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NEUTERING ADDISON AND STEELE: AESTHETIC FAILURE AND THE SPECTATORIAL PUBLIC SPHERE

BY ANTHONY POLLOCK

More than four decades after its initial publication, Jürgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* remains an unavoidable starting point for studies of early eighteenth-century print culture. For Habermas, of course, the development of English coffee-house culture and its periodical press marked the emergence of a potentially egalitarian discursive space, a realm governed more by the rational force of the better argument than by the institutional force of existing power relations.¹ Extending Habermas's argument, historian Lawrence Klein has recently argued that figures like Anthony Ashley Cooper (Third Earl of Shaftesbury), Joseph Addison, and Richard Steele promoted an urbane ethos of sociability through their ideal of polite conversation, a form of dialogue that offered a "normative framework for human relations since its conventions implied the values of freedom, equality, activity, pleasure, and restraint."² For Habermas's critics, on the other hand, this interpretation of the post-Restoration public sphere is compromised: either by the blind spots in Habermas's theory itself—especially regarding issues of gender and class—or by the fact that Habermas's Enlightenment publicness was managed by precisely those empowered Englishmen whose interests it was supposed to scrutinize.³ But both Habermasians and their opponents leave unquestioned the claim that post-Restoration English writers imagined their public sphere as a form of dialogic, conversational sociability focused on "rational-critical public debate."⁴ Addison and Steele, however, insisted that their paradigmatic periodical *The Spectator* (1711–1714), despite its print dissemination, should be thought of as a vehicle for privately consumed, surrogate visuality—a spectatorial model of publicness.⁵

Addison and Steele's shift from a conversational to a spectatorial model of print culture undermines recent scholarly consensus about what these periodicalists hoped to achieve.⁶ As a representative reading, we can take Terry Eagleton's view that Addison and Steele embody the earliest examples of criticism's "substantive social function," promoting social consolidation through their periodicals by "codifying

norms” and “regulating practices”; as such, the Spectatorial project is imagined to be that of “consciously educating a heterogeneous public into the universal forms of reason, taste and morality.”⁷ Though they would emphasize the critical function of the public sphere more than Eagleton does, Habermasians would agree that Addison and Steele register the early eighteenth-century desire for a particular kind of ethical social order and that their texts reflect a confident effort at reform. Erin Mackie has complicated the image of Addison and Steele as reformers by suggesting that, to succeed in the market, the essayists “depend upon” the same disruptive socioeconomic forces that they “warn against” in their papers; even so, Mackie still views Addison and Steele as deeply invested in getting readers to “do, say, like, and buy the right thing[s].”⁸

One task of this essay will be to reconcile the longstanding idea of Addison and Steele as promoters of Augustan values—decorum, good sense, politeness—with the almost complete absence in their work of characters who exemplify these values.⁹ Critics often view Mr. Spectator, the eidolon of Addison and Steele’s periodical, as a model of the polite sociability he is taken to promote, a reading that equates Mr. Spectator with his creators’ public images. J. G. A. Pocock has noted that Addison and Steele, like many upwardly-mobile mercantile Whigs in early eighteenth-century England, wanted to distance themselves from “new types of personality” that provided easy targets for Tory propagandists, personalities whose status depended upon a tenuous credit economy that made them seem “unprecedentedly dangerous and unstable”; as a result, Addison and Steele often claimed cultural patrilineage from a kind of neo-classical “Roman mythology”—with Cato as a model—in order to appear “self-mastered, stoic, and public.”¹⁰ Mr. Spectator occasionally wants to be this kind of figure, but his behaviors and inclinations are hardly those of the stable social hero. In *Spectator* 131, Mr. Spectator admits he “does not love Jollity and what they call Good-Neighbourhood”; he makes “a very unsociable Figure” during his visit to Sir Roger’s country estate, and he resolves to return to London “in order to be alone” amid anonymous crowds (*S*, 2:20, 21). As readers’ surrogate participants in the disorderly public sphere, Addison and Steele’s personae characteristically do not intervene, they withdraw. Mr. Spectator repeatedly removes himself from urban scenes that threaten to overwhelm him. Even the editorial persona of the *Tatler*, the slightly more extroverted Isaac Bickerstaff, offers a rather limited assessment of what spectatorial judgment can achieve: he hopes his labors as cultural critic “can but wear one Impertinence out of human

Life, destroy a single Vice, or give a Morning's Cheerfulness to an honest Mind," as the minimal condition of his not having written "in vain" (*T*, 2:278). This perking up of the coffee-hour hardly matches Eagleton's description of Addison and Steele's "juridical technology" bent on "scourging deviation and repressing the transgressive."¹¹

Perhaps we can better account for Addison and Steele's complicated relationship to the supposedly deviant elements in their culture by expanding on Mackie's insight that their periodical papers rely on the subversive forces they want to contain. In fact, the papers collaborate in the very production or performance of the disorder they describe. Rather than encouraging social reform, the papers create an ideologically useful image of the public sphere as beyond manageability. In the readings that follow, a blueprint for their cultural project emerges: the papers begin by depicting a public world in desperate need of regulation, but their subsequent attempts to establish order end up allegorizing the failure, and even the illegitimacy, of their own disciplinary efforts.¹² In an apparent paradox, by establishing the unmanageability of the public sphere, the papers attain what I would call their managerial moment: the papers imply that social reform is not feasible, but they redeem that impossibility by cultivating a spectatorial ethos that imagines its public impotence as both necessary and unfortunate. As I hope to prove, the ideal of spectatorial neutrality or of "standing Neuter" is central to Addison and Steele's cultural project (*S*, 1:479). While previous readings emphasize Addison and Steele's desire to reform contrary energies in early eighteenth-century England, I argue that the papers stage the failure of their public engagement in order to enable a privately-conducted neutralization (in the sense of "render[ing] ineffective") of their audience's impulse to make ethics public.¹³ Addison and Steele enforce a strict separation between an irremediably antagonistic social realm and a compensatory private sphere of ethically legitimated spectatorship. In and through their periodical essays, they develop an influential, aesthetic model of English publicness that theoretically assuages the violence it cannot practically prevent.

I. VISION AND SOCIAL ORDER: THE SPECTATORIAL PROJECT

John Barrell has shown how eighteenth-century British writers hoped to contain the growing fragmentation of their society by offering persuasive representations of it as still unified.¹⁴ As Barrell points out, only those who could be considered disinterested were deemed

qualified to give an account of the social totality. Even magistrates and statesmen would not meet this standard of disinterestedness, since their perspectives were limited by the demands of their specific occupations. To be reliable, the ideal spectator must be a property owner free from any particular employment that might impede his (presumed male) view of the social whole. The eighteenth-century British gentleman, “having no need to follow any determinate occupation, had the potential to comprehend them all,” for only “those who perform no regular, determinate task can comprehend and describe the relations between such tasks.”¹⁵ Addison and Steele’s Mr. Spectator perfectly fits the bill: he possesses both a small hereditary estate and the leisured condition of “liv[ing] in the World without having any thing to do in it” (S, 1:45).

Mr. Spectator, however, generally does not describe himself as disinterested or impartial; Addison and Steele use the less common but more semantically suggestive term “neuter” to define their eidolon’s viewpoint. In fact, Addison and Steele did not see neutrality and impartiality as synonyms, so the lexical choice here is important. In the first number of the *Guardian* (1713), often seen as simply a continuation of the *Spectator*, Steele distinguishes his new paper from its predecessors by declaring, “I shall be impartial, tho’ I cannot be neuter.”¹⁶ For Steele, neutrality demands more thoroughgoing detachment than impartiality. While impartiality requires that one avoid prejudice, it in no way precludes the articulation of judgment or the taking of sides. Remaining neuter, on the other hand, makes judgment a more difficult matter. In *Spectator* 117, which debates the legitimacy of belief in witchcraft, Addison upholds the value of “stand[ing] Neuter,” which he defines as his refusal to “engage[re] his Assent to one side or the other” (S, 1:479). For Addison, such a “hovering Faith as this, which refuses to settle upon any Determination,” is necessary “to avoid Errors and Prepossession” (S, 1:479). Not surprisingly, among the relevant contextual meanings of “neuter,” one finds the notion of “not declaring oneself on, or rendering assistance to either side” in a conflict.¹⁷ To be neutral, then, one must neither speak about one’s judgment nor make that judgment publicly effective or “engaged,” in Addison’s terms. Impartiality allows for a public statement of opinion that neutrality precludes; and, while impartiality effaces one’s private prejudices in the name of public declaration, neutrality marks the effacement of public declaration, regardless of private feeling.

This conception of neutrality would seem to undermine the spectator’s role as social reformer. If the gentlemanly observer is not to

make public declarations about matters of ethical import, then how are Addison and Steele to effect social change? The difficult doubleness of the spectatorial vantage point is clarified by a letter from a reader in *Spectator* 324, which describes Mr. Spectator's procedure: "You have been pleased, out of a Concern for the Good of your Countrymen, to act under the Character of SPECTATOR not only the Part of a Looker-on, but an Overseer of their Actions; and whenever such Enormities as this infest the Town, we immediately fly to you for Redress" (S, 3:188). For the reader, both forms of neutrality that Addison and Steele idealize depend upon mechanisms of visibility: to be neutral requires that one act as a certain kind of "[l]ooker-on," while to make others neutral is to engage in a managerial or legislative over-seeing. But how can Addison and Steele legislate without declaring laws? In other words, how can their personae remain neutral in the act of neutralizing others? Addison and Steele's model of over-seeing must avoid both direct prescription and the disciplinary threat of exposing readers through surveillance; by offering to make ideal spectators of their readers, Addison and Steele mold their consumers' practices of looking-on in a way that will conduce to social order apparently without coercion.

Rather than harping on their readers, Bickerstaff and Mr. Spectator pitch themselves as agents of aesthetic education, giving readers an experience comparable to that offered by the theater. Early in the *Spectator* papers, Addison defines the spectatorial view as one that "considers the World as a Theatre" and that "desires to form a right Judgment of those who are the Actors on it" (S, 1:45, 46); as such, the papers function as a series of dramatic presentations meant to stimulate mechanisms of identification and repulsion, offering both theatrical characters and "right Judgment[s]" about them. In *Tatler* 172, Steele's Bickerstaff imagines himself as an unconventional tragedian, one who refuses to present audiences with "Histor[ies] of Princes, and Persons who act in high Spheres," since such aristocratic drama would affect the average reader "only in a transient Manner . . . as Things fit rather to exercise the Powers of our Minds than to create new Habits in them" (T, 3:305, 305–6); instead, Bickerstaff's simulated stage depicts "such Adventures as befall Persons not exalted above the common Level," so that his readers will view things that happen "to such as live and look like themselves" (T, 3:306). Steele's defense of *drame bourgeois* highlights its performative capacity to "create new Habits" by acting upon readers' predisposition toward visual modes of representation—their "prepossess[ion] with outward Appearances"—rather than criticizing

or countering that tendency (*T*, 3:306).¹⁸ By tapping into (or creating) his audience's appetite for visual identification, Steele heightens the cultural force of his papers, creating new behaviors in his audience rather than offering up essays that transiently "pass through our Imaginations" (*T*, 3:305).

Steele's description of bourgeois spectacle is ideologically complicated. To begin with, the idea of "creat[ing] new Habits" harbors some internal contradiction inasmuch as something new shouldn't immediately be called habitual. Steele would have his theatrical representations initiate new identities in his audience members, identities at once unprecedented and somehow so deeply recognizable that they take root automatically, unconsciously in the spectating subject. Steele's new spectators will not be particularly decisive or agential but will replicate (or become) new programming at the level of habit, repetitively consuming periodicals and identifying with those who "look like themselves" in the scenes they depict. At the same time, Steele downplays the power of his own texts by differentiating them from those "which Writers form for the Ostentation of their own Force" (*T*, 3:306). Still, his project clearly reverses the agential order implied by those aristocratic texts he criticizes, texts that emphasize the readerly activity of "exercis[ing] the Powers of our Minds," while his own texts re-"create" minds which passively receive them.¹⁹ This dramatic theory clearly carries out Addison and Steele's project of neutralization according to the contextual meanings of that term. If to neutralize is "to render ineffective or void," or even "to destroy," then Bickerstaff's idea of "creat[ing] new Habits" in his audiences conduces to their being, in a sense, neutralized.²⁰ Viewing Steele's bourgeois spectacle will negate the already existing properties in his spectators in the name of producing new characteristics and values; one's previous identity is "render[ed] . . . void," as it were, and replaced with one whose operations will be less ethically noxious, derived from characters who "live and look like" us.

We can make this point less abstract by examining the particular dramatic scene that follows Bickerstaff's aesthetic theory in *Tatler* 172. This bourgeois tragedy stars a young Irish gentleman, Eustace, and his wife, the two of whom live together "in general with much Ease and Tranquillity," though Mr. Eustace is secretly "impatient of Rebuke" (*T*, 3:306). During a spat between Eustace's wife and her sister, Eustace falls into an "outrageous Passion on the Side of the Sister," prompting his wife to "rally him for interposing." As the evening continues, his wife's rebuke "descend[s] deeper into [Eustace's] Thoughts" in a way

that prompts the horrifying dénouement: Eustace stabs his wife to death in their bed, runs from the murder scene, and is finally shot by an officer of justice (*T*, 3:307). Surely Eustace has a temper, but his more fundamental flaw, for Bickerstaff, is that he can neither be neutral nor contribute to the neutralization of opposed forces.²¹ Steele makes it clear that Eustace's thirst for partiality, his being "one of that Sort of Men who are never unconcerned at what passes before them," directly precipitates the killing spree (*T*, 3:306–7). In this light, the character with whom the audience should identify becomes evident only later: spectators must recognize themselves in the properly "unconcerned" author, a subject-position they do not see but without which no sight would be possible. For the spectacle to create new habits, the audience must finally inhabit the spectatorial viewpoint from which individual characters' behaviors can be seen as excessively partial. We are made neutral by looking on through the neutral eyes of the apparatus.

All will become spectators. But Addison's and Steele's spectators will do the seeing for you—leave the seeing to us, they say. Bickerstaff and Mr. Spectator often insist that ordinary citizens are easily led astray when left to their own aesthetic faculties. Take, for example, the *Tatler* essays warning about the dangers of reading newspapers. In Addison's *Tatler* 155, Bickerstaff complains about an upholsterer whom he calls "the greatest Newsmonger in our quarter," a man who spends so much time searching out the latest periodicals that he is "much more inquisitive to know what passed in Poland than in his own Family" (*T*, 3:218). Struggling to obtain his own view of European politics, the upholsterer becomes "the Ruin of his Shop," disrupting in his own small way the economic basis of England's prosperity and social cohesion (*T*, 3:218). Though Addison emphasizes the upholsterer's reading habits rather than his vision, what Addison seems most troubled by is this ordinary person's accession to a spectatorial position from which he (metaphorically) sees for himself by searching out information from a variety of sources.²² But rather than appealing to a non-visual sense or to Habermasian conversation as a way of promoting legitimate sociality, Addison and Steele correct spectatorship with spectatorship. The problem with self-appointed spectators is that they "live more in a Coffee-house than in their Shops" and have minds "so taken up with the Affairs of the Allies, that they forget their Customers" (*T*, 3:222). Far from viewing the early eighteenth-century public sphere as a site for the democratization of politics through rational discourse, Addison's and Steele's essays on their own print culture represent it as a subversive threat to the socioeconomic order and a locus of "the most incurable

and ridiculous of all Phrensies" (*T*, 3:332); according to Bickerstaff in Steele's *Tatler* 178, the newly cluttered market of periodical literature induces otherwise industrious citizens into a pathological curiosity, an "Epidemick Ill" (*T*, 3:332) that requires their medicalized containment in Bickerstaff's own "Bedlam" (*T*, 3:336). All will become spectators, but only through the framing of the observations presented in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. As Mr. Spectator puts it in *Spectator* 10, to prevent citizens from incapacitating themselves, "I would earnestly entreat them not to stir out of their Chambers until they have read this Paper" (*S*, 1:46).

In effect, Addison and Steele build a community of readers who share the comprehensive view that the *Tatler* and *Spectator* papers produce. Several of the papers explicitly thematize how they provide a more complete view of social totality than that available to any of its individual participants. *Spectator* 454, for example, follows the insomniac Mr. Spectator through London for twenty-four consecutive hours, offering readers a synoptic view of how "Men of Six a Clock give Way to those of Nine, they of Nine to the Generation of Twelve, and [how] they of Twelve disappear, and make Room for the fashionable World, who have made Two a Clock the Noon of the Day" (*S*, 4:99). If a Londoner appearing at noon is so different from another appearing at nine that they represent entirely different "People . . . born in different Centuries," as Addison puts it, then English society must need the spectator's synthesizing viewpoint to discover its unifying principle (*S*, 4:99). Mr. Spectator emphasizes that his papers should be consumed for their socializing visual effect; he explains that "the greatest Pleasure [he] knows [he] receive[s] at [his] Eyes" and that he is as "obliged to an agreeable Person for coming abroad into [his] View, as another is for a Visit of Conversation at their own Houses" (*S*, 4:98). Mr. Spectator's is not an ethics of dialogue, then, but an ethics of visibility, in which the observing subject becomes affectively "obliged" to those who enter their visual field: the social order imagined by these papers is maintained by its participants' mutual connectedness as both observing and observed.

Steele works through the implications of this aesthetic obligation in his essays on prostitution. Here he attempts to engage his readers' "Compassion" by criticizing "outrageously virtuous" citizens who rigidly distance themselves from streetwalkers (*S*, 2:534). By analyzing "the Oeconomy of Whoredom" (*S*, 2:535), Steele highlights the interdependence of "pampered Vice in the Habitations of the Wealthy" and the "distressed indigent Wickedness [in] the Harbours of the Brothel"

(*S*, 2:537). Following his idea of the periodical as a kind of theater, Steele makes his social critique more forceful by presenting readers with images of young women who have fallen into a life of prostitution; he paints a “slim young Girl of about Seventeen” (*S*, 2:534) with a “forced Wantonness in her Look and Air,” “Eyes wan and eager,” and “Dress thin and tawdry”—a composite sketch that elicits “Anguish of Heart” from Steele’s narrator (*S*, 2:535). In a follow-up essay, Steele prints a letter from a “Francis Courtly,” who complains that telling the “rich” and the “virtuous” about the “Lapses” and “Indigence” of others is “in a kind involving each of them in some Participation of those Disadvantages” (*S*, 2:574). Of course, Steele’s point in the earlier essay was that there would be no such disadvantages without the exploitative participation of the empowered. Making visible the connection between fallen women and rakish aristocratic men—two ostensibly separate economic spheres—Steele builds an audience united by their identification with a surrogate spectator who models the proper affective reaction to images of violated women.

But what is the social significance of an obligation that arises from this kind of spectatorial identification? An answer can be found in the way Addison and Steele depict marital and labor relationships, two spheres that represent the stability, productivity, and reproducibility of English society. Bickerstaff begins *Tatler* 149 by lamenting how England’s “ill-natured Husbands” undermine his glorious nation’s “publick Happiness and Liberty”; he describes such husbands as “private Tyrants, against whom there neither is any Law now in being, nor can there be invented any by the Wit of Man” (*T*, 3:184). Bickerstaff then paints scenes of private distress, using the charged tableau of a young wife’s “Eyes full of Tears” to promote the ideal of “reciprocal Complaisance” (*T*, 3:184, 185).²³ In *Spectator* 137, Steele offers an extended argument for reciprocity in his response to a servant whose master is so “suspicious” that he spies on his employees; indeed, this master so “constantly watch[es]” the servants that they “differ no more in Pleasure and Liberty than . . . a Goaler and a Prisoner” (*S*, 2:41). Mr. Spectator offers a way out of this dialectic by admonishing masters who “cannot put themselves in the Condition of the Persons below them” (*S*, 2:43). An ethos of placing oneself in the condition of those one observes gradually emerges as a crucial theme in Addison and Steele’s periodicals. The problem in each dyad—master-servant, husband-wife, rake-prostitute—is that the empowered half fails to view the other as an object of sympathetic identification and to understand their interdependence. For Addison and Steele, seeing the other prop-

erly becomes the aesthetic solution to a set of moral problems, a way of curing both the husband's insolence and the master's perverseness. Neutrality and reciprocity are fused in the spectatorial bearing toward others, the perceptual ground of a "reciprocal Complaisance" that can guarantee English order.²⁴

II. THE ADVANTAGES OF SPECULATION: ADDISON'S AND STEELE'S ALLEGORIES OF NEUTRALITY

If Addison and Steele rely on the power of ethical spectatorship to neutralize antagonism and to promote reciprocity, to what extent and in what ways do their papers imagine their project's feasibility? That is to say, how realizable are these ideals made to seem by the papers themselves? To approach this problem, Mr. Spectator generally uses two different strategies; he either describes the characteristics of a properly neutral vision or he offers a narrative in which the achievement of a neutral position is the end goal. In rare cases, essays I would call allegories of neutrality, Addison and Steele employ both strategies at once: they provide a maxim by which the ideal spectator should be guided and a narrative example of that maxim in practice. While this formal structure—maxim, example, restatement—is common to much conduct literature of the eighteenth century and beyond, Addison and Steele use this convention rather unconventionally in that their essays consistently fail to achieve their ostensible aims of proof, reinforcement, and closure. To cite their maxims as evidence of Addison and Steele's priorities, one must overlook countermovements in the papers that show the maxims failing by their own standards.

We have already seen how the *Spectator* papers attempt to quell the increasing divisiveness in early eighteenth-century English society by showing how differences of opinion or interest can be reconciled at a higher level of generality. Chief among the disputes the *Spectator* papers wish to settle is that between the interests of land and trade. Much has been made of the papers' advocacy of Whig positions on trade, but, as the opening of *Spectator* 174 clarifies, Steele aims less for the overthrow of land by trade than for the unification of the warring parties:

There is scarce any thing more common than Animosities between Parties that cannot subsist but by their Agreement: This was well represented in the Sedition of the Members of the human Body in the old Roman Fable. It is often the Case of lesser confederate States against a superiour Power, which are hardly held together though their

Unanimity is necessary for their common Safety: And this is always the Case of the landed and trading Interest of Great Britain; the Trader is fed by the Product of the Land, and the landed Man cannot be clothed but by the Skill of the Trader; and yet those Interests are ever jarring. (*S*, 2:185–86)

Steele makes unanimity crucial not only to “common Safety” but to his society’s very “subsist[ence].” Moreover, the reference to Livy’s “old Roman Fable” makes England a human body, with land and trade functioning as individual limbs which haphazardly injure one another rather than understand themselves as parts of the same whole. The figure of anthropomorphism aims to accomplish a great deal here, implicitly positing the nation as the primary criterion by which bodies should be unified and defined—a political criterion that would replace and subsume the narrower economic affiliations of land and trade. But the figure also implies that the limbs of land and trade cannot unify themselves; rather, they must be reconciled by a perceptual agent that is simultaneously distinct from and dependent upon those limbs for its effectiveness. This ideal of a unanimous position, or neutral place, Mr. Spectator imagines as a figural brain able to perceive an interconnectedness to which the individual members are blind. On the one hand, the anthropomorphism effectively naturalizes the existence of such a position—every body has such a brain that directs its interdependent limbs. On the other hand, however, the figure also troubles that naturalization by requiring a further figuration: the idea of the individual members’ capacity for “Sedition”; England is a body subdivided into parts that are themselves anthropomorphized, since, for a limb to be seditious, it too must be like a person with a brain of its own. The allegory of sedition in the old Roman fable—a commonplace of contemporary economic theory—undermines the very notion of a single, neutral position from which economic conflict can be controlled and legislated because it insists on the embodied difference of the jarring interests it would harmonize.

If the maxim that opens *Spectator* 174 subverts itself through a reliance on this complicated set of figures, then perhaps the exemplification of the maxim offers a more convincing image of the neutral unanimity England needs. Steele gives us a dialogue between factions, with Sir Roger speaking for land and Sir Andrew Freeport for trade, but the dialogue is no negotiation. It begins with Roger’s observation that “Carthaginian Faith was a proverbial Phrase to intimate Breach of Leagues” (*S*, 2:186). Mr. Spectator quotes Roger’s excursus against trade:

Carthaginians were the greatest Traders in the World, and as Gain is the chief End of such a People, they never pursue any other: The Means to it are never regarded; they will, if it comes easily, get Money honestly; but if not, they will not scruple to attain it by Fraud or Cosenage: And indeed what is the whole Business of the Trader's Accompt but to over-reach him who trusts to his Memory? (S, 2:186)

Roger finishes by asking how anything “great and noble” could ever be expected from those perpetually concerned about “ballancing Books” and “watching Expences”; he places the trader’s virtues of “punctual Dealing,” “Frugality[,] and Parsimony” below a gentleman’s “Charity to the Poor” and “Hospitality among his Neighbours” (S, 2:186). Freeport then defends the mercantile ethos on the basis of its public usefulness, explaining that the Roman proverb’s truth-value is compromised by the fact that “the Romans were [the Carthaginians’] professed Enemies”; Freeport regrets that “no Carthaginian Histories have come to our Hands,” histories which would teach “Proverbs against the Roman Generosity in fighting for and bestowing other People’s Goods” (S, 2:187). Steele’s essay reveals how proverbs perpetuate antagonisms between different groups: in Freeport’s view, proverbs don’t argue for a position as much as they are written “against” others. The jarring between Freeport and Roger can be seen as the eighteenth-century repetition of an ancient antagonism rendered permanent through its proverbial formulation. Unanimity becomes impossible to imagine because these characters are not really in dialogue; their conversation presents two mutually exclusive monologues—one grounded in nobility and generosity, the other in “Numbers” and industry (S, 2:188). In fact, the men who represent the forces of land and trade are not really speaking at all; in a strong sense, they are being spoken for by proverbs that antedate their (hardly dialogic) conversation.

Mr. Spectator uses a proverb to end the antagonism between land and trade, but the exemplification of his proverb describes an irreconcilable conflict between proverbs. After Freeport’s tirade against Roger, Mr. Spectator offers no account of how the differences between the two men might be mediated, no position of unanimous neutrality from which their disagreement might be resolved.²⁵ Having juxtaposed two mutually refuting arguments, he remains silent before the apparently irresolvable economic conflict they represent. In effect, the characters’ need to mediate difference through speech disrupts what Mr. Spectator hoped the purely visual might unify. It is one thing for Mr. Spectator to view the body of England as symbolically unified, but it is quite another to unify those interests practically through a

dialogue in which both sides are allowed to speak. Acknowledging this incompatibility of the spoken and the seen, Mr. Spectator remains silent—conversation here only highlights the irremediable antagonism that spectatorship must assuage. Even at the level of the essay's aesthetic rhetoric, anthropomorphism fails to produce unity from the outset, effecting a plurality of personifications within the body it would unite, while synecdoche fails in the exemplification by showing that Roger's and Freeport's different parts cannot be subsumed into a whole; the economic partialities of land and trade resist political unification in the body of England.

Steele presents another allegory of neutrality in *Spectator* 454, the episode narrating a consecutive "Four and twenty Hours" in London. Here Mr. Spectator explains that the most "inexpressible Pleasure" of observation is reserved for those who "value things only as they are the Objects of Speculation, without drawing any worldly Advantage from them" (*S*, 4:98). The ideal on-looker views the world as an aesthetic object that will amuse and instruct, while his negative foil sees only economic objects useful for projecting profit and loss. Even so, the benign spectator still uses a discourse of value and speculation that overlaps with the language of capitalism from which Mr. Spectator wants to distance himself. While "Speculation" has a number of meanings in early eighteenth-century parlance, in the *Spectator* papers the term is most often associated with Freeport, for whom to speculate is to predict the outcome of an economic venture. Not surprisingly, then, Mr. Spectator's visual apotheosis in this particular essay occurs at the Royal Exchange, London's center for the trading of stocks, goods, and mercantile information. While the merchants focus on their own "Hopes and Bargains," Mr. Spectator finds his "Account" in "observing them in Attention to their several Interests"; Mr. Spectator concludes, "I, indeed, looked upon myself as the richest Man that walk'd the Exchange that Day; for my Benevolence made me share in the Gains of every Bargain that was made" (*S*, 4:102). Mr. Spectator never really distances himself from the language and practice of economics. Spectatorship makes him "the richest Man" on the Exchange; he accumulates a wealth of "Pleasure" through the operation of a "Benevolence" that "ma[kes him] share in the Gains of every Bargain." But what sort of benevolence takes a commission from the happiness of others? Summing up the essay, Mr. Spectator teaches us to "make every Face you see give you the Satisfaction you now take in beholding that of a Friend," since such a practice "will make all the Good which arrives to any Man an Encrease of Happi-

ness to your self” (S, 4:103). In accordance with his theories of social order, Steele’s benevolence involves the capacity to identify, to efface difference by substituting oneself for others under the aegis of friendship. Friendship, in turn, provides a visual pleasure indistinguishable from profit: one sees the face of the other, distinguishes that face as “Friend,” and then identifies with that image as a source of “Gratification” and “Gains” (S, 4:102, 103, 102). Finally, the discourses of aesthetics and economics collapse together in the terms “Speculation” and “Account.” What gets lost in this description of the spectacular exchange, of course, is loss itself. Mr. Spectator’s vision is a fantasy of pure accumulation without expenditure, in which he identifies only with those who profit and never with those who lose. His exchange enacts a scenario in which everybody who matters wins—the only losers are those without the “Benevolence” to identify with profiting merchants in a way that would allow them access to a figurative share in others’ literal gain.

In the end, Addison’s and Steele’s efforts to imagine a neutral spectator turn into allegories of neutrality’s impossibility. Their attempts to establish a detached position free from particular interest, a position from which the social realm can be viewed as a kind of aesthetic object (theater, scene, picture, and so forth), often reveal either a keen self-interest behind the mask of altruistic public concern or a world governed by intractable economic antagonism. Materialist readings of eighteenth-century literature have described how particular authors—Alexander Pope stands out as a common example—use aesthetic form to efface the economic circumstances and relations of production in the cultural context out of which their own literary works take shape. This attempt to aestheticize the economic marks the ideological moment of much Augustan literature, the moment in which mercantile capitalism and colonial exploitation are sublated into the image of a beautiful England, gilded and enriched by trade.²⁶ Addison’s and Steele’s allegories work in the opposite direction, underlining the inescapably economic basis of the aesthetic moments they attempt to enact. The *Spectator* papers offer what I would call an econom(ic)ization of the aesthetic, a rhetorical gesture whose effects may appear to be critical or counter-hegemonic but which must be understood in relation to Addison and Steele’s broader cultural aims. The pure speculator who would eschew worldly advantage turns out to be the richest man at the Exchange, while the paper promoting a neutral, unanimous economic policy demonstrates the mutual disruption of the arguments it would unite. In each case, the aesthetic construction of a position beyond

positionality is compromised by the economic conditions within which it would have to be articulated.²⁷

But if neutrality appears impossible to exemplify, then what becomes of the ethical ideal of reciprocity so crucial to Addison and Steele's ideal social order? From Mr. Spectator's perspective, the reciprocity he recommended of others was hardly anything he could be expected to practice himself. On the one hand, Mr. Spectator often identifies sympathetically with those he observes, as in the "grand Scene of Business" (S, 1:294) at the Royal Exchange, where he is "infinitely delighted" (S, 1:293) in becoming "a Dane, Swede, or French-man at different Times," or in "los[ing himself] in a Crowd of Jews" (S, 1:294). On the other hand, he rigorously prevents himself becoming the object of others' vision and speech. In his opening essay, Mr. Spectator expresses his extreme displeasure at the idea of being exposed out of his "Obscurity," revealing that "the greatest Pain [he] can suffer, is the being talked to, and being stared at" (S, 1:5, 6). This visual asymmetry isn't merely a topos meant to preserve his anonymity—it's an ethos. In a visit to Sir Roger's country estate, Mr. Spectator consistently evades others' visual fields until the neighbors' curiosity proves too strong; he returns to London, where he can "raise what Speculations [he] please[s] upon others without being observed [himself] . . . enjoy[ing] all the Advantages of Company with all the Privileges of Solitude" (S, 2:21).²⁸

The ideal of mercantile reciprocity in Addison's and Steele's many paeans to trade also reveals itself to be specious. In *Spectator* 69, on the Royal Exchange, Addison explains that just as reciprocal identification supposedly unites the British nation, international commerce unites the globe, ensuring that the world's "several Parts" have "a kind of Dependance upon one another, and [are] united together by their common Interest" (S, 1:294, 294–95). For Addison, international capitalism enables a "mutual Intercourse of good Offices" through which the "Gifts of Nature" are "distribut[ed]" (S, 1:296). Again, everybody wins. Addison describes the reciprocity of trade:

Our Ships are laden with the Harvest of every Climate: Our Tables are stored with Spices, Oils, and Wines: Our Rooms are filled with Pyramids of China, and adorned with the Workmanship of Japan: Our Morning's-Draught comes to us from the remotest Corners of the Earth: We repair our Bodies by the Drugs of America, and repose our selves under Indian Canopies. My Friend Sir Andrew calls the Vineyards of France our Gardens; the Spice-Islands our Hot-Beds; the Persians our Silk-Weavers, and the Chinese our Potters. . . . Nor is it the least part

of this our Happiness, that whilst we enjoy the remotest Products of the North and South, we are free from those Extremities of Weather which give them Birth; That our Eyes are refreshed with the green Fields of Britain, at the same time that our Palates are feasted with Fruits that rise between the Tropicks. (S, 1:295–96)

Clearly, “we” benefit from commercial intercourse; the subjects that Addison’s first sentence catalogs make his focus quite evident, as he glowingly describes “Our Ships,” “Our Tables,” “Our Rooms,” “Our Morning’s-Draught,” and the repairing of “our Bodies.” But what of our trading partners, who ostensibly gain as much as we do in this economic theory of “common Interest”? In fact, as the second section of the passage makes clear, they (and the sites of their labor) become ours as well; they live among “our Gardens” and “our Hot-Beds,” and they are “our Silk-Weavers” and “our Potters,” all conspiring to “our Happiness”—a situation in which “we enjoy . . . Products” and are “free.” The passage closes symmetrically with a return to cataloging “our” repositories of foreign goods, though these repositories are no longer the displaced metonyms of our consumptive apparatuses (ships, tables, rooms), but are named as our own bodily orifices (eyes and palates). If our partners come out a bit behind in trading their “Rubies” for our “Wooll”—a trade suggested in the essay’s concluding paragraph—they can still be winners if they imaginatively identify with those who profit at their expense, following Addison’s logic in *Spectator* 454, which neatly anticipates the cultural logic of neoliberal globalization (S, 1:296).²⁹

III. JUST LOOKING: SOCIAL VIOLENCE AND AESTHETIC REDEMPTION

Critics have read the spectatorial project as a public realization of Augustan ideals—common sense, decency, and polite taste—by referring to the essays’ maxims without analyzing either how those maxims fare in the examples or how the same principles might be contradicted in other papers. As we have seen, however, Addison and Steele’s rhetoric of social order is consistently compromised by a particular pattern of disintegration, in which neutrality and reciprocity replicate the forms of antagonistic partiality and asymmetry they are supposed to correct. The spectatorial project fails by its own standards, occasionally warning us that it can do nothing but fail. But what if this relentless repetition of ethical and political failure is itself the spectatorial project? The project begins by expressing the desire to unify English

society through the ideals of polite neutrality and reciprocity. But the project harbors within itself a movement beyond that explicit desire, a countermovement that allegorizes the failure of the managing gesture. In that sense, the papers perform a critical function: they demystify the ruse of neutrality by unveiling the antagonism and appropriation hidden under its benign mask. In the same procedure, however, there remains what we might call an ideological residue: by having neutrality ineluctably fail, Addison and Steele suggest that there is no clear way to counter prevailing forms of violence, no ground for a critical practice that would not replicate the problems it wants to solve. Addison and Steele promote not the ideology of an order that pastes over society's disruptive forces but the ideology of inevitable disorder, naturalizing historically specific forms of violence from which a narrowly delimited group of Englishmen benefits. The spectator's image of English society reconciles the reader to the unfortunate irremediability of the self-interest that permeates public and private and that conditions gestures of friendship and enmity alike.

What redeems such a violent world in the spectatorial scheme, finally, is our capacity to have the proper aesthetic reaction to it. If neutrality and reciprocity are necessarily compromised by self-interest, then the *pis aller* is to identify with the position of the detached, non-violent spectator. Neither Bickerstaff nor Mr. Spectator can be accused of the forms of violence Addison and Steele bemoan: they don't duel, they don't beat their wives, they don't hire prostitutes, and they don't sully their hands with the dingy calculation of trade. They embody the spectatorial ideal of just looking, in two senses: they're not hurting anybody because they're only (just) looking, and because their look promotes the proper affective reaction to what they observe, it is an ethically legitimate (a just) form of looking. Addison and Steele use their vision of an irremediably antagonistic society to elicit the sympathetic response from readers that will help reproduce a rather disorderly English order; sympathy turns readers into passive spectators to a violent social scene about which nothing can ostensibly be done but which is palliated by their commiserating with the victims of that violence through an identification with the spectatorial viewpoint. In a myriad of examples from *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, commiseration displaces ire, critique, or positive action as the proper response to an ethical dilemma. Remember that Mr. Spectator never suggests ending prostitution (an institution prompted by "Desires which are natural to all") or altering an economic system that makes sexual slavery a viable option for women; he asks only that we feel

anguished “Compassion” rather than disgust at the women so disenfranchised (S, 2:534).³⁰ Violence is inevitable and unfortunate. But the pleasure of our commiserative reaction makes audiences complicit in and desirous of the violence they also abhor to the extent that readers’ introjection of the spectatorial viewpoint removes any pretense to impartiality; one introjects not an impartial spectator but an inevitably partial perspective that can still be thought of as neutral to the extent that it makes no public declarations. As a result, readerly guilt here is not analogous to superego-induced guilt as traditionally conceived, a guilt forceful enough to produce neurosis because (in part) of one’s conviction that one could and should avoid having the shameful desires one has; rather, this guilt is always already assuaged by the knowledge that if we desire wrongly, we cannot desire otherwise.

Addison and Steele’s procedure can be illuminated by comparison to Peter Sloterdijk’s account of how ideology works in post-Enlightenment modernity. Sloterdijk treats cynicism as the most recent and insidiously effective form of ideology in that cynics—unlike the mystified subjects of ideology in Marxian theory, who know not what they do—know very well what they are doing; they see through the ideologies to which they are asked to submit, but they behave as if they believed nonetheless.³¹ There are crucial differences, though, between Addison and Steele’s subjects of ideology and Sloterdijk’s cynics. While Addison and Steele’s readers know that the public sphere is irremediably riven by antagonisms for which neutrality and reciprocity are masks rather than alternatives, they are also called upon through the discourse of sentimentality to enact a subjective realm opposed to that violence; for Sloterdijk’s cynical subject, on the other hand, there is an absolute disjunction between knowledge and action. For Addison and Steele, in short, an ethics remains possible but affective and impotent, whereas for the Sloterdijkian cynic the category of ethics can only be another ideological ruse to be seen through. Addison and Steele’s treatment of prostitution serves as an excellent model for understanding the dialectic of pleasure and guilt in conditioning their audience’s response. Among prostitutes in the unmanageable public sphere, a gendered “we” can’t help but pleasurably satisfy “Desires which are natural to all,” while in the private sphere we prove our ethical legitimacy by lamenting the condition of those at whose expense we take pleasure.³²

We can better understand Addison and Steele’s procedure by comparing their simulated community of readers to what Slavoj Žižek has described as “solidarity-in-guilt”: their essays offer readers the double satisfaction of feeling both guilty and pleased in their engagement

with the victims, and confirmed in their own goodness by watching themselves have the proper reaction to another's suffering.³³ Žižek's guilt-based community gets created by its members' "participation in a common transgression"; in Addison and Steele, of course, this transgression involves the sentimental economy of pleasure and guilt modeled by Mr. Spectator himself in the face of social violence.³⁴ But readers' "identification with community" (through Mr. Spectator) requires not only the transgressive moment but also what Žižek calls "the fetishistic disavowal of [the] guilt" caused by the initial transgression.³⁵ Addison and Steele's most powerful example of such disavowal can be found in *Spectator* 11, which depicts Mr. Spectator's reaction to the story of the English merchant Thomas Inkle, as told by another character (Arietta) holding forth in her *salon*.

In the story, based very loosely upon a brief episode in Richard Ligon's *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657), the shipwrecked Inkle is saved by an Amerindian woman (Yarico) whom he later sells into slavery.³⁶ Upon hearing this narrative, Mr. Spectator produces "Tears" that function as "Applause," and he withdraws from Arietta's drawing-room, overwhelmed by emotion (*S*, 1:51). Steele offers no cognitive judgment, either about Inkle's economic imperatives (linked explicitly to Freeport's) or about his exploitative sexuality; rather, Mr. Spectator's sentimental impotence emblemizes the ethical position of the privatized reader framed by Addison and Steele's essays. Mr. Spectator's tears are the sign of his complicated affective engagement with the scene of colonial exploitation. In part, Mr. Spectator participates in Inkle's pleasure. Inkle begins as a surrogate for Addison and Steele's readers in that he's initially called "the European," a paradigmatic masculine subject who "was highly charmed with the Limbs, Features, and wild Graces of the Naked American" and of whom "the Indian grew immediately enamoured" (*S*, 1:50). By the end of the tale, though, Steele calls his character "Mr. Thomas Inkle," a man more concerned with what "Account he should be able to give his Friends of his Voyage" than with "the poor Girl," toward whom Mr. Spectator insists we should be "incline[d] . . . to commiserate" (*S*, 1:51). Inkle's transgressive pleasure turns into the reader's complicit guilt by the essay's conclusion. But when Mr. Spectator says that his tears can be "take[n] for" applause, he figures the recuperative turn toward self-congratulation that, for Žižek, signals the ideological basis of social and subjective consolidation. Reading *Spectator* 11 with the essays on prostitution, we begin to see the Žižekian "shared lie" that founds Addison and Steele's community: the idea that the forms of

violence that make us cry are the result of natural desires or ineluctable forces.³⁷ In Žižek's terms, Addison and Steele's naturalization of violence is itself the "ideological fantasy" that perpetuates historically-specific forms of antagonism by "structuring social reality itself."³⁸

This link between spectatorial ethics and the aestheticization of violence helps us to read the most extended treatment of neutrality in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*: Addison's essay against the politics of "furious Party Spirit" in *Spectator* 125 (S, 1:510). Addison bemoans the current "Spirit of Division" for the fact that it makes Englishmen "greater Strangers and more averse to one another than if they were actually two different Nations" (S, 1:509, 510).³⁹ Again, Addison's solution is to offer the ideal of neutrality and to exemplify that neutrality in a way that undermines its conventional definition. Addison posits the paradoxical ideal of "an honest Body of Neutral Forces"—a strategic "Association" designed for mutual support "against the Endeavours of those whom [we] ought to look upon as [our] common Enemies, whatsoever side they may belong to" (S, 1:512). This support group turns out to be a neutral army whose primary intent is to "single every Criminal out of the Herd, and hunt him down, however formidable and overgrown he might appear" (S, 1:512). Scapegoating is both necessary because of the gargantuan proportions of its objects—who are not merely grown, but "overgrown"—and justified by the literariness of our neutral heroes who, when not singling people out and hunting them down, also "shelter distressed Innocence" and "defend Virtue, however beset"; these Quixotes will complete the aesthetic redemption of sociopolitical antagonism by teaching us "not any longer [to] regard our Fellow-Subjects as Whigs and Tories" but to regard them novelistically (if not tautologically), to "make the Man of Merit our Friend, and the Villain our Enemy" (S, 1:512).⁴⁰

Neutrality underwrites the two related goals of the spectatorial project: it both conditions the ineluctability of social violence and legitimizes that violence by promoting audience identification with a spectatorial position from which we can have a proper view of our common enemies. By coming to "consider the world as a Theater," an unmanageable theater of violence whose scenes appear in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, we accede to the management of the spectatorial eye (S, 1:45). Our redemption here is aesthetic in several ways. First, the fantasy of violent social consolidation is always pitched as just that: a fantastic wish offered by Mr. Spectator, though he hardly appears to imagine its realization. Divisions within England cannot be quelled, though it may in fact become necessary to engage in some hunting down

of enemies to prevent Civil War—as if such a practice weren't itself an enactment of civil discord. But the redemption is aesthetic in a second way, to the extent that if scapegoating occurs, it can be recuperatively re-imagined as a literary event on the order of sheltering distressed innocence and defending virtue. The most ideologically efficacious aspect of the spectatorial project turns out to be its containment of readers' political judgment about public antagonisms by transforming that judgment into a matter of private aesthetic response.⁴¹

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Addison and Steele do promote the ideals of decency and politeness, benevolence and compassion, but they relocate those values from the realm of ethical and political publicness to that of affective privacy. They refuse prescriptive discussion about public matters, and they back away from regulating even the domestic sphere. Steele abstains from declaring strictures against domestic violence because, as he puts it, "Commerce in the Conjugal State is so delicate, that it is impossible to prescribe Rules for the Conduct of it" (*T*, 3:184).⁴² The ethical moment in Addison and Steele is neither public nor, in the strongest sense, intersubjective; rather, it occurs in the radically private, intra-subjective space of the spectatorial subject watching itself watching. In Addison and Steele's model of reform, changes in their audience's knowledge and behavior play a less significant role than previous scholarly work would suggest: reformed readers are asked primarily to change their mode of aesthetic reception. This receptive capacity has been mistaken as a public site (in part) because the periodicals' privatization of spectacle for individual consumption blurs the distinction between public and private.⁴³ The ruse of reader participation in the periodicals through letter-writing, along with the narrators' constant assurance that the images provided in the journal will substitute adequately for intersubjective experience, allows Addison and Steele to offer a simulated version of the materially effective publicness that their papers have been taken to both embody and promote. Again and again, Addison and Steele send readers home from coffeehouses and public assemblies to consume their periodicals in the carceral Bedlams, as Bickerstaff puts it, of their shops, closets, and breakfast nooks. By administering a simulacrum of publicness to private consumers, Addison and Steele substitute aesthetics for ethics, promoting a model of quietistic sentimentality to readers whose fantasies of engagement compensate for their neutered powerlessness.

Addison and Steele's spectatorial model of publicness forces us to rethink the Habermasian reading of early Enlightenment print culture as conversational, rational-critical, and reformist. To be sure, Habermas claims to be discussing only the period's "political self-understanding"—how the "audience-oriented subjectivity" of the early public sphere represented itself to itself—rather than the actually existing "legal institutions" of that sphere, whose theoretical principles of inclusive equality were "not realized in earnest."⁴⁴ But the archival materials strongly suggest that this public sphere's political self-understanding was internally fractured. There was, in fact, not much agreement between prominent figures in the same social class—even in a narrowly delimited historical frame like 1709–1714—about crucial questions bracketed by Habermasian analysis: to what extent and to what ends should the public sphere function as a conversation among equals? what social effect should the consumption of publicly relevant texts ideally produce? what sort of agency does the reading public have? whose public(s)? It's hard to imagine what texts Habermas had in mind when he made his influential claims. Even Daniel Defoe's acerbic Mr. Review, quintessential antitype to Mr. Spectator, abandons his would-be Habermasian commitments at the end of the *Review's* decade-long run, concluding that he can "convince nobody by words."⁴⁵ Defoe describes the English public sphere as a place where he has opposed "cool argument and calm reasoning to party rage . . . [though] the noise here is so great that no appeal to man, to reason or to conscience will reach your ears."⁴⁶ In what has become a truism about the period, Marjorie Nicolson has contrasted Defoe's "opinionated" sincerity against Addison's "remote cool sophistication."⁴⁷ For Nicolson, while Mr. Spectator "mildly shakes his powdered head" at social ills in essays written "for the joy of the contemplative man," Defoe confronts "real problems of real people in a world much too busy to worry about Italian tenors and party patches."⁴⁸ Even so, by the end of his periodical's run, Defoe capitulates to the very paradigm of publicness he abhorred: "I shall be a quiet spectator of those wretched abominable divisions that I can do no good in attempting to cure, and I shall be a silent mourner over the miseries of my country."⁴⁹

While Brian Cowan has contextualized Addison and Steele's paradigm of non-participatory publicness as part of a strategic effort to make Whigs look more polite and stable than Tories after the Sacheverell debacle of 1709 and 1710, we still have to account for why the ideal of the reader as neutral spectator emerges dominant within and persists beyond that context. The popularity of this aesthetic model

is indexed both by the reprint history of the early eighteenth-century periodical, in which *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* far outdo any of their competitors, and by the sentimental novel's projection of the affective, quietistic reader from the 1740s onward.⁵⁰ As Cowan points out, after 1714 Addison and Steele's periodical writing "abandons the spectatorial strategy" to "return to more blatant partisanism."⁵¹ I would suggest this movement marks the complementary halves of their overarching program: on the one hand, a pure politics promoting Whig economic ideology and colonialist activity, and, on the other, a more properly cultural or aesthetic project that simultaneously laments the socio-ethical effects of these economic praxes and devalues the ideal of public political action. The neutral spectator serves as a perfect model for culture-consumers in an increasingly egalitarian social scheme because the passive, anonymous, visually-oriented surrogate with no particular commitments (like Mr. Spectator) can appeal to a much wider demographic than more concretely embodied, discursive, and obviously opinionated personae like Bickerstaff or Mr. Review. Broad consumer appeal is also fostered by the minimal ethical demands of the neutral spectator—the idea that readers need not act but should merely react to social ills with aggrieved (and pleasurable) compassion. Perhaps their contemporary Bernard Mandeville best captures the essence of Addison and Steele's project with his claim that "the wary Magistrates preserve themselves" in public opinion by making people believe that "the Government is always endeavoring, tho' unable, to suppress what it actually tolerates."⁵²

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NOTES

¹ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). My critique of Habermas is informed by Neil Saccamano's "The Consolations of Ambivalence: Habermas and the Public Sphere," *MLN* 106 (1991): 685–98.

² Lawrence Klein, "Enlightenment as Conversation," in *What's Left of Enlightenment?: A Postmodern Question*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), 158. For other readings sympathetic to Habermas, see Scott Black, "Social and Literary Form in the *Spectator*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33 (1999): 21–42; and Michael Ketcham, *Transparent Designs: Reading, Performance, and Form in the Spectator Papers* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1985).

³ For Habermas's reception in Germany, see the final chapter of Peter Hohendahl's *The Institution of Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), 242–80; for a critique of Habermas on gender, see Nancy Fraser, "What's Critical about Critical Theory?" in *Feminists Read Habermas*, ed. Johanna Meehan (London: Routledge, 1995), 21–56; for recent work that complicates Habermas by recovering the role of women in eigh-

teenth-century English public culture, see *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700–1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger and others (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001); on Addison and Steele's milieu, see especially Markman Ellis's contribution to that collection, "Coffee-Women, *The Spectator*, and the Public Sphere in the Early Eighteenth Century," in which Ellis argues that coffee-house culture "was often anything but quiet, polite and business-like" (31) and that it "proposes a fractured sociability riven by significant gender difference" (33).

⁴Habermas, 28.

⁵Brian Cowan argues likewise that Addison and Steele's influential periodicals are "not so enthusiastic about the potential for public politics" but actually desire to "close off and restrain venues for public debate on political matters . . . to rein it in and discipline [such debate]" ("Mr. Spectator and the Coffeehouse Public Sphere," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37 [2004]: 345–46). Cowan reads Addison and Steele's periodical as responding to a "crisis of Whig political fortunes in the later years of Queen Anne's reign," a "specific means of reacting to the high Tory resurgence of 1709–14" (347); my point, however, is to understand the broader cultural implications of the spectatorial model of reading and publicness because of the model's persistence beyond the context of Whig party fortunes in the early 1710s.

⁶This shift is marked in the very titles of their most influential periodicals, from *The Tatler* (1709–1711) to *The Spectator*. What Steele makes clear in the final number of *The Tatler*, though, is that this move from dialogue to visibility had already taken place; thinking back on the function of the *Tatler* papers, Steele retrospectively describes the project as that of "fram[ing] . . . the least Observed into an agreeable View" (*The Tatler*, ed. and intro. George A. Aitken, 4 vols. [London: Duckworth, 1898], 4:377). Hereafter abbreviated *T* and cited parenthetically by volume and page number.

⁷Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From The Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), 10. For Eagleton, the *Spectator* papers helped create the image of a "free [and] equal" public sphere (9), which was ideological in that it served to "mystify and idealize bourgeois social relations" (26), promulgating a sense of the public's "imaginary unity with itself" (22) by "replacing rancour with reconciliation" (25).

⁸Erin Mackie, introduction to *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator*, ed. Mackie (New York: Bedford, 1998), 3, 2. See also Mackie's excellent book on Addison and Steele, *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997), where she argues, in part, that Addison and Steele manage their readers' practices of consumption in a way that reveals their own fascination with and reliance upon the fashionable, the deviant, and the transgressive.

⁹The few unequivocally positive characters one could point to in *The Spectator* turn out to be stock female figures—Aurelia (in number 15) and Statira (in number 41) are representative here—whose experiences are not narrated in any significant detail; rather, such figures are described as possessing a catalog of ostensibly positive attributes (cheerfulness, good humor, grace, and a preference for quiet retirement) that need not be exemplified because they are imagined as passive values. One exception to this formula can be found in the character of Emilia (in number 302), whose patient efforts to reclaim her wayward husband through "silent Example" are narrated over several paragraphs—not by Addison or Steele, predictably enough, but by John Hughes (*The Spectator*, ed. and intro. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985], 3:82. Hereafter abbreviated *S* and cited parenthetically by volume and page

number.). Even so, Emilia functions as a kind of cipher for female readers to emulate, not through positive agency but through silence, self-erasure, and inaction.

¹⁰ J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 235.

¹¹ Eagleton, 12.

¹² As with the issue of positive examples, the few occasions when Addison and Steele's disciplinary efforts succeed almost always involve a female figure internalizing the values of the paper's male eidolon. As Kathryn Shevelov has demonstrated, the best example of this procedure can be found in the *Tatler* papers on Jenny Distaff (Bickerstaff's half-sister), which chart her movement from assertive coquette to vigilant housewife, just as Bickerstaff would recommend to all female readers. See Shevelov's indispensable study, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London: Routledge, 1989), 116–29. I would also want to second Shevelov's contention that women in the early periodicals are “metonymic for the non-elite public” in general (36); Addison and Steele's promotion of sentimental, depoliticized reading practices is aimed at male and female readers alike, such that what I am here calling their “neutering” of audience response could easily be viewed as a kind of feminization, given the way femininity and quiet domesticity are mobilized in early eighteenth-century ideologies of gender. Even so, the specific strictures demanded of men and women in Addison and Steele's domestic ideal are by no means equal in weight or similar in aim; as Shevelov judiciously puts it, “[T]he picture of male responsibility does not contain the same prescriptive urgency as that of female duties” (126).

¹³ *OED*, 2nd ed., s.v. “neutralize,” 3a. The titles of Delarivier Manley's *Female Tatler* and Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* suggest that Mr. Spectator's gesture toward neutrality is also a way of obscuring that his own masculine position comes to seem universal or able to speak to/for both sexes.

¹⁴ See the introductory chapter of John Barrell's *English Literature in History, 1730–80: An Equal Wide Survey* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 17–50.

¹⁵ Barrell, 33, 34.

¹⁶ Steele, *The Guardian*, 2 vols. (London: Tonson, 1714), 1:6. For more on this movement in Addison's and Steele's periodical work from neutrality to more active impartiality after 1714, see Cowan. I will return to this distinction in the concluding section of this essay.

¹⁷ *OED*, 2nd ed., s.v. “neuter,” 2a.

¹⁸ Steele's aesthetic theory here relies on a psychologically effective mechanism governed by simile—similitude, identification, and substitution through the recognition of another as oneself—for the production of interpellative moments in his dramatic scenes.

¹⁹ To be sure, activity and passivity are intermingled in Steele's formula in that the typical aristocratic drama still does the “exercis[ing]” of our minds, whose “Powers” are his sentence's direct object. At the same time, aristocratic drama is imagined as the object upon which our powers are exercised, while bourgeois drama will “create” us anew.

²⁰ *OED*, 2nd ed., s.v. “neutralize,” 3a.

²¹ For a detailed account of how post-Restoration periodicals promulgate the ideal of a masculinity that “(re)forms itself through the process of reforming women,” thereby establishing private domesticity as “an important locus of masculine control,” see Shawn Lisa Maurer, *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 4, 3. As the example of Eu-

stage implies, the construction of gender norms in Addison and Steele takes place (as Maurer points out) not only through “illustrations of men and women who exemplified these gendered ideals” but also through “portrayals of failure”—depictions of men and women who fail to adhere to gendered standards of propriety (19).

²² Addison’s two injunctions to the upholsterer—run your shop efficiently but don’t seek out news for yourself—are at least mildly contradictory since one of the earliest functions of print culture was to provide merchants, investors, and goods-transporters with the accurate information (political, infrastructural, agricultural, and so forth) necessary to their economic strategies. For more on this issue, see Habermas, 14–26.

²³ Steele often views the husband-wife dyad as a subset of the master-servant category—thus the significant overlap in his advice to the two different social sets.

²⁴ The spectatorial ethos outlined here bears significant comparison with the moral philosophy of Shaftesbury, Addison and Steele’s contemporary, in whose work there is an equally remarkable tension between the idea of ethics as mere aesthetic bearing—see his claim that virtue “consists in a certain just disposition or proportionable affection of a rational creature towards the moral objects of right and wrong”—and ethics as a praxis whereby we make ourselves “useful to others” and “prosecute the public good” (Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit*, in his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times*, ed. Philip Ayers, 2 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1999], 208, 196, 225).

²⁵ These details trouble Pocock’s claim that Addison achieves a “reconciliation of [England’s] diverse ‘interests’” (236). See also Pocock, 235–38.

²⁶ See, in particular, Laura Brown on Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* and *Windsor-Forest* in the first chapter of her *Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 6–45.

²⁷ This point complicates Eagleton’s reading of the link between interest and the public sphere in Addison and Steele. Eagleton writes that for Addison and Steele “[i]t is not . . . that the public sphere exists for the direct discussion of [economic] interests; on the contrary, such interests become its very concealed problematic, the very enabling structure of disinterested inquiry” (16). Addison and Steele highlight, rather than conceal, the irremediability of interested conflict, as a way of de-legitimizing the notion of disinterestedness.

²⁸ Mr. Spectator’s unilateral economy of advantages and privileges gets staged in another of his country analogies, when he explains that the spectator’s visual field is like “a great Field of Game for Sportsmen,” in which one “start[s] several Subjects, and hunt[s] them down” (*Spectator*, 2:19). Mr. Spectator eats without being eaten.

²⁹ Our commercialized others, whose labor produces the commodities we enjoy, are eaten or incorporated by the fetishizing grammar of trade narrative. Earlier in the essay, Addison’s famous description of how “the single Dress of a Woman of Quality is often the Product of an hundred Climates” displaces labor into climate; moreover, the components of the dress appear rather magically in England, without the effort of any particular agent (*Spectator*, 1:295).

³⁰ Women bear the brunt of the sympathetic burden in Addison and Steele; female victims in scenes of prostitution, domestic violence, and colonial exploitation often provide a nexus for a community of spectators sharing the proper reaction to others’ suffering.

³¹ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. M. Eldred (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987).

³² Though the publicly active “we” here is obviously gendered, both sexes are invited to have a proper reaction to male licentiousness; the judgment about the conduct is universalizable, even if the conduct itself is not.

³³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment* (London: Verso, 1994), 58.

³⁴ Žižek, *Metastases*, 55.

³⁵ Žižek, *Metastases*, 57.

³⁶ For the sections of Ligon's text upon which Steele based his essay, see Frank Felsenstein's critical edition of the Inkle and Yarico material (*English Trader, Indian Maid: Representing Gender, Race, and Slavery in the New World* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999], 55–80).

³⁷ Žižek, *Metastases*, 59. My analysis diverges from Žižek's to the extent that his earlier work hypostatizes the idea of a radical or fundamental antagonism inevitably structuring the social field (see Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* [London: Verso, 1989], "Introduction," 1–7). For more on constitutive antagonism, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985) and Mouffe's more recent argument for a politics of ineradicable contestation in *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000). While I am sympathetic to their theoretical resistance to the possibility of a "final resolution of conflicts," I would not want these writers' agonistic political ontology to naturalize or to obscure the interested contingency of particular, material, historically-specific forms of violence and exploitation (Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 32).

³⁸ Žižek, *Metastases*, 33.

³⁹ If the historical context of Addison's remarks weren't clear enough, he claims that when such division "rages in its full Violence," it "exerts itself in Civil War and Blood-shed" (*Spectator*, 1:510).

⁴⁰ The literariness of the figures in this particular essay is consonant with Steele's descriptions of Inkle from *Spectator* 11, who is "the Hero of [the] Story," a man with "a Person in every way agreeable, a ruddy Vigour in his Countenance, Strength in his Limbs, [and] Ringlets of fair Hair loosely flowing on his Shoulders" (*Spectator*, 1:50).

⁴¹ This reading gives a sinister twist to Pocock's notion that the "sociable role" of Addison and Steele's techniques of observation "is more important than any role [they] could play as politically engaged activist[s]" (237).

⁴² Bickerstaff makes a more sweeping claim to this effect in *Tatler* 61: "[T]he greatest Evils in Human Society are such as no Law can come at [them]" (2:83).

⁴³ See Tetra Osell's contention that "essay periodical eidolons model and maintain a version of the public sphere that deliberately blurs the lines between text and reality" ("Tatling Women in the Public Sphere: Rhetorical Femininity and the English Essay Periodical," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38 [2005]: 285).

⁴⁴ Habermas, 29, 36.

⁴⁵ Daniel Defoe, *The Best of Defoe's Review: An Anthology*, ed. William L. Payne, intro. Marjorie Nicolson (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1951), 68.

⁴⁶ Defoe, 66.

⁴⁷ Nicolson, introduction to *The Best of Defoe's Review*, xx.

⁴⁸ Nicolson, xix, xx, xviii.

⁴⁹ Defoe, 67.

⁵⁰ See Bond's claim that "no single collection of eighteenth-century prose has been oftener reprinted than the *Spectator*, at least during its own century and the nineteenth" (introduction to *Spectator*, 1:v).

⁵¹ Cowan, 359. Though Addison and Steele's later periodicals—especially *The Guardian* (1713) and *The Freeholder* (1715–1716)—are more explicitly Whig in orientation than *The Spectator*, they are continuous with the earlier works in their consistent

devaluation of debate and public political action among their readership. This ongoing promotion of quietism is particularly noticeable in Addison's *Freeholder* papers; in the wake of Whig victories at the polls in 1715, due in large part to growing fears of a Jacobite rebellion, Addison ironically uses strategies similar to earlier Tory rhetorics of passive obedience, non-resistance, and church vulnerability to consolidate Whig power under George I. As James Leheny argues, Addison's *Freeholder* promotes reactionary policies (the suspension of habeas corpus, the impeachment of disagreeable Lords, and the extension of Whig authority through the Septennial Act) by "exploit[ing] the political potential of [the *Spectator*'s] moral and philosophical stances," offering up "abstract essays on political issues like loyalty [that] appealed to the rationality of readers, flattered their intelligence, and . . . created at least an illusion of magnanimity" (introduction to Addison, *The Freeholder* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1979], 27).

⁵² Bernard Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, ed. F. B. Kaye, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), 1:98.