damage can



amount to.” To supplement this utilitarian response, he continues, “Satisfaction to be made to the Owner...is an Unquestionable Equivalent” (77). To a skeptical reader, the “Unquestionable” nature of such “Equivalen[ce]” may seem doubtful. But the project does assume that all persons can achieve an “Equivalent” position from which they can perceive its “Benefit.” By re-invoking the argument that all men are “Neighbours” exactly when he admits that the project requires that some men be granted authority over others, Defoe emphasizes that the project aims to sustain rather than infringe on the principle of equity.

Later, the equivalence of land again shades into the stronger claim of persons’ equivalence in a further but more perplexing argument about compensation. As it imagines how grants of improved wasteland might serve to compensate those who have lost acreage, the *Essay* seems to envision the country as a fluid space in which everywhere is proximate. The improved land, Defoe points out, “will be either saleable to raise Money, or fit to exchange with those Gentlemen who must part with some Land where the Ways are narrow” (80-81). The assumption here seems to be that newly-arable land will always be convenient to—both near and useful to—individuals who lost land to the expansion of the roads. The specificity of persons and their interests is again effaced by their imagined mobility within a more or less uniform space, and the residual differences that might make a man at Norwich unhappy about being granted substitute lands in Norfolk are eclipsed. Mere proximity, or nearness, the most basic form of resemblance, here seems to entail a further nearness of motives.<sup>15</sup>

If the *Essay*’s focus on proximity helps it to elide difference between distances of both geography and motive, at times the text is more open about the extent to which it relies on imaginative acts of relation. At such moments, the *Essay* seems to want to cultivate in its readers analogical habits of thought: analogy, Foucault points out, develops from *convenientia*, marking the point at which relations grounded on “visible, substantial” likeness become conceptual (21). Analogy in the *Essay* further secures places’ and persons’ equivalence. Early in the project, Defoe hopes that a place can be found to serve “as a Pattern and Experiment for the whole Kingdom” (74). When the *Essay* later describes the town of Islington, the area initially seems singularly unqualified to serve such a paradigmatic role. The town is hampered by “the inconvenience of a Clayey Ground, and no Gravel at hand,” and its “wholly Unpassable” stretches of cross-roads seem to render it “a Place, that has not its Fellow in the Kingdom” (86-87). Yet despite these difficulties, Defoe does not abandon the attempt to make the town exemplary. Rather, he goes on to show how “a noble Magnificent Causeway might be erected” in the town, transforming Islington

into a "Pattern" after all. As the argument develops, Islington's exceptionalism subsides so that the parish can be re-figured as a kind of anywhere. Though the town's promise "as a Pattern" would seem empirically dubious, the project makes an imaginative leap—"as"—that transcends doubt. Elsewhere, the *Essay* further resists conceding to the pull of difference when it contracts the nation into a space that, if not everywhere identical, is everywhere familiar: if the project succeeds, Defoe writes, "a Man might Travel over all *England* as through a Street" (84). The poetic force of the simile proposes the synecdochic status of any particular place, rendering all men, at bottom, "Neighbours" in a nation conceived as a single "Street." England here becomes a place in which people are ordered but also joined by their equivalence.

### Conclusion

While the *Essay* is primarily committed to imagining sociability, the risk of estrangement does haunt the text's edges. In several schemes, the *Essay* certainly seems committed to distinguishing or "sorting" persons according to contingencies of their circumstances, raising the possibility that difference plays a more significant role in the text than my focus on equivalence might suggest. The proposals for insurance societies, for example, tend to begin with a focus on distinguishing types of persons: a friendly society, Defoe writes, must admit "None...but whose Circumstances are, at least in some degree, alike, and so Mankind must be *sorted* into Classes; and as their Contingences differ, every Different Sort may be a Society upon even terms"; thus, "'tis necessary to sort the World into Parcels" (118-20). Here, the comprehensive view of society in the highways project seems to break down as the *Essay* encounters "Circumstances" insoluble into equivalence. It is worth noting, however, that "Contingences" are a problem to be overcome throughout the *Essay*, not a condition to be borne with, much less celebrated. The proposal for a general "Pension-Office" opens with an invitation to "all Sorts of People" to register themselves, a call that at once acknowledges and brackets difference.

In a slightly different vein, the *Essay* elsewhere works to reassert "Sorts" or categories of persons, as in the project for a "Court of Enquiries," whose aim is to prevent "Honest" debtors from being driven "into the *Friars*" or the Mint, "those Nurseries of Rogues," and being mistaken for "Knavish, Designing" debtors (206). Here, sorting restores the visibility of character threatened by laws that reward cunning. Producing character's visibility in this way may feel compensatory, as if the *Essay* aims at a kind of social engineering that, in Frances Ferguson's words, will offer "a description of individuality that is not so much expressed as produced" (1164). A debtor, for example, can show his "Honest[y]" by registering his name with the court of enquiries and by surren-

dering his account books for scrutiny. Here, the *Essay*'s "Sorts" or classes might seem to "become instruments of individuation rather than their signs" (Ferguson 1162). Elsewhere in the *Essay*, however, the claim is that persons' essential equivalence allows them to function as the authentic signs of one another; the sociability thus imagined is not merely a productive fiction but serves persons' genuine connectedness. Even in the bankruptcy project, character preexists its rescue. The *Essay* overall seems committed to the proposition asserted late in the text that "the whole Difference in Mankind proceeds either from Accidental Difference in the Make of their Bodies, or from the *foolish Difference* of Education" (299). Equivalence here precedes and preempts the differences that can produce an experience of estrangement.

Difference thus emerges in the *Essay* as an ultimately contingent factor that is not central to identity. Taking the *Essay* as a representative project suggests that projects' significance may well rest on their commitment to an imaginative belief in the individual's likeness to others—a belief increasingly ruled out of bounds as anxieties about enthusiasm shape accounts of sociability that, by privileging strangeness, structure social life around difference and distinction. To the extent that it implicitly acknowledges the costs of premising social life on estrangement, the *Essay* is indeed representative of more sophisticated projecting texts. Defoe the projector seems ready to accept the possibility that the text will be received as enthusiastic. His *Essay* suggests that Restoration readers did not only need to learn how to cope with alienation or how to manage conflicts between private interests, but that they also turned to texts—projects—that could provide strategies for imagining a life amongst one's "Neighbours," persons not identical but equivalent to the not-so singular self.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Though associated during the Civil War era with radical sectarianism, by the 1690s, when Swift likely composed the *Tale*, "enthusiasm" was a general smear word as readily linked to Peter's Roman Catholic dogmatism. Catholicism was often characterized as an example of the "superstition" that was enthusiasm's complement, but it could be linked directly to enthusiasm as well. See Heyd 72-92.

<sup>2</sup>Rogers 35-6. The comments appear, respectively, in a pamphlet attributed by Rogers to John Clark, *A Paper concerning Daniel De Foe* (Edinburgh, 1708), and the pamphlet *Remarks on a Scandalous Libel, Entitl'd A Letter ... Relating to the Bill of Commerce* (London, 1713), sometimes attributed to John Oldmixon (Rogers 33).

<sup>3</sup>On Defoe and Bacon, see Vickers. On the effects of modern epistemology on religious understandings of the self, see Branch. On the role of desire in the early modern economy, see Poovey 157-61.

<sup>4</sup>Jon Mee argues that, as the eighteenth century developed, "enthusiasm had become available for making sense of any popular phenomenon, religious or otherwise, deemed threatening by the cultural hegemony of the Anglican Church and the broader culture of politeness in the eighteenth century" (27). Klein and La Vopa note that "[c]laims about reason, philosophy and Enlightenment were not used simply to define what constituted knowledge; they identified who could claim knowledge, who had cognitive authority, who could speak and write, and what kind of speech and writing were normative in the public world" (4).

<sup>5</sup>See for example Novak, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe*. John Richetti acknowledges "a key tension in Defoe's life and mind between an early form of secular modernity and quite strongly held orthodox Christian beliefs," though he argues that Defoe's secularism is "dominant" (8, 172). Carol Houlihan Flynn describes Defoe as "dreamer laureate of a capitalist system that he found too hard to manage" (79).

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of the shifting languages of public welfare in this period, see Slack 77-125.

<sup>7</sup>See for example Agnew.

<sup>8</sup>See McKeon xix-xxiii, 342-7.

<sup>9</sup>The most influential account is Habermas.

<sup>10</sup>See Mee 10-11.

<sup>11</sup>See also Acosta, who characterizes the Dissenting Academies as "an alternative public sphere able to allow for rational Dissent" (15).

<sup>12</sup>See McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel* 120, where he notes the presence "in writers of exceptional acuity" of "the autonomous aesthetic and the idea of realism," using Defoe as an example.

<sup>13</sup>See Kennedy, Seidel, and Novak, xxvii-xxix.

<sup>14</sup>See Albert 14-29.

<sup>15</sup>For a discussion of the forms of order and their relation to one another, see Foucault 50-8, 72-3. Foucault argues that modernity is defined by a preference for orders based on acts of differentiation, and that the residual desire for similitude can look "visionary" (47).

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