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**“THIS VICISSITUDE OF MOTION AND REST,
WHICH WE CALL LIFE”**

THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE IN *THE SPECTATOR*

RUDOLF FREIBURG

Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

Socio-Historical Changes in the Wake of the Glorious Revolution

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 had caused intense change in both history and society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [MÜLLENBROCK 1984 : 1-30]. Displaying a new spirit of compromise, the constitution had been transformed from a rather absolutistic form of government under James II, who had shown extraordinary sympathy to Catholics, to a hybrid formation usually referred to as a ‘mixed monarchy’ under William III, who clearly favoured Protestantism. The “Act of Tolerance” (1689), the “Bill of Rights” (1689) and the “Act of Settlement” (1701) had changed political life in England forever. The emerging political forces, led by the Whigs and the Tories, polarised public political discourse about the Spanish War of Succession, the “Conduct of the Allies” or the pros and cons of the “Stamp Act” [BOND 1965 : 445; 4- 63], generating a climate of political bickering that produced a veritable culture of contention [MÜLLENBROCK 1997]. The developing industrialisation, the effects of the emerging British imperialism, and last but not least, the breathtaking progress prompted by technology and empirical science, also changed everyday life in England dramatically. In London, the numerous coffeehouses became urban emblems of a new permissiveness that clearly demonstrated how intensely society had changed;¹ they represented a new, semi-democratic political culture of the exchange of opinions, but also an open-minded forum where innovative ideas in religion, philosophy, art, and criticism could freely be discussed. The literary market, in particular, profited from the many changes generated

¹ See also BLACK 21: “I explain the *Spectator* as written at the convergence of three early-modern phenomena: a new use of print technology, a new literary form, and a new social space”.

by the historical and social reforms; the emerging “public sphere” favoured the production of new genres, new markets, and new conditions of publications.²

The Spectator (1711-1712/1714), launched by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, is a veritable literary icon of the philosophy of change which characterised the early decades of the eighteenth century. “Addison and Steele positioned their *Spectator* to critically engage the forces and discourses of change and mediate their impact on English lives and society” [NEWMAN 11]. The *Spectator* is both a product and a producer of change. Following the time-honoured principle *varietas delectat*, Addison and Steele present various genres, which range from letters, visions, allegories, oriental tales—anticipating the aesthetics of the short story—to lucubrations and especially the essay. Then, again, the *Spectator* is the indefatigable agent of change, since the authors follow the Montaignean aesthetics of a serene, detached moralism that aims at reformation without coercing it [RAU 78-93]. As this essay will show, the philosophy of change cherished by the authors of the *Spectator* is dialectic in its core.

Negative Change

The popular eighteenth-century view of human nature supposed “to be the same everywhere”,³ regardless of time and place, was about to be reformed by the publishers of the *Spectator*. The “formation” of the eighteenth-century “self” had long since been deeply influenced by John Locke’s doctrine of associations and his concept of an ever varying train of thought [LOCKE 206-220], which made it necessary to redefine any simple notions of human

² The idea of the public sphere as HABERMAS described it [122-133] has recently been criticised severely; see, for instance, COWAN [345-366], who argues that Addison’s and Steele’s “*Spectator* project” sought to “close off and restrain, rather than to open up, venues for public debate” [346]; their principle goal was “not to prepare the ground for an age of democratic revolutions—it was to make the cultural politics of Augustan Britain safe for a Whig oligarchy” [361]. ELLIS [27-52] emphasises the association of the ‘coffeehouse’ with the ‘brothel’ [36] and criticises that “Habermas relied on a restricted range of generalist secondary texts on the English coffee-house” [44]. Furthermore, Habermas is said to have idealised the coffeehouse as an ideal place of the public sphere, disregarding its sheer “corrupt materiality”; see MACKIE 2005 : 81-104.

³ Nobody represented this idea more intensely than Samuel Johnson who was of the opinion that one could study human nature even if he remained in London; if one travelled one would find the same results everywhere; see also WILTSHIRE 209.

identity and prepare the way for a deeper psychological understanding of man suggesting a new concept of anthropology. Featuring as the taciturn, detached Mr Spectator, Addison leaves no doubt that for him, men are “the most changeable Beings in the Universe” [BOND 1965 : 162; I, 136], and the eidolon himself is no exception,⁴ since he presents himself as a real Proteus, as “a Speculative Statesman Soldier, Merchant and Artizan”, “a Husband” and “a Father” and “a Jew” [BOND 1965 : 1; I, 4]. At the same time, Mr Spectator claims authority and must be seen as a personification of the *vox populi*.⁵ The primary intention of the periodical essayists is to warn against changes which endanger the common welfare of the new bourgeois society,⁶ or in Samuel Johnson’s words, it is “to regulate the practice of daily conversation, to correct those depravities which are rather ridiculous than criminal, and remove those grievances which, if they produce no lasting calamities, impress hourly vexation [...]” [1-327-368]. And in a jocular, rather condescending, or, to put it more succinctly, “patronising” way, which—with its subtle misogynistic undertone—⁷ irritates not only the representatives of the school of French Feminism, the writers focus on women as the absolute incarnation of the idea of change whom they hold responsible for many of the “hourly vexations”.

“Taste” and “politeness” are key concepts of the *Spectator*.⁸ In innumerable letters and essays, the *Spectator* attacks female follies with mild Horatian satire, never too severe, since the publishers know that their paper’s audience is made up of a majority of women. Their “fair sexing” intends to

⁴ See also BOND 1965 [556; IV, 498-500], where Mr Spectator gives up his taciturnity.

⁵ See POLLY 106: “While they are not political Hobbesians, Addison and Steele do imagine Mr. Spectator as possessing a contractual sovereignty in his own body—a body which is the sum of hundreds of epistolary petitions and arguments directed to him. He is a kind of Leviathan of letters.”

⁶ See also NEWMAN 17: “Middle-class readers, increasingly conscious of their marginalization and the messages of inferiority this marginalization conveyed, were eager to efface the class markers—their lack of education, social and formal; their lack of polish; their ignorance of the fine arts—that identified them to the genteel as the *other*.”

⁷ See MERRITT 45 ff.; see also EADIE [21-41], who in her comparison of Addison and Steele, Eliza Heywood and Samuel Johnson blames Addison and Steele for “limiting their focus to a narrow segment of a woman’s life” and for leaving “many possible questions unanswered” [22].

⁸ See MORÈRE [301-323], who analyses the mixture of common sense, wit, imagination and sentiment typical of the *Spectator*’s style. For the complex relationship between “taste” and “commodification” see DYKSTAL 46-63. See also MACKIE 1997 [209]: “Taste is the coin of the cultural realm”.

change women's lives by education and by appealing to both their common sense and their reason.⁹ The proverbial Shakespearean "fickle woman" has invaded the pages of the *Spectator*; she is virtually omnipresent, and it is especially the painted woman [LÖFFLER 239-53], known as "Pict" [BOND 1965 : 41] whom the essayists compromise as a creature of mutability.¹⁰ Love-struck, but disappointed "Samuel Hopewell", for instance, laments his sad experience with a pretty lady who kept him waiting "above Thirty Years" until "she is grown Grey as a Cat" [BOND 1965 : 89; I, 377-378]. In the *Spectator*, women are characterised as 'beautiful animals' of whim and sudden changes:

There is not so variable a thing in Nature as a Lady's Headdress: Within my own Memory I have known it rise and fall above thirty Degrees. About ten Years ago it shot up to a very great Height, insomuch that the Female Part of our Species were much taller than the Men. The Women were of such an enormous Stature, that *we appeared as Grass-hoppers before them*: At present the whole Sex is in a Manner dwarfed and shrunk into a Race of Beauties that seems almost another Species. [98; I, 413]

Women are the incarnation of enigmatic 'otherness' and creatures of change equipped with an inbuilt mechanism which allows them to react spontaneously to any changes in their surroundings. In *Spectator* No 281, the eidolon witnesses the dissection of a "Coquet's Heart", an experiment which seems to be rather difficult, because the heart of a coquet can hardly be found. The whims and changes of mind have obviously turned the lady into a kind of "human barometer" capable of registering subtle changes around her:¹¹

The *Pericardium*, or Case of the Heart, contains in it a thin reddish Liquor [...]. Upon examining this Liquor, we found that it had in it all the Qualities of that Spirit which is made use of in the Thermometer, to shew the Change of Weather.

[The anatomist] affirmed to us, that he had actually enclosed [the liquor] in a small Tube made after the manner of a Weather-Glass; but

⁹ The term was coined by Jonathan Swift; see SWIFT II, 482: "I will not meddle with the Spectator, let him fair-sex it to the world's end".

¹⁰ See MERRITT 53: "[...] the Pict's use of cosmetics is also under attack because her self-constructions denote the possibility of mutability and, hence, inauthenticity".

¹¹ The *Spectator* varies an idea first mentioned in *Tatler* 214, where the essayists describe a "Political Barometer" or a "State Weather-Glass" which helps to predict the political future; see BOND 1987 [214; III, 124-127; 126].

that instead of acquainting him with the Variations of the atmosphere, it showed him the Qualities of those Persons who entered the Room [...]; it rose at the Approach of a Plume of Feathers, an embroidered Coat, or a Pair of fringed Gloves; and [...] fell as soon as an ill-shaped Perriwig, a clumsy pair of Shoes, or an unfashionable Coat came into his House [...]. [281; II, 595].

The mildly misogynic attacks on female follies, tinged, however, by clearly perceptible connotations of misogyny,¹² exemplify the essayist's major role, that of *arbiter elegantiarum*.¹³ The behaviour of young coquettes, proud beaux, dirty old men, conceited *virtuosi*, and unscrupulous fortune hunters is an easy target for the essayists' mild and persuasive satire. The gallery of human characters proves to be rich and fascinating. And just like the English character writers Thomas Overbury and John Earle before them [BORINSKI 48-77], they focus on the deficiencies in human nature. In this respect their philosophy of change is a typical product of eighteenth-century Augustanism, with its conservative system of Biblical values and its idealisation of ancient culture.¹⁴ Their philosophy of change is deeply influenced by the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*¹⁵ and its paradigm of linear decay; it is a refutation of negative change interpreted as decay in morals, in language, in behaviour, in literature, and in culture. By inscribing clear, if subtle, ideologies into their paper the authors contribute to what cultural materialists would define as "cultural work",¹⁶ building and cultivating a system of common beliefs and values that every thinking being should accept.¹⁷ The set of rules, incessantly brought home by the *Spectator's* essays, resembles a catalogue of bourgeois values and comprises, among others, virtue, honesty, chastity, and politeness. The ethical aspect in this philosophy of change is one that anticipates Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. It is founded on the staunch belief that man, as a *zoon politikon*, has to follow rules if he does not want to endanger the function of the whole

¹² For the *Spectator's* treatment of women see EINHOF 68-83.

¹³ JOHNSON 334. See also MACKIE, who prefers to refer to this function more cynically, when she calls Addison and Steele "self-styled cultural watchdogs." [1997 : 22]

¹⁴ See also KLEIN, who recognises a "quasi-scriptural character in Addison's writings" [2012 : 101].

¹⁵ The best study of this discourse is LEVINE.

¹⁶ See also BOWERS, who interprets the buying of the *Spectator* as a kind of "sociopolitical investment" [171] which helps the individual to reach the goal of "self-advancement" [151].

¹⁷ KLEIN's analysis of the reception of Addison's writings by his contemporaries demonstrates that "Addison had become a monument in eighteenth-century culture" [101].

social system. The *Spectator's* conservative philosophy of change, deeply influenced by Biblical values, Shaftesburian philosophy and Lockean psychology,¹⁸ resembles the plea for compromise. The philosophy of change in the *Spectator* is based on the principle of an ultimate stasis which can only be found in a transcendent world,¹⁹ with the Supreme Being, God, as a personification of invariance. The essayists' achievement lies in the perception of slight changes; like literary seismographs they register not only the earthquakes but also the almost imperceptible little perturbations in society, because they believe that these will create disorder and cause catastrophes if not censured in time. That is why Addison is primarily interested in the various deficiencies in language and literature. Addison does not tire of criticising the many phenomena of false wit [BOND 1965 : 58] and he launches abuse on modern tragedies turned into phantastic farces by exaggerating pathos [39, 42]. The *Spectator* advocates a purified language, since breaking the rules, however slightly, produces changes in society that will prove to be damaging to everyone. The moral decay starts when a young man inclined to follow the allegedly harmless mania for bawdy language develops into the ruthless figure of a cynical rake fond of fornication and flirting with ideas of atheism only to end up in the Club of the Mohocks, set on tormenting, raping and killing [324, 332, 347]. Language is interpreted as a residuum of values and ideologies, as a subtle force which influences thinking. Speaking and writing, in Addison's view, are not merely modes of expression, but rather they contribute to forming the mind by instilling ideas and philosophies that help to shape culture. Criticism of language and literature thus serves a much higher purpose,²⁰ it follows a strict program of "self-fashioning" and endeavours to produce a new cultural self-image [Greenblatt], which severely castigates all deviations. English language and culture must be defended against the impending changes brought about by foreign influences. With the loss of a uniform concept of religion on the one hand, and a consolidated notion of reliable absolutistic monarchy on the other, a vacuum of axiological certainty had come into being. The former allegedly safe space of self-assuredness, nourished by staunch beliefs in Britishness, kingship and divinity, had been shattered by so many ideological earthquakes, that it became necessary to

¹⁸ For a detailed influence of Shaftesbury on the *Spectator*, see BOWERS 153-161.

¹⁹ For Addison's and Steele's notion of 'life' in the world beyond the grave see JOST; The *Spectator* tried to prepare its readers for eternity by daily repetitions of moral lessons.

²⁰ See TROLANDER & TENGER 189: "Mr. Spectator appears to reject the cliquish nature of interpersonal criticism. He does not express the views of a single class, rank, or gender. Rather, he is a 'Spectator of Mankind' [...]"

reanimate the spirit of nationality. This is the reason why Addison stigmatises everything 'un-English', and why he wants to protect the English language from the modish verbal accessories imported from France. By the essayistic, joco-serious, but mildly xenophobic, presentation of the achievements of the Italian opera, for example, Addison makes it crystal clear that the absurdities presented on the stage are not only amusing minor errors produced by accident, but also severe attacks on the strongholds of reason and the British school of Enlightenment philosophy. In Addison's and Steele's view, a mind full with the follies of ridiculous contemporary fashion,²¹ or benumbed by the narcotic impressions of the Italian opera cannot be an enlightened mind any more. If Persius's maxim *Veteres avias tibi de pulmone revello*, quoted in *Spectator* No 12,²² is taken seriously, there is no room for false wit, absurd notions, or preposterous conceits. A latent fear concerning the imminent infiltration of English culture by the viruses of Italian light-heartedness and insincerity reveals itself when the *Spectator* laments the triumph of the Italian Opera on the English stage. The opera is presented in a language that the audience cannot understand, and—if translated into English at all—the public witnesses “the most refined Persons of the *British Nation* dying away and languishing to Notes that were filled with a Spirit of Rage and Indignation” [18; I, 80]. Addison pokes fun at “acting lions” singing in High Dutch [13; I, 57] and “painted Dragons spitting Wild-Fire” [5; I, 23-4]:

The Queens and Heroines are so Painted, that they appear as Ruddy and Cherry-cheek'd as Milk-maids. The Shepherds are all Embroider'd, and acquit themselves in a Ball better than our *English* Dancing-Masters. I have seen a couple of Rivers appear in red Stockings; and *Alpheus*, instead of having his Head cover'd with Sedge and Bull-Rushes, making Love in a fair full-bottom'd Perriwig, and a Plume of Feathers, but with a Voice so full of Shakes and Quavers that I should have thought the Murmurs of a Country Brook the much more agreeable Musick [29; I, 123].

Positive Change

The *Spectator's* culture of criticism may give the impression that the periodical essayists feel completely averse to any change at all, but this is not the case. The dialectic nature of their philosophy of change is clearly proved by the many recommendations for reforms, transformations,

²¹ The best analysis of fashion in the *Spectator* is to be found in MACKIE [1997].

²² “I pluck the old wives' notions from your breast” [BOND 1965 : 12; I, 52].

transfigurations and metamorphoses which are scattered through its pages. The spirit of reform permeates each and every lesson of politeness; the writers believe that a young coquette can be turned into a responsible wife, that a shallow beau may ripen into a scholar, and that even the most abominable Mohock can be transfigured into a man of virtue by the magic wand: the Spectator's pen.²³ The *Spectator* reflects the philosophy of change typical of a time characterised by incessant political and social modifications, for which London itself serves as an emblem. As Mr Spectator himself remarks, London never remains the same, the scenes shift constantly,²⁴ and he cannot walk around without being inspired endlessly by the many impressions provided by the urbane surroundings. Rambling through the streets, Mr Spectator—like Virginia Woolf's protagonist two centuries later—perceives “a myriad of impressions”, his mind receiving an “incessant shower of innumerable atoms” [WOOLF 160]. As an anachronistic eighteenth-century *flâneur*,²⁵ the rambling observer of mankind loves the changing scenes of town life, the street signs [BOND 1965 : 376], and the many voices of London [251]. By transforming urban adventures into polished narratives, Mr Spectator anticipates the aesthetics of Virginia Woolf's and James Joyce's epiphanies. He is fascinated by London and when, as he says, “I am following one Character, it is ten to one but I am crossed in my Way by another, and put up such a Variety of odd Creatures in both Sexes, that they foil the Scent of one another, and puzzle the Chace”.²⁶ The paradox of a kind of “Augustan modernism” offers itself as a descriptive formula, the urban adventures are reminiscent of the modernist subjects' experience of town life as a vast panorama consisting of puzzle pieces and fragments rearranged incessantly. The town appears to be a buzzing and pulsating metropolis; like Heraclitus's famous river it cannot be entered twice in the same way [CHENG 339], but keeps on moving, proves to be a shape-shifter and the emblem of incessant transmutation:

²³ See BOND 1965, 127 and 526. This optimism was shared by several novelists of the age; see, for instance, the figure of the conversed rake John Belford in Richardson's monumental novel *Clarissa* (1748). The best illustration of the philosophy of change is the beautiful story of “Troponius's Cave” (see BOND 1965 : 599) and of the experience of a “drop of water” in BOND 1965 : 293; III, 46.

²⁴ In this respect, the microcosm of the coffeehouse, as it is described in BOND 1965 [49], resembles the macrocosm of London.

²⁵ See also Pierre de Marivaux's *Spectateur français* (1721-1724). He imitated his English model in this respect and introduced his eidolon as a kind of “Baudelairean *flâneur*” [FRANCE 101].

²⁶ BOND 1965 : 131; II, 19; see also BLACK 33.

The Hours of the Day and Night are taken up in the Cities of *London* and *Westminster* by People as different from each other as those who are born in different Centuries. Men of Six a Clock give Way to those of Nine, they of Nine to the Generation of Twelve, and they of Twelve disappear, and make Room for the fashionable World, who have made Two a Clock the Noon of the Day. [BOND 1965 : 454; IV, 99]

And if London is the epitome of urban transmutation, the Royal Exchange is the beating heart of this epitome, the centre of the centre of change. In *Spectator* No 69 [KNIGHT 167-169], an encomium on the achievements of the Royal Exchange, Mr Spectator confesses that his heart overflows with pleasure when he admires the wonders of this “*Emporium* for the whole Earth” [BOND 1965 : 69; I, 294; 293]. Plenitude, imperialistic self-confidence, deep satisfaction and gratitude, a serene national pride without jingoism, and sheer pleasure are associated with the Royal Exchange. A mental climate of early eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism, which anticipates a quasi-Arnoldian philosophy of intercultural axiology, fills the Spectator’s mind whenever he enters the buildings. The Royal Exchange is the meeting point of all nations: the Spectator is pleased to see representatives from all over the world: “Inhabitants of *Japan*” meet and talk with an “Alderman of *London*”, “Subjects of the *Great Mogul*” discuss with those of the “*Czar of Muscovy*”; the motley assembly of Armenians, Dutch, Danes, Swedes, Frenchmen and Jews,²⁷ makes him feel like a genuine “Citizen of the World” [69; I, 294]. The traders are redefined as the new ambassadors of the earth who take over genuine political tasks. Mr Spectator celebrates the “mutual Intercourse and Traffick among Mankind” [69; I, 294], the transformation of poor people and barren regions into prosperous countries and flourishing landscapes. The commercial philosophy of change is a kind of magic metamorphosis, featuring John Bull as a kind of happy King Midas, but—here Addison deviates from the mythological tale—the metamorphosis does not paralyse but enliven the nation:

The Food often grows in one Country, and the Sauce in another. The Fruits of *Portugal* are corrected by the Products of *Barbadoes*: The Infusion of a *China* Plant sweetned with the Pith of an *Indian* Cane: The *Philippick* Islands give a Flavour to our *European* Bowls. The single Dress of a Woman of Quality is often the Product of an hundred Climates. The Muff and the Fan come together from the different Ends of the Earth. The Scarf is sent from the Torrid Zone, and the Tippet from beneath the Pole. The Brocade Petticoat

²⁷ For Addison’s view of the Jews between scepticism and admiration, see BRAVERMANN.

rises out of the Mines of *Peru*, and the Diamond Necklace out of the Bowels of *Indostan*. [69; I, 294-295]

Although the *Spectator* is eager not to betray its political position too clearly, it is evident that the encomium on the Royal Exchange is deeply inspired by an implicit intention to defend Whiggism; as staunch supporters of the Whigs,²⁸ Addison and Steele associated Whiggish politics with progress. The affirmative philosophy of change in the *Spectator* can be interpreted as a very favourable connection between “morality and economics” [KNIGHT 164]; “mercantilism” is justified “on the grounds of benevolence” [172]. This philosophy reveals great optimism towards the world and its possibilities. At the same time, it is clearly aware of the many dangers inherent in changes, accidents, and permutations. In a clever prophecy of the events of the South Sea Bubble of 1720, the *Spectator* presents an interesting allegory of the commercial world,²⁹ which—in its financial microcosm—reacts to the changes in the real world. This parable of change tells the story of a virgin, who—as the incarnation of “Publick Credit” and the embodiment of “quick Turns and Changes” [BOND 1965 : 3; I, 16]—is prone to hysteria and “changes Colour, and startled at every Thing she heard”. She is extremely nervous and can be imagined as a female Proteus, because “in the Twinkling of an Eye, she would fall away from the most florid Complexion, and the most healthful State of Body, and wither into a Skeleton” [3; I, 15]. But true to the optimistic philosophy of Whiggism, the parable ends conciliatorily: the virgin proves to be not only very hysterical and nervous, but she also displays the character of a veritable ‘Valetudinarian’ [3; I, 15-16].³⁰

Change is the breath of urban life. The most simple events gain a new meaning because the Spectator’s imagination refines them, an ordinary

²⁸ See also COWAN. According to Klein, Addison can be characterised as a “Whig who frequently sought perspectives [...] from which to frame and contain political controversy” [2005, 109]; “The achievement of the polite periodicals can now be seen to fit within the evolution of a modern Whiggism that linked the establishment of liberty, the growth of commerce, and the refinement of manners in a comprehensive and progressive ideology of enlightenment” [KLEIN 2005 : 113].

²⁹ See KNIGHT 166-167 and MACKIE 1997 : 132: “Women, fashion, and credit share a paradoxical nature: they can become anything and everything because they are in themselves nothing.” See also the interesting parallels between ‘women’ and ‘blanks’, as they are described in BOND 1965 : 663; IV, 523.

³⁰ See also MACKIE 1997 [127-133], who emphasises the gendered aspect of Addison’s allegory and who demonstrates that the association of ‘hysterical’ Lady Credit with “Fortuna” and “Virtue in Distress” is typical of the time: “Finally, hysteria is only a (patho)logical extension of innate frailties defined as essentially feminine” [129].

street scene is turned into a source of meditation, an observation is perfected to an everlasting philosophical truth; a *quasi*-Joycean spirit of epiphany combining emotion and intellect, permeates the philosophy of change in the *Spectator*. The positive aspect of this philosophy can be circumscribed as a kind of transubstantiation, which pays tribute to a universal law of incessant metamorphosis. And the *Spectator's* readers perceive the paper's ability to change things:

The Variety of your Subjects surprizes me as much as a Box of Pictures did formerly, in which there was only one Face, that by pulling some Pieces of Isinglass over it, was chang'd into a grave Senator or a *Merry Andrew*, a Patch'd Lady or a Nun, a Beau or a Black-a-moor, a Prude or a Coquet, a Country 'Squire or a Conjuror, with many other different Representations very entertaining (as you are) tho' still the same at the Bottom. This was a childish Amusement when I was carried away with outward Appearance, but you make a deeper Impression, and affect the secret Springs of the Mind; [...]. I think my self obliged to declare to all the World, that having for a long time been splenatick, ill-natur'd, (...) and unsociable, by the Application of your Medicines, taken only with half an Ounce of right *Virginia* Tobacco for six successive Mornings, I am become open, obliging, officious, frank and hospitable. [134; II, 29-30].

The *Spectator* witnesses a town in constant movement and improvement admiring its "quick turns and changes", and even the paper itself is not exempt from this universal metamorphosis; its material nature may be turned into waste or become a utensil in a dirty kitchen.³¹ The many daily accidents and unforeseen events, the avalanche of news, the incessant stream of acoustic, olfactory, sensible and visual information, and the accelerated pace of modern urban life have left their traces in the magazine. The essence of the *Spectator's* philosophy of change is the belief in a dynamic anthropology, a new perception of human identity permanently endangered by what Samuel Johnson would call "the vicissitudes" of life.³² Change is the only reliable feature of human nature, nothing is solid, nothing remains as it was. Age, disease, and death are the catalysts by which the most effective forms of change are brought forth. The great philosophical tales, such as the

³¹ "It is pleasant enough to consider the Changes that a Linnen-fragment undergoes, by passing through the several Hands above-mentioned. [...] In a word, a piece of Cloath, after having officiated for some Years as a Towel or a Napkin, may by this means be raised from a Dung-hill, and become the most valuable piece of Furniture in a Prince's Cabinet" [BOND 1965 : 367; III, 380-381].

³² See BATE 184, in which Johnson analyses the relationship between essay-writing and the alleged contingency of life.

famous "Vision of Mirzah" in *Spectator* 159, are all more or less indicative of this fundamental anthropological law of change. This allegory demonstrates that the *Spectator* can be seen as a genuine organ of Enlightenment. It is not only the attempt to get rid of prejudices and false notions of human life, the *Spectator* is interested in changes of perspective. Urban life, the Bank of England, the Public Credit, the Royal Exchange demand a new form of hermeneutics which can no longer rely on traditional sources of knowledge. The world of Addison and Steele needed a new form of processual hermeneutics, adaptable to change and vicissitudes. The polyphonic character of London, the bipolarity of its political landscape, the inhomogeneous nature of the religious worlds, the simultaneous presence of so many different social ranks and even nations in city life, made it necessary to develop an advanced form of toleration. The coffeehouses, veritable bee-hives of conversation, proved every day that no single perspective could claim the right to be the one and only correct one. Willingness to change one's perspective became a *conditio sine qua non* of modern life in London. The *Spectator* warns against self-assuredness by employing the principle of relativity; in two numbers, No 50 and No 56, the essayists describe English society from the perspective of Indian Kings who visited the metropolis. Whatever seems normal to an English eye (the ladies' headdresses, the political parties), is suddenly transformed into something very odd, remarkable and occasionally absurd. The essayists believe that "Human Nature appears a very deformed, or a very beautiful Object, according to the different Lights in which it is view'd" [230; II, 393-394]; their philosophy of change implies the constant preparedness to see "an Object by the Light of a Taper, or by the Light of the Sun" [409; III, 528]. The request for differentiation also implies a historical dimension, since the *Spectator* is pleased to show "Human Nature in a variety of Views, and describe the several Ages of the World in their different Manners" [209; II, 317]. In *Spectator* 355, Addison writes: "I never met with a Consideration that is more finely spun, and what has better pleased me, than one in Epictetus, which places an Enemy in a new Light, and gives us a view of him altogether different from that in which we are used to regard him" [355; III, 323]. The main achievement of the *Spectator*, namely the establishment of the *Spectator's Club*, is another proof of the significance of the change of perspective for the correct functioning of a polite society. Sir Roger de Coverley, Will Honeycomb, Sir Andrew Freeport and, of course, the *Spectator* himself, pay tribute to the polyphony of the political discourses by personifying the principle of relativity. But the philosophy of change in the *Spectator* does not merely focus on worldly transformations. It is true, a modern society is well advised to consider the opinions of traders, bankers,

philosophers, artisans, military men and even beaux, if it wants to achieve a certain level of democracy, but this free interchange of opinions does not suffice. The vicissitude of life,³³ the contingency of reality, and the incessant stream of accidents which define human existence demand a greater awareness of change which includes a metaphysical sphere. A deep belief that all "Vanities of Nature, all the Works of Art, all the Labours of Men, are reduced to Nothing" [146; II, 77] conveys more than a note of sadness to Addison's meditations:

There is scarce a State of Life, or Stage in it, which does not produce Changes and Revolutions in the Mind of Man. [...] A cloudy Day or a little Sun-shine have as great an Influence on many Constitutions, as the most real Blessings or Misfortunes. A Dream varies our Being and changes our Condition while it lasts; and every Passion, not to mention Health and Sickness, and the greater Alterations in Body and Mind, makes us appear almost different Creatures. [162; II, 137].

Thus, the ultimate concern of the *Spectator* is a kind of existential shift of perspective:³⁴ the Vision of Mirzah, the beautiful and serene essay on Westminster Abbey in *Spectator* No 26, in which death itself is seen from a new perspective, since it levels all former distinctions of birth, social class or nationality, the various meditations of the end of life, of disease, of age, of the deathbed,³⁵ and of the loss of beauty, wealth, influence or power express the wish to see life from a different point of view: *sub specie aeternitatis*. This rather arid principle of epistemology is illustrated by the beautiful story of the Dervish, who travels through Tartary; when he chooses a lodging for the night, he confuses the King's palace with a caravanserai; when the King asks the Dervish how he could have taken his palace for a caravanserai, this is what the oriental sage answers:

³³ "He [Man] is subject every Moment to the greatest Calamities and Misfortunes. He is beset with Dangers on all sides, and may become unhappy by numberless Casualties, which he could not foresee, nor have prevented, had he foreseen them" [BOND 1965, 441; IV, 49]. See also BONS 1965, 615; V, 104.

³⁴ In an imitation of Montaigne's maxim "Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir", Edward Young would later say about the *Spectator*: "Addison taught us how to die"; see WALMSLEY who quotes Young [217] and who demonstrates how intensely Addison's view of death was influenced by the writings of Cicero, Thomas Burnet, and John Tillotson [202-206]. For Montaigne, see FRIEDRICH.

³⁵ "How surprising is this Change from the Possession of vigorous Life and Strength, to be reduced in a few Hours to this fatal Extremity!" [BOND 1965, 133; II, 27]. See also "The Death-Bed shews the Emptiness of Titles in a true Light. [...] Titles at such a time took rather like Insults and Mockery than Respect" [219; II, 352].

Sir, says the *Dervise*, give me leave to ask your Majesty a Question or two. Who were the Persons that lodged in this House when it was first Built? The King replied, *His Ancestors*. And who, says the *Dervise*, was the last Person that lodged here? The King replied, *His Father*. And who is it, says the *Dervise*, that lodges here at present? The King told him *that it was himself*. And who, says the *Dervise*, will be here after you? The King answer'd, *The young Prince his Son*. 'Ah Sir, said the *Dervise*, a House that changes its Inhabitants so often, and receives such a perpetual Succession of Guests, is not a Palace but a Caravansary [289; III, 30-1].

For Addison and Steele, too, the world was nothing but an ever changing caravanserai, with life being but a journey from the earthly existence to a transcendental one. Like Johnson, Addison, in particular, could not lose sight of this 'life beyond the grave' which fascinated him and which—for him—was the genuine existence everyone should prepare himself for.

As loyal defenders of the Christian tradition, Addison and Steele are of the opinion that the soul will finally be transfigured into something eternal and sublime, something—which like the Supreme Being, God himself—will be immune against all forces of change and decay. A strong belief in the tenets of Christianity is perceptible throughout the *Spectator*; it is the reason for many critics to regard Addison's *Spectator* as being of *quasi*-scriptural nature.³⁶ The Spectators are quite certain that—after death—"our Parts in the other World will be *new cast*" [219; II, 353], and that man must prepare for this final transubstantiation of his soul with all his might. To them, the world is nothing but a great chemical theatre, producing incessant changes with all the suffering and all the blessings that man has to witness. As representatives of the "age of theodicy" [Real 85], Addison and Steele emphasise the idea that blessings may be transfigured into evils, and that accidents may finally be turned into happy prospects for the future. As long as there is life, there is change, caused by the incessant curiosity of human beings. The Spanish proverb "*Il sabio muda conscio, il necio no*; i.e. *A wise Man changes his Mind, a Fool never will*", quoted by Steele [78; I, 337], is programmatic for the Spectator's view of human nature. Change is the elixir of life, its basis and its ultimate reason. Only fools do not recognise this universal truth, and in particular the religious fools, atheists in Addison's view, will pay severely for their gross error. Atheism is the one great theme in the *Spectator* which the essayists do not treat with tolerance or sympathy. The great meditations on the follies of atheism are characterised by derision,

³⁶ "Spectatorial periodicals were thus bibles of enlightened behaviour" [KLEIN 2012, 101, 103].

incomprehension, and the decisive wish to punish this folly with the utmost rigor.³⁷ In the essayists' view, the atheist is a static, paralysed figure, doomed to obliteration and eternal punishment. In a brief section, taken from *Spectator* 635, Grove presents a rhetorical question which reminds one of the clever paradox of the figure of the "resurrected atheist" in Julian Barnes' brilliant book *Nothing to be Frightened Of* (2008):³⁸

Will there not a time come, when the Free-Thinker shall see his impious Schemes overturned, and be made a Convert to the Truths he hates; when deluded Mortals shall be convinced of the Folly of their Pursuits, and the few Wise who followed the guidance of Heaven, and, scorning the blandishments of Sense and the sordid Bribery of the World, aspired to a celestial Abode, shall stand possessed of their utmost wish in the Vision of the Creator? [635; V, 172].

It has become clear by now, I hope, that the urban setting of Addison's and Steele's *Spectator* demanded a new flexible genre,³⁹ which could react to the many changes in politics, religion, culture, in the manners and the opinions of Londoners spontaneously. The essay,⁴⁰ etymologically derived from the term *exagium*, was the perfect genre, in which the vicissitudes of life could be represented. No apodictic rules were delivered. Instead the essayists made modest proposals, minor suggestions, courting not coercing their readers. Addison's "nice and easy" style, praised by so many of his successors, was the perfect verbal instrument to induce his readers to think for themselves, anticipating the famous Kantian imperative "*sapere aude*" [KANT 5]. Accepting the Baconian tradition of essay-writing [LILLEY 95-112], Addison and Steele internalised Bacon's doctrine of the idols and his endeavor to distil universal truths into memorable aphorisms and maxims, thus reanimating the long tradition of the *florilegia*. But more important than this was their profound familiarity with the French tradition of essay-writing invented by Michel de Montaigne [GOOD 26-42]. Even if Addison objected to Montaigne's "revelation of personal foibles and idiosyncracies" [WATSON 216], and criticised his excessive predilection for digressions,⁴¹ reading

³⁷ See BOND 1965 : 389. Atheism is also discussed in BOND 1965 : 166, 185, 186, 210, 336, 381, 476, 571, 575, and 635.

³⁸ "The fury of the resurrected atheist: that would be something worth seeing" [BARNES 64].

³⁹ "Providing the formal condition by which the metropolitan world became self-reflective, the periodical essay offered the dynamics of the modern city itself as a model of understanding the modern world" [BLACK 38].

⁴⁰ For general information concerning the essay see GOOD; see also BERGER and SCHÄRF.

⁴¹ Addison compared Montaigne with a "straying horse" [WATSON 216].

Montaigne enabled the periodical writers to imitate the French writer's *nonchalance*, his elegance, his vivacity, and especially the serene, detached mood in which he presented his ideas. Montaigne's mind made him write inconsistently, with many gaps and "quick turns and changes". The many whims of Montaigne's essays resemble the contingency of life, as the Augustans experienced it. With its great achievement of delivering ideas, philosophies, concepts of morality, and recommendations for leading a polite life through the process of writing, the formation of new ideas could be observed *in statu nascendi*. Montaigne's scepticism, expressed in his motto, "J'examine",⁴² was transformed into a lifelong test of rules, habits, rituals, manners and prescriptions and could thus easily be combined with any Enlightenment intentions. Addison took nothing for granted, the world of religion excepted. Due to its close affinity with the oral tradition of dialogue and diatribe,⁴³ the essay appeared as a kind of "petrified" coffeehouse-conversation [HAAS 48-50]. It was the appropriate medium to represent the bipolar positions of the contemporary political landscape. The essay followed a serene, detached, peripatetic philosophy in which ideas were tested sceptically before they were either accepted or refuted. The essayistic licence included opinion-changing; even if Addison and Steele castigated "Inconsistency" as a major vice referring to John Dryden's "Zimri" as an example,⁴⁴ they provided the generic frame for essayism and for the universal decision to change and to be changed.

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⁴² For Montaigne's lifelong scepticism see FRIEDRICH 129 ff.

⁴³ Moreover, the *Spectator* was also read out publicly [FRANCE 87-88].

⁴⁴ "A Man so various, that he seem'd to be/Not one, but all Mankind's Epitome" [BOND 1965, 222; II, 363].

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