Spatial Practices of 18th-Century Domestic Travellers and the Idea of the Nation

1 Introduction

In The Handbook of New Media, Curry claims that there is an “interconnection between the technologies available for communication […] and the ways in which people have conceptualized space and place.”¹ It is the purpose of this paper to explore this ‘interconnection’ during the transport revolution in 18th-century Britain by comparing domestic ‘Tours’ composed in the first quarter of the century with ‘Tours’ written in the 1770s.

The typology of perception employed opposes vertical and horizontal space, notions developed by Yi-Fu Tuan. Vertical space positions a place in a hierarchy of authorities whereas horizontal space is structured by lines of communication.² Under the impact of an improved transport infrastructure, the traditional idea of vertical space was being challenged in 18th-century Britain by a mental image of the nation as a web of roads and waterways, a horizontal concept of the nation. The perception of space as either vertical or horizontal has implications for the concept of the nation and as writers of domestic tours had to make a decision on a vertical or horizontal representation of the land, they were involved in the contemporary construction of the British nation. Their task was made all the more difficult as the Act of Union of 1707 made it necessary to replace the notion of an English nation by a concept of Britishness.³

The task of redefining nationhood coincided with the mid-century transport revolution. Considering the road system only, conditions improved substantially after 1707, when turnpike trusts came into existence: they all built new and upgraded existing highways. Between 1725 and 1770, the number of turnpike miles rose from less than 2,000 to nearly 15,000,⁴ with the

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“greatest decadal mileage increase in the 1750s and 1760s.” The new and mostly well-maintained network of roads was also used by travellers who toured the country just out of curiosity. If these ‘tourists’ discussed, in their travelogues, the transport infrastructure they found, it was inevitable that they would challenge the dominant notion of a vertically structured society as they represented national space as a web of horizontal relations and connections. Mobility and the traditional concept of the nation are incompatible. “Once the spatial knowledge of the common traveller is embraced [...] then the nature of nationhood is significantly transformed.”

This type of travel writing developed against the background of the dominant view of the nation as a place of social order, with the monarch as God’s representative, the estates, and all its hierarchies. In the 18th century, then, a clash can be observed of the traditional – vertical – concept of the nation and the spatial practices of ‘tourists’ which resulted in a horizontal concept. The struggle between these two differing types of representing the nation gives 18th-century representations of mobility an important place in the development of the concept of the nation.

The discussion of these travelogues will examine the information they provide on (1) the road system as a horizontal organisation of national space, (2) churches and great houses as signifiers of authority for tracing any vertical ideas of Britain, (3) the scenic quality of landscapes, and (4) the travellers’ view of the nation.

2 Texts from the Beginning of the 18th Century

2.1 Type I: Vertical Space: John Macky

John Macky’s Journey Through England (1714) hardly ever gives any details of how the traveller toured the country. At best readers are given the number of hours it took the traveller to make his progress from one place to the next: “in four Hours I got to Rumney [...] and in three Hours more, through these Meadows, I arriv’d at Rye.” These travel times are useless if one is attempting to reconstruct a horizontally organised nation. Defoe will later criticise Macky’s traveller for his neglect to record his spatial practice:

5 See Pawson 115.
6 Andrew McRae, Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 68.
From York we did not jump at once over the whole Country, and, like a late Author, without taking notice of any Thing, come out again sixty or seventy Miles off, like an Apparition, without being seen by the way.\footnote{Daniel Defoe, 	extit{Writings on Travel, Discovery and History}, vols. I-III: 	extit{A Tour Thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain}, ed. John McVeagh (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001 [1724-26]), 3: 102.}

When, rarely enough, actual road conditions are considered to be worthy of notice it is not out of interest in the nation’s transport infrastructure, but with the convenience of the nobility in mind:

The Country round it [i.e. Petworth] being fat and fertile, makes the Roads bad in Winter; whereas the Downs […] are firm and solid all the Year round; and to which his Grace must have the Mortification to ride in the Dirt when he goes a hunting (Macky 107).

The idea that a bad road is an obstruction to the circulation of people and goods does not cross this traveller’s mind. Instead, he identifies with a member of the nobility by wishing him easier access to his pleasure. Royalty and the nobility form indeed the centre of the traveller’s interest and their houses function as signifiers of authority. Introducing his enthusiastic 30-page-long description of Windsor Castle he states its significance quite clearly:

\textit{Windsor} is the celebrated Habitation of the Kings of England since the Reign of Edward III, though indeed it has belonged to the Crown since the Norman Conquest […]. The Situation of this charming Castle seems design’d by Nature for Royal Majesty, being on the Top of a rising Ground, which with an august State overlooks all the adjacent Country (27-28).

Readers are even given help in the correct understanding of this passage: “\textit{Windsor} will give you a just Idea of the Grandeur of the English Nation” (58).

The traveller’s selection of sights is determined by his veneration of gentility and nobility, certainly not by any taste for scenery, and this motivation explains why he gives much space to the Colleges of Cambridge: they were all established by royalty and members of the nobility and thus reflect their noble founders’ authority, as, for instance, Clare Hall which “owes its Beauty to the Lady Elizabeth Burk, Countess of Clare” (155). This traveller’s discursive construction of the nation is indeed solidly vertical.

In accordance with his vertical view of the nation, the history of places and their rulers is more important than any activities of the present. Macky’s traveller even refuses to register the occupations of not a few persons of rank:

abroad it is generally believed, that the ancient Nobility of this Nation is lost in Trade […]; yet by the exact Examination I have made from the Records of this Order, it is plain, that very few Nations can shew a more uninterrupted Course of ancient Nobility (43-44).
Macky, a Scotsman, uses his *journey* to have England praised for cutting “the most conspicuous and shining Figure of any in the World” (i-ii) and a “glorious Country of Liberty” (viii). At the same time he claims: “Scotland is a Province by it self” (227). Obviously, the Union has not been accepted by the author. This attitude explains his publishing strategy: two volumes of the *Journey Through England* were followed, in 1723, by a one-volume *Journey Through Scotland*. This third *Journey* was marketed as a book “Which Compleats Great Britain,”9 but no attempt was made to produce a coherent domestic travelogue. The phrase “the whole Island of Great Britain” (i) appears in brackets only, a typographical practice in starkest contrast to Defoe’s decision to raise the *Whole Island of Great Britain* to the level of book title. Macky’s brackets certainly are a political statement: the idea of the Union should not be encouraged. In an unmistakeably regretful tone, readers are informed that Scotland, once proud of her “ancient independent State” (ii), “has subsisted by a successive Series of Kings for above Two Thousand Years, till by the Union it was incorporated and indented with England into One Dominion of Great Britain” (i-ii).

Macky’s travel books propagate the traditional view of the English nation: neither does the traveller of the various *Journeys* develop a horizontal notion of the country, nor has the Union affected his conviction that England and Scotland are different nations. Macky’s *Journeys* are examples of a systematic negation of all consequences mobility might have for the concept of nationhood.

2.2 Type II: Horizontal Space: Celia Fiennes, Daniel Defoe

Celia Fiennes’ notes of journeys undertaken from the 1680s onwards – written down mainly in 170210 – best reveal her view of the nation in a passage on Windsor Castle,

> which is all the Kings and Queens appartments, and lookes very noble, the walls round with the battlements and gilt balls and other adornments; here I ferry over the Thames and so went a nearer way which is a private road made for the kings coaches.11

The flippant comment: it “is all […] appartments” ignores the value of Windsor Castle as a monument signifying authority. Indeed, the traveller’s phrasing shows disrespect for authorities as is revealed by the pragmatic justifica-

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tion of what is presented as trespassing on the king’s “private road” – “so went a nearer way.” In Fiennes’ travel notes, traditional vertical English space no longer exists, and, accordingly, the past and its authorities seem immaterial:

Ipswitch has 12 Churches, their streets of a good size well pitch’d with small stones, a good Market Cross railed in, I was there on Satturday which is their market day and saw they sold their butter by the pinte, 20 ounces for 6 pence, and often for 5d. or 4d (132).

The church-building activities of the past, which were also about the construction of signifiers of power, pale into insignificance when compared with present activities: good roads and thriving agricultural businesses. If, occasionally, noble buildings are presented as seats of power, the traveller usually resorts to a few disparaging remarks on the house or its owner: Tutbury Castle “is the kings, a great fortification but all decay’d” (149). Commenting on a visit to Durham, the traveller’s first remarks are concerned with the interior of the Bishop’s Palace: “the furniture was not very fine, the best being taken down in the absence of my Lord Crew” (179). It is only after this observation that the traveller itemises the wealth and authority of the third Baron Crew, with the effect that this figure of power has been deflated before we are given an impression of his importance.

Lord Crew who is not only a Barron of England but is a great Prince as being Bishop of the whole Principallity off Durham and has a great royalty and authority, is as an absolute Prince and has a great command as well as revenue; his spiritual is 5 or 6000£ and his temporalls since his brothers death makes it much more (179).

Yet, as this powerful man was obviously not able to prevent the theft of his more valuable pieces of furniture he emerges as a slightly ridiculous figure. The traveller’s poor view of the effective authority of bishops is corroborated when entering York: “For one of the Metropolis and the See of the Archbishop it makes but a meane appearance” (90). Observation of the present state of things always invalidates traditional claims of authority.

Though no longer seats of authority, manor houses, castles and churches are still of interest to Fiennes’ traveller; but if they seem attractive, they appeal for aesthetic reasons. However, this traveller is never emotionally engaged in the enjoyment of aesthetically pleasing views; all she conveys in her “impressionist style”¹² are surfaces: Salisbury Cathedral, for instance, “is esteemed the finest in England” (36) not least because “the top of the Quoire is exactly painted and it lookes as fresh as if but new done though 300 yeares standing” (37).

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The traveller’s engagement with space produces an England which is characterised by roads of various qualities, but generally good enough to enable moderately fast journeys: “From Newtontony to Warminster, a good road town, and good way; thence to Breackly [Berkley] a deep clay way […]” (44). Even before turnpike building got under way Fiennes’ traveller constructs an English space which organises the interrelationships of places ‘horizontally’, “positing a nation endlessly amenable to the tourist’s curious investigation.”13 Traditional meanings are replaced by the new categories of ease of access, the activity of local markets, “good buildings, different produces and manufactures” (329), cleanliness etc.

As the list of these purely material values shows, Fiennes’ traveller produces a travelogue which shows that the shift from a vertical view of the nation to one focussed on a network of relations jeopardises a sense of the nation. Were it not for the existence of ‘abroad’ (32), mobility as a spatial practice would not, in her case, engender an idea of an English nation. In fact, the traveller’s very spatial practice makes it impossible to delineate a distinctive English space: always in a hurry, she is restricted to a most superficial perception of the country: “St. Johns Colledge had fine gardens and walkes but I did but just look into it, so I did into Kings, and Queens Colledges and severall of the rest I looked into; they are much alike in building” (57).

Indefatigably moving around, Fiennes’ traveller is even unable to do justice to regional characteristics: “Devonshire […] is much like Somersetshire – fruitfull Country’s for corn graseing, much for inclosures that makes the wayes very narrow” (41), and her vision of England is blurred at best: “the whole country [i.e. County Durham] looks like a fruitfull woody place and seemes to equal most countys in England” (178). No wonder, then, that this traveller’s style “continually repairs to a handful of all-purpose modifiers.”14 Superficial generalisations, however, cannot form a base for a definition of the qualities of the English nation. Mobility proves to be an obstacle to the creation of a sense of the nation.

This creation of a mobility-based sense of the nation was achieved by Daniel Defoe. The traveller of his *Tour through the Whole Island of Britain* (1724-26) even delivers a panegyric on the newly built turnpike roads: “they are very great Things, and very great Things are done by them.”15 A traveller thus ‘enthused’16 by the emerging turnpike-road system will no doubt represent the nation as a horizontally organised space. Consequently Defoe’s text

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13 McRae 201.
15 Defoe 2: 236.
no longer deals with the monuments of the past at any length. However, his declaration: “looking back into remote Things is studiously avoided” (1: 47) is justified by reminding the reader of the work of Camden and others who have provided historical information on Britain’s antiquities. Their achievements make it possible for the Tour to focus on the present state of Britain without necessarily distancing itself from the British past. Indeed, more than once, readers are asked to take on the responsibility for acquiring knowledge of the nation’s past while the traveller does his duty to inform them of its present condition:

The Cathedral of this City [i.e. Norwich] is a fine Fabrick […]; the Church has so many Antiquities in it, that our late great Scholar and Physician, Sir Tho. Brown, thought it worth his while to write a whole Book to collect the Monuments and Inscriptions in this Church, to which I refer the Reader.

The River Yare runs through this City, and is Navigable thus far without the help of any Art, (that is to say, without Locks or Stops) (1: 107).

Yet, the self-reflective traveller can change his approach – as in the case of his detailed depiction of Windsor Castle: “I must leave talking of Trade, River, Navigation, Meal, and Malt, and describe the most beautiful […] Castle, and Royal Palace, in the whole Isle of Britain.” (2: 51). The very building which provoked Fiennes’ traveller into a most flippant attitude is singled out for carrying the symbolic power of the monarch’s authority. A sense of the nation is created by referring to the old hierarchies – either directly as in this passage on Windsor Castle or, in a more mediated way, by praising the value of antiquarian research. Yet the signifying quality of seats of power is mentioned but rarely in this travelogue. A vertical sense of the nation is excluded even by the very title of his topographical survey which asserts that the book is A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain, not, as one would expect, “A Tour through the Whole ’Kingdom’ or ‘Realm’ of Britain.”

Defoe’s traveller approaches the task of creating a sense of the nation by using his observations on the present state of Britain as a basis for envisioning the nation’s splendid future. The literary strategies for creating a concept of the future nation range from apologetic remarks on the restricted reliability of the Tour as a guide to Britain to the development of visions of wealth. Apologies for giving out-of-date information to any readers taking up the Tour a couple of years after its publication are justified by the nation’s development into a better state: “no Description of Great Britain can be, what we call a finished Account, as no Cloaths can be made to fit a growing Child” (1: 49). The very obsolescence of the Tour establishes the nation’s attractive prospects.

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Interestingly enough, the Tour’s vision of the nation neglects the category of ‘born in Britain.’ As the example of some poor German families re-peopling the New Forest shows, everyone can contribute to the “Wealth and Strength of a Kingdom, provided those Inhabitants were such, as by honest Industry applied themselves to live by their Labour” (1: 233). For Defoe’s traveller, being engaged in the improvement of British soil defines the sense of the nation; descent and nationality are immaterial. What counts is the fact that the original investment in those immigrants, “the ready Money of 4000l. which the Government was to advance to those twenty Farmers” (1: 236), came from Britain’s government.

This non-genealogical argument of the Tour is also employed when the traveller faces the task of incorporating Scotland, the newly acquired “Province, or at best a Dominion” (3: 11), into the concept of a British nation. Again he adopts the strategy of “describing it, as it really is, and as in Time it may be” (3: 148). Improvement will be the characteristic feature of this part of Great Britain as well, and even if it will lag behind England in the foreseeable future it shares the dynamic nature of the nation: “they are where we were, I mean as to the Improvement of their Country and Commerce; and they may be where we are.” (3: 148). Defoe’s traveller is “committed to the idea that the Union was both right and necessary.” 18 In Defoe’s Tour mobility as a spatial practice and a belief in a British nation coexist on the basis of imagining the success of a shared effort to achieve a perfect life in the promised land on earth.

2.3 Vertical vs. Horizontal Space in Early 18th-Century Britain

The question of how to imagine the nation was still debated at the very beginning of the transport revolution.

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Macky’s perception of national space continues the vertical paradigm whereas Defoe’s traveller has to undertake continued conceptual work to develop a view of the nation based on his horizontal perception of the country: he imagines a future Great Britain by singling out from his travel experiences those elements from which he can build his vision.

Fiennes’ traveller takes mobility for granted but, not being prepared to do conceptual work, does not raise the issue of national space at all. While Macky and Defoe are involved in the ideological work of propagating a valid view of the nation, Fiennes’ traveller is just chattering away.

3 Texts from the 1770s

3.1 Type A: Dual Positioning: Thomas Gray

Approaching the second group of texts, separated from the first group by a half-century and 13,000 miles of turnpike-building, one finds an example of an unresolved tension between vertically and horizontally imagined space: Thomas Gray’s *Journal of his Visit to the Lake District in October 1769* (1775). On the one hand, the *Journal* can easily be used for a reconstruction of the region’s road network – “a turnpike is brought from Cockermouth to Ewsbridge 5 miles & is carrying on to Penrith”19 –, on the other hand, and reflecting the traditional view of the nation, it records the progress of the walker by “ticking off the names of landowners whose estates he was passing.”20 However, individual sensibility bridges all discrepancies arising from this lack of a clear definition of the nation’s space from the very beginning of the *Journal*:

went to see Ulz-water 5 miles distant. soon left the Keswick-road & turn’d to the left thro’ shady lanes along the Vale of Eeman, wch runs rapidly on near the way, ripling over the stones. to the right is Delmaine, a large fabric of pale red stone with 9 windows in front & 7 on the side built by Mr Hassel, behind it a fine lawn sur- rounded by woods & a long rocky eminence rising over them. a clear & brisk rivu- let runs by the house [...].

Farther on appears Hatton St John, a castle like old mansion of Mr Huddleston (33).

The information contained in this passage belongs to three different categories. First, there are items derived from a horizontal view of the nation: Gray’s traveller is specific about distances (“5 miles”) and directions (“Keswick-road,” turning left into “lanes along the Vale of Eeman”). Secondly, based on the vertical idea of the nation, Dalemain and Hutton John are mentioned as manifestations of the ownership and governance of the land the

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traveller traverses. In addition, Dalemain House is characterized, though not emphatically, as a symbol of authority (“a large fabric,” “fine lawn surrounded by woods”). Thirdly, the traveller reveals that he is aesthetically pleased with the landscape (“shady lanes,” “rippling over the stones,” “fine lawn,” “a clear & brisk rivulet”).

Gray’s traveller develops an alternative idea of the country by introducing an aesthetic dimension into the literary genre of domestic tours: “this is the sweetest scene I can yet discover in point of pastoral beauty, the rest are in a sublimer style” (59). This traveller’s spatial practice is “exploratory of the emotional, psychological and even spiritual stimuli” of landscapes. He is far from claiming that an idea of the nation can be derived from the aesthetic pleasure British spaces can provide, but the seeds for this argument are sown. He does not sum up his delighted literary recreations of pastoral English scenes with patriotic generalisations although he states that this part of England, containing not merely one “little unsuspected paradise” (88), enjoys the special grace of God: “saw from an eminence at two miles distance the Vale of Elysium in all its verdure, the sun then playing on the bosom of the lake, & lighting up all the mountains with its lustre” (39).

Yet this “entranced relationship to the scene” remains at the level of personal sensitivity. Overwhelmed by a “changing prospect at every ten paces” (45) the traveller, understandably, is not willing to reflect on the consequences his enjoyment of the scene might have on his view of the nation.

3.2 Type B: Horizontal Space: Thomas Pennant, Arthur Young and Samuel Johnson

The traveller in Thomas Pennant’s *Tour in Scotland, and Voyage to the Hebrides* (1772) takes the existence of a network of well laid-out highways and by-roads for granted; bad roads seem to be a thing of the past: “Cross the river on a bridge of five arches, ascend a hill, through lanes once deep, narrow, and of difficult approach.” Of all components of infrastructure, Britain’s canals are given his foremost attention: throughout the *Tour*, he observes – often in much detail – how new canals, regulated rivers and improved harbours facilitate the circulation of goods:

> from a neighboring warehouse much cheese is shipped off, brought down the river in boats from the rich grazing grounds, that extend as far as Nantwich. The river, by means of locks, is navigable for barges as high as Winslow bridge; but below this admits vessels of sixty tuns (7).

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22 Roberts 49.
This traveller certainly entertains a view of the nation as a horizontally organised space. In accordance with this perception of the nation, Pennant’s traveller does not attach any signifying quality to churches or the houses of the great. Buildings are summed up in one sentence which leads to some historical anecdote connected with the building in question:

pass by Norton, a good modern house, on the site of a priory of canons regular of St. Augustine, founded by William, son of Nigellius, A.D. 1135, who did not live to complete his design; for Eustace de Burgaville granted to Hugh de Catherik pasture for a hundred sheep, in case he finished the church in all respects conformable to the intent of the founder (8).

The Tour’s focus is on the present with its economic and infrastructural characteristics, and the past is dissolved in a series of anecdotes which never add up to a body of traditions from which an idea of the nation could be derived. Even the extended description of the Anglo-Saxon Ruthwell Cross is not summarized in a way which could establish some dignified past; any reader expecting some reflections on the respective roles of the Romans, the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons in the forging of the nation will be diverted by an amusing anecdote: “Scotland has had its vicar of Bray: for in this church-yard is an inscription in memory of Mr. Gawin Young […]” (98).

There are many ‘fine views’ in Pennant’s Tour, yet not one of them affects the traveller. Readers get but an inventory of landscape features. When he points out ‘beauty’ the term is used as a rhetorical device to enhance his approval of fertile land, wealthy towns and successful business: “Continue my journey due North through the beautiful Nithsdale, or vale of Nith, the river meandering […] along rich meadows; and the country, for some space, adorned with groves and gentlemen’s seats” (121).

The idea of the nation which emerges from Pennant’s Tour is a poorer version of Defoe’s notion of the beneficial effects of a flourishing production and circulation of goods. Poorer, as Pennant’s traveller not only dissolves the past’s identity-forming power in a series of entertaining anecdotes but also abstains from any visionary sketch of a Great Britain thoroughly ‘improved’. He lives one-dimensionally in the present.

Part of the traveller’s present is the Union, and he, true to his horizontal concept of Great Britain, is glad to be able to cross the once disputed border several times without any difficulties: “before the accession of James I. to these kingdoms, the borders of both were in perpetual feuds: after that happy event, those that lived by hostile excursions, […] were at length extirpated” (78). The task of incorporating Scotland into the nation is also solved by the structure of the Tour: although called A Tour in Scotland, and Voyage to the Hebrides, a considerable part of the book – more than 100 pages – centres on places in the North of England. By his slow approach to Scotland and the
easy crossing of the border, the traveller seems to suggest that the distinction between the two kingdoms has become immaterial.

The traveller of Arthur Young’s *Six Months’ Tour Through the North of England* (1770) constantly comments on England’s road infrastructure: “From Newport Pagnell I took the road to Bedford, if I may venture to call such a cursed string of hills and holes by the name of road” 24 Leaving Bedford for Northill, he is pleasantly surprised “to find after I left the turnpike, that the road continued a very fine causeway […] I could scarce believe myself upon a bye-road which induced me to enquire […]” (26). This emotional involvement with, and curiosity about, road conditions is typical of a horizontal perception of the country.

Any vertical positioning is avoided. At the beginning of his *Tour*, this traveller even thinks he “should apologize for introducing so many descriptions of houses, paintings, ornamented parks, lakes etc.” (vi). But what he calls ‘descriptions’ are in fact inventories which lack any potential for turning the nation’s great houses into signifiers of power. Houses are assessed for their value, and the *Tour*’s language on these occasions is straight from the estate agent’s book:

The Billiard Room, newly fitted up, 33 by 21, the chimney-piece of white marble polished, and a rounding of *Siena*; it is light and pretty.
The Chapel, not finished; 33 by 24 […].
The Bow-window-room, 45 by 33, painted by *Le Guere* […] (38).

This materialistic view of the great houses is not at all impaired by the traveller’s occasional aesthetic comments. His praise of “the beauties of hill and dale, wood and water” (8) is reserved for the parks of great houses, and his aesthetic appreciation is not founded on any emotional involvement with the qualities of the scenes. Rather, the wording of these landscape pieces reveals that well-designed parks are evaluated as assets of the house: the language uses a random selection of the terms used in contemporary landscape aesthetics, yet these “aesthetic observations take place within what he calls ‘the swelling canvas of active commerce.’” 25 The park at Luton Hoo, for instance, is indiscriminately praised for offering views which are “beautiful” and “picturesque,” “prettily diversified” and “noble,” “charming” and “magnificent,” “fine,” “elegant,” “pleasing” and generally having “a good effect” (8-9). This is, again, the language of estate agents who list vendible commodities, not of someone who has developed a personal relationship to the scene.

The view of the nation emerging from this materialistic approach is based on the financial value of houses and land and their “capability” (9) of being


improved. Like Defoe in his *Tour*, the agricultural reformer Young urges the nation’s landowners to improve their estates and farms in order to create a rich and powerful nation. But the comparison with Defoe’s *Tour* also shows that Young’s exclusively materialistic view of the nation is lamentably poor as its past does not contribute to his idea of nationhood. As the commodification of houses, works of art and scenes depends on mobility, and as commodification requires access to these objects, the traveller of Young’s *Tour* is firmly restricted to a horizontal idea of the nation.

In Samuel Johnson’s *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), the traveller regularly comments on road conditions in Scotland and, further north, he admires road-building techniques in more difficult territory:

> The road on which we travelled, and which was itself a source of entertainment, is made along the rock, in the direction of the lough, sometimes by breaking off protuberances, and sometimes by cutting the great mass of stone to a considerable depth.26

This marked interest in roads characterizes Johnson’s traveller as a representative of those who have adopted a horizontal view of the nation. Correspondingly, part of the archaic attraction of the Highlands is the lack of proper transportational infrastructure, and he is thrilled by the prospect of entering “a country upon which perhaps no wheel has ever rolled” (29).

In accordance with this attitude, he cannot find any signifying quality in churches and great houses in the majority of cases because all seats of power are now in ruins, at best “fragments of magnificence” (11) which can no longer convey the meaning of authority: St. Andrews “cathedral, of which the foundations may still be traced, and a small part of the wall is standing, appears to have been a spacious and majestick building, not unsuitable to the primacy of the kingdom” (5).

Yet the traveller also regrets the loss of buildings able to signify authority. Although he subscribes to the contemporary horizontal view of the nation he is aware of its sadder implications, one of them being its neglect of the traditional signs of authority: “It seems to be part of the despicable philosophy of the time to despise monuments of sacred magnificence” (24). Yet his own remarks on undamaged buildings are too short and too general to carry any meaning, and they are immediately followed by practical considerations:

> we saw the laird’s house, a neat modern fabrick, and found Mr. Macleod, the proprietor of the island […] expecting us on the beach. […]

Our reception exceeded our expectations. We found nothing but civility, elegance, and plenty (58-59).

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Here, the traveller’s criterion for the usefulness of great houses – providing personal comfort – reveals a decidedly materialistic mind which is not even impressed by the scenic qualities of the Highlands.

Initially, Johnson’s journey to Scotland was meant to be an exploration of “a newly discovered coast” (13) of archaic customs and an un-English style of life. Yet the traveller who likes to call himself an “Englishman” (25) is compelled to register a growing coherence of Britain. On closer inspection of things Scottish, he detects a convergence of Scottish and English attitudes which is due to the adoption of an English-style economy in Scotland: the Highlanders “are now acquainted with money, and the possibility of gain will by degrees make them industrious” (58). Consequently, the Highlanders will soon be absorbed into a larger commercial Britain with her trade and the necessary circulation of goods. Notwithstanding the economic ‘improvement’ connected with this development, the traveller reveals himself as a sceptic: will the Highlanders not lose in terms of happiness what they gain in wealth?

His regret at seeing the old patriarchal relationships being replaced by economic interdependencies is tempered, though, by “satisfaction with contemporary English civilisation,”27 which in turn is based on the exchange of ideas and the circulation of books and journals – on mobility – even if this civilization will bring about the extinction of the culture of the Highlanders who “are now losing their distinction, and hastening to mingle with the general community” (47). In Johnson’s Journey, a “significant tension”28 between a nostalgic admiration for the archaic spirit of the Scottish people and a belief in Scotland’s progress towards civilisation prevents the development of a clearly visible idea of the British nation. The traveller’s frame of mind is securely anchored in a horizontal view of the nation, although his Journey “recognizes the questionable morality of extending one general system of values so that it overpowers another”29: “I saw with grief the chief of a very ancient clan, whose island was condemned by law to be sold for the satisfaction of his creditors” (85). A high price, the abolition of Scottish culture, will have to be paid for the inevitable British nationhood.

3.3 Type C: The Challenge: Horizontal and Aestheticized Space: Mary Ann Hanway and William Gilpin

The traveller of Mary Ann Hanway’s *Journey* (1776) is used to the British network of reliable roads: “Nothing need be said of the road between England and this place [i.e. Edinburgh], it being so universally known […].”30 Travel conditions are unvaryingly presented as good; and if a hierarchy of roads is established it is according to aesthetic rather than practical principles: an “agreeable” (107) road must at least offer scenic views, if not “a pleasing gloominess” (52).

No evidence of a vertical view of the country can be found in the *Journey*. The noblest of houses are dismissed with a few words, too laconic to produce descriptions which could establish the houses’ signifying power. When, on one occasion, a castle could signify the authority of its owner, the traveller hastens to put the stamp of unreliability on this piece of information: “the seat of a prince of Orkney, who an old woman, – the Cicerone of the place – assured us, was the second man in the kingdom […]; this was all the information she could give us, and, therefore, all I can give you.” (69-70). For this traveller, mobility has completely erased any vestiges of the vertical view of the nation.

Scenic views are much appreciated by Hanway’s traveller, but she seems to look for a justification of this way of satisfying her curiosity. High principles seem at stake here, as she opposes the traditional view that God had initially created the world as a perfectly even globe and that mountains and other irregularities had come into existence as a consequence of the Fall:

> if the face of the earth was naturally uniform; if destitute of that diversity, which it derives from the hill and valley, the barren heath, and the blooming garden, there would [not] be any motive to excite the curiosity of the traveller […]. (63-64).

With Hanway’s traveller, the perception of the country as space which can easily be traversed facilitates an emotional engagement with a country’s topographical features: she is constantly involved in an intensely felt personal appreciation of the moods which can be obtained from exposing oneself emotionally to certain landscape features as “those occasional glooms which seemed to breathe the spirit of melancholy, from the surrounding barrenness” (ix). A series of waterfalls provokes the confession: “There is something exquisite to me, even in the *cadence* of a cascade: as I listened to it in this captivating spot, I really felt my imagination expand” (54). In this frame of mind, a tour of Scotland can be split up into a succession of “romantic walks” (32), roads of “pleasing gloominess” (52), “ruins [which] fill me with melancholy

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reflections” (97), “beautiful views” (62), places one is “extravagantly fond” (34) of and, now and then, a “sublime prospect of the sea” (143).

Hanway’s journey projects an idea of an aesthetically satisfying nation which definitely includes Scotland. The traveller talks down any dissimilarity between England and Scotland and emphasises the uniformity of the two countries. Findhorn, for instance, “is not inferior to the most cultivated village in England” (118), and, as for the Scots, they all excel, if from a higher social class, in “hospitality and politeness” (78). Two generations after the Union, the traveller meets everywhere with a remarkable “civility of the people” (72).

Due to improved conditions of mobility, Hanway’s traveller projects a horizontal idea of British nationhood based mainly on landscapes which address the emotions of the traveller. In this respect, “Hanway’s traveller reflects a change in England’s perception of Scotland” 31: Scottish scenery adds new value to the qualities of Great Britain.

William Gilpin’s Observations on the River Wye (1782) are made by a traveller who takes networks of roads and navigable waterways for granted: “From Monmouth to Abergavanny, by Ragland-castle, the road is a good stone causeway; (as the roads, in these parts, commonly are).” 32 Roads and rivers are assessed in terms of the scenic pleasure they provide: thus, all roads are “disagreeable” which fail to afford visual entertainment: “Nothing appears, but downs on each side” (5). Gilpin’s traveller measures the profit provided by the nation’s communication arteries in aesthetic terms exclusively. Even industrial activities are praised only if they contribute to a good view: “Many of the furnaces, on the banks of the river, consume charcoal […] which is frequently seen issuing from the sides of the hills; and spreading its thin veil over a part of them, beautifully breaks their lines ” (12). Similarly, commercial traffic does not indicate flourishing trade activities generating wealth, but the traveller registers traffic as an element contributing to picturesque effects: “we were often entertained with light vessels gliding past us. Their white sails passing along the sides of the hills were very picturesque” (30).

As expected in a traveller rooted in a horizontal notion of the country, great houses and churches do not signify authority. In fact, the traveller relies on a literary strategy of mocking the appeal old and venerable buildings might possess: “The transmutations of time are often ludicrous. Monmouth-

castle was formerly the palace of a king; and birth-place of a mighty prince: it is now converted into a yard for fatting ducks” (27). Buildings generally are at best ruinous “ornaments” (14) of the landscape, at worst they spoil what could be a good view. This traveller’s mobility allows no vertical concepts of the nation’s space.

Gilpin’s Observations do not transform ekphrastically visual impressions into descriptive prose passages: rather, this travelogue examines the landscapes of Britain – Observations on the Highlands were published in 1789 – “by the rules of picturesque beauty” (1-2). Picturesque qualities, however, are often the result of mental improvements on what can actually be seen. Speaking of the picturesque, the traveller admits: “The imagination formed it, after the vision vanished.” (52). As often as not Gilpin’s traveller writes about the results of his imaginary improvements on the scenes he often saw indistinctly enough, just as he writes about his observations. Beyond the registering of impressions, the Observations search for aesthetic improvements which could perfect British scenes according to the aesthetic standards of the picturesque.

3.4 Horizontal British Space in the 1770s – Aestheticized

Of all the travellers of the domestic travelogues of the 1770s, only Thomas Pennant’s narrator manages to replace the traditional vertical view of the nation’s space by a horizontal view without difficulties. All other travellers emphasise one aspect of the loss of a familiar descriptive pattern. The traveler in Arthur Young’s Tour resorts to a provocatively materialistic approach by presenting land, buildings and works of art as commodities: Young’s traveller constructs a one-dimensional Britain which excludes both the nation’s past and its potential. This ‘secularising’ effect of a horizontal view of the nation explains the nostalgic attitude in Johnson’s Journey with its traveller who cannot but regret the loss of all non-material values under the impact of a society based on financial values. One can sympathise indeed with the narrator of Thomas Gray’s Journal when he is more than reluctant to part with the idea of a vertically organised British space: sensing the demise of the traditional concept, he experiments with the introduction of a new set of values into the task of defining the nation and develops a taste of the aesthetic qualities of the country.

The definition of nationhood remains a subject for debate in the 1770s. Young’s emphatic materialism tries to fill the same gap as Gray’s aesthetic way of perceiving the country. Yet Gray’s innovation does not make the definition of nationhood any easier as it opens up a new dichotomy by “establishing the […] division between aesthetic perception and productive utili-
ty.”33 In the 1770s, the choice is between a purely economic and an aesthetic view of Britain.

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Mary Ann Hanway, who cultivates a taste for scenic tours, is at pains to justify her non-commercial notion of Britain. In an ill-thought-out attempt to play down the dichotomy between economic and aesthetic definitions of the nation, her traveller even attacks a popular religious idea, the doctrine of a “naturally uniform”34 earth, and claims that “diversity, which it [i.e. the earth] derives from the hill and valley” (63) is also an “incentive for one country to connect itself commercially with another” (64). Only William Gilpin defines the nation unapologetically in purely aesthetic terms. Yet, in order to avoid the impression of being a socially useless enthusiast for picturesque scenes, he has his traveller resort to the literary strategy employed in Defoe’s *Tour*: he sketches a view of a future Britain as imagined on the evidence of present-day impressions.

34 Hanway 38.
4 Summary

By the 1770s, Britain’s improved transport infrastructure had indeed, as Curry stated, changed “the ways people have conceptualized space.” The transport revolution of the 18th century with its increased mobility is one of the engines of the shift from the traditional definitions of Britain to a fairly modern concept of the nation.

Just as Defoe developed, from his inspection of Britain, a vision of a commercially flourishing, Eden-like nation, so Gilpin proposes a constant process of aesthetic improvement at the end of which a perfectly ‘picturesque’ Britain might be found. For Gilpin as for Defoe, the view of the nation is derived from its potential rather than its reality. Both commercial and aesthetic improvement depend on human activity. Yet the traditional vertical view of the nation’s space was a concept marked by “transcendence”: the nation as a place of social order, with the monarch as God’s representative. With Defoe and Gilpin focussing on improvement, one could argue that the transport revolution is also an engine for creating further confidence in the beneficial effects of human activity.

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35 Curry 502.
36 Tuan 129.
Works Cited


Hickey, Alison. “‘Extensive Views’ in Johnson’s *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland.*” *SEL* 32 (1992): 537-553.


