

The Moment of Transition:
Plasticity in Ralph Waldo Emerson's Writings

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used for frequently cited works. Citations are given by volume number and page.

- CW* *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Alfred R. Ferguson et al, Harvard UP, 1971–2013, 10 vols.
- EL* *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Stephen E. Whicher, Robert E. Spiller, and Wallace E. Williams. 3 Vols. Harvard UP, 1961.
- JMN* *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by William H. Gilman, et al, Harvard UP, 1960–82, 16 vols.
- L* *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 10 vols. Edited by Ralph L. Rusk and Eleanor M. Tilton. Columbia UP, 1939, 1990-1995.
- TN* *The Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Ralph H. Orth, et al. U of Missouri P, 1990-94, 3 vols.
- W* *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Concord Edition. Mifflin, 1903–04, 12 vols.
- A Week* *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. Princeton UP, 1980.
- PJ* *Journal*. Vol 3. Edited by John C. Broderick et al, Princeton UP, 1990.

Introduction

Plasticity and Emersonian Transcendentalism

Life only avails, not the having lived. Power ceases in the instant repose; it resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state, in the shooting of the gulf, in the darting to an aim.

——Ralph Waldo Emerson “Self-Reliance”

Is there any coherence across the diverse texts of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82)? If a consistent system or model defines his thinking, what does it look like? This dissertation reconsiders this theme, which has been often discussed in previous studies, with a particular focus on the concept of “plasticity.” Based on this concept, which deconstructs the opposition between rigidity and flexibility, this dissertation attempts to detect neither the absence nor a complete model of the system in Emerson’s texts; instead, it seeks to illuminate a plastic system that is situated in between the two, and that is constantly transforming. Thus, this dissertation tries to shed a new light on Emerson’s works in following and reevaluating “the moments of transition” in Emerson’s literary track, which is analogous to a “zigzag line of a hundred tacks” (*CW* II 34),¹ or a series of “circles.” Such an approach reveals that Emerson’s thought consistently involves the expression of an idea characterized by his singular “poetics of distance” that aims not to transcend human limits and reach the realm of the ideal, but to continue to converse and transform in the realm of experience.

¹ See the section of Abbreviations regarding the citations from the texts of Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

Emerson's loathing of consistency and his constantly changing ideas have long been debated, and they are symbolized in the following lines in the essay "Self-Reliance" (1841): "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesman and philosophers and divines" (*CW* II 33). Critics like George Santayana, for example, who argues for the absence of an inherent system in Emerson's thought in contrast to that of the German Romantics who influenced him ("Emerson" 300). Harold Bloom also criticizes the ambiguity found in Emerson's writings by using metaphors such as a fog and mist ("Mr. America" 502). In *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (1982), Bloom contends that Emerson's "post-apocalyptic or Gnostic realization" transcends Hegel's "irony at another's apocalyptic egocentricity" (146), further arguing that "he [Emerson] is our rhetoric as he is our Gnosis, and I take it that his sly evasion of both Hegel and Hume deprived us of our philosophy" (178). In *Emerson's Epistemology: The Argument of the Essays* (1986), David Van Leer, who had earlier attempted to assign a high value to Emerson as a serious philosopher, also digests Emerson's philosophy as "unsystematic epistemology" (14). Taking the arguments of Bloom and Van Leer into account, in *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (1989), Cornell West emphasizes that "Emerson's alternative to modern philosophy was neither to replace it with a new philosophical problematic nor to deny it by means of a strict and severe skepticism. Rather he *evades* modern philosophy" (36; emphasis original). Many other scholars have attacked the inconsistency in Emerson's texts and ideas connected with his optimism.

In contrast to this position, there is a long tradition of studies interpreting Emerson's contradictory thought as a kind of linearly developing, coherent, and complete system similar in kind to G. W. F. Hegel's dialectic. For instance, R.A. Yoder, in "Emerson's Dialectic" (1969), describes the evolution of Emerson's thought in

chronological order from *Essays: First Series* (1841) to *The Conduct of Life* (1860), and even traces it as a dialectical development to the lectures of his final years. Emerson's seemingly obscure thought was also closely related to the zeitgeist of the mid-nineteenth century, which F. O. Matthiessen once called "the age of Hegel" (54).² Several subsequent studies linked to Marxist criticism and New Historicism have positioned Emerson's thought as a dialectical and linear process of development. In *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner* (1981), Carolyn Porter, relying on Georg Lukács's theory of reification, asserts that the method, which Emerson found in *Nature* (1836), was against systems that reify and alienate humans, and that this line of thought survived and developed into later essays such as "Circles" (1841) and "Fate" (1860).

This method, which emphasizes the position of the observer's eye in control and possession of nature and using the instrumental and use-value of nature as a means of defiance against alienation, can also be seen in Michael T. Gilmore's argument. In *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (1985), Gilmore points out this tendency in Emerson's essays as a consistent element from the early *Nature* to the late "Wealth" (1860). According to Gilmore, "Disavowing, on the one hand, the commercial outlook of the times, Emerson, on the other, purifies and sanctions an aggressive, 'capitalistic' ethos of mastery over nature" (30). In *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (1988), David S. Reynolds "discover[s] a repeated dialectic of subversive dismissal of revered social norms followed by affirmations of self-reliance, aesthetic perception, and the symbolic imagination" (95) in Emerson's major essays. Referring to the contrast between what

² Matthiessen indicates that Emerson was attracted to the Hegelian type of progress although he read Hegel much later than in the formative years of his thought (54).

he calls “the Conventional” and “the Subversive,” Reynolds epitomizes the essay “Compensation” (1841) as “a continual process of opposition and renewal, of subversion and reconstruction” (96), and summarizes the image of the reformer in Emerson’s lecture “Man the Reformer” (1841): “man as reformer must not only be subversive . . . but also reconstructive” (97).

Relatedly, in *The Emerson Effect: Individualism and Submission in America* (1996), Christopher Newfield encapsulates Emerson’s method as a three-step process. In the first step, Emerson rebels against rigid institutions and conventions at the same time that he calls on readers and audiences to develop their inner beings to do so. As a radical liberal, Emerson’s second step redefines self-trust as something that can only be achieved in relation to society and its surroundings. The Emersonian self-reliance that is re-established from the loss of stable institutional and customary foundations is not a simple form of possessive individualism, self-ownership, or autonomy. Rather, it is said to be “a complex relation to actually existing society.” However, in the third move, Emerson locates the source of insight or genius that he finds in this relationship with his surroundings in what he calls “transcendental destiny.” Through “accepting” and “obeying” the transcendent law often associated with reason and God, Emerson again reestablishes himself as a solid self, transcending his ordinary relationship with the world around him. Newfield sees this three-step process through which defiance turns into obedience as problematic because it appears repeatedly in Emerson’s account (22–23). Drawing on the argument of Raymond Williams, he asserts that “[Emerson’s] individualism defines freedom as submission to unmodifiable law” (7), and criticizes “his frequently unconscious—and all the more influential—structure of feeling toward

democratic authority” (12), the influence from Emerson, and the impact of his texts on the surroundings.³

Both Porter’s and Gilmore’s criticisms, or the limitations of Emerson that they point out, can be seen as being directed at this third step that Newfield points to and the consequences that derive from it. As these previous studies show, from both a biographical and a New Historicist perspective, it is evident that there were elements in Emerson’s works and in himself that were clearly linked to the third process.⁴ This dissertation, however, does not subscribe to the third step, but exaggerates the one “creative reading” that Emerson emphasized in “The American Scholar” (1837). Instead of focusing on Newfield’s third step, this dissertation rereads Emerson’s method not as an attempt to affirm the self, reason, and soul as solid and unchanging, nor as a dismissal of them as mere illusion, but instead as an alternative way of understanding the self based on an acknowledgment of the ambiguity and ephemerality of such perceptions. How can one avoid anchoring relationships that engage with possession and violence, such as domination and subjugation? To address this problem, we need to examine another genealogy of Emerson studies.

1. The Puritan Origin of the Emersonian Self

There is a long history of research that discusses Emerson’s vision in relation to the traditions of Puritanism and Unitarianism in New England. Perry Miller discusses

³ This critique by Newfield, which engages with the second and third steps, will be dealt with in Chapter 5, which examines Emerson’s spatial representations and domesticity, and the Conclusion, which reconsiders his Americanism.

⁴ In addition, there has already been much discussion about the recognition that the beliefs associated with the reestablished self, idealism, and reason are nothing more than illusion. For example, Barbara L. Packer discusses Emerson’s religious views and skepticism in *Emerson’s Fall* (1982). Michael J Colacurcio, in light of Packer’s discussion, provides a deeper analysis of the themes of idealism and illusion in “Religion and the Lonely Subject: A Note on Emerson’s Idealism” (2011) mainly by referring to the late essay “Illusion” (1860).

the ambiguity of the word “errand” used by Puritans in *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956). In *The American Jeremiad* (1978), Sacvan Bercovitch summarizes Miller’s argument as implying “the dichotomy of fact and rhetoric” (10), and then emphasizes “the dualism” established between the two in opposition. This revision between “fact and rhetoric” allows Bercovitch to redefine American literary history since the Puritan theocracy according to the concept of a “typology” and the idea of a *figura* proposed by Erich Auerbach.

Auerbach finds a model of figure-fulfillment in a typology to be the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. On the one hand, he points to the Old Testament symbols as a *figura* or types and defines them as signifying figurative providence. On the other hand, he finds an account in the New Testament that fulfills and agrees with the providence that appeared as an antitype in the Old Testament. In *Mimesis* (1953), Auerbach extends this figurative causality to the whole of nineteenth century European literature. As summarized by Haydon White, *Mimesis* describes the history of Western literature “as a story of the fulfillment of the figure of figurality” (White 88). That is to say, “later events in the history of literature are to be viewed, in Auerbachian terms, as fulfillments of earlier ones” (90). It is significant to note here that this model has a principle of design distinct from the linearly developing system that is evident in Hegelian dialectics. White continues, “[t]he later events are not caused by the earlier ones, certainly are not determined by them. Nor are the later events predictable on any ground of teleology as realizations of earlier potentialities” (91). To put it simply, for Auerbach, “[t]he later figure fulfills the earlier by repeating the elements thereof, *but with a difference*” (91; emphasis added).

Highly inspired by this earlier study of Auerbach, Bercovitch develops his own theory that redefines American literary history as a process of the fulfillment of such a

figure. Attentive to dualism and the relationship between hope and despair, he discusses the differences and continuity of rhetoric throughout American literary history. Rhetoric has always had some influence on history and vice versa. In particular, when paying attention to rhetoric in Emerson's works, Bercovitch focuses on the interconnectedness of ancestor worship and individualism. In *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975), Bercovitch shows that Emerson's thought had its origins in both Puritanism and Romanticism. Following the argument of Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1975), he sees in Emerson a tendency toward "perfection" that the English Romantics did not have in his desire to take over and fulfill the mission of their predecessors without suffering "the anxiety of influence" from them. Bercovitch claims: "Intermediary between the Transcendentalis and the Oversoul was the text of America, simultaneously an external model of perfection and a product of the symbolic imagination, and in either aspect a guarantee that intermediary *American* identity bypassed the contradictions inherent in the effort at self-completion" (165; emphasis original). He also situates Emerson's vision in relation to the rhetoric of early New England and the model of the *figura*:

What I would suggest is that he [Emerson] adjusts these to the tenets of early New England rhetoric. Characteristically, the self he sought was not only his but America's, or rather his *as* America's, and therefore America's as his. He undertook a figural trial of the center that led ineluctably toward a social *telos*, since what he meant by "social" (as America) was defined by *figura*, in contradistinction to historical fact, and the nature of figural completion was for Emerson a matter of prophetic self-expression. (165; emphasis original)

According to Bercovitch here, an exact line cannot be drawn between Emerson's self and America's self. Namely, the figure-fulfillment leads inexorably to a social (i.e., American) purpose defined by *figura*, and at the same time, the nature of such fulfillment is said to be, for Emerson, oriented toward a "prophetic self-expression." Bercovitch also points out that Emerson's process of perfection and fulfillment is under the profound influence of the Founding Fathers and early Puritans as a figure and type: "Emerson was obviously speaking of fathers and Puritans not in any historical sense, but as aspects of the American idea as this made itself manifest in his thought. Like [Cotton] Mather's, his filiopietism is a self-celebratory summons to the future" (167). Referring to the early study of Stephen Whicher, Bercovitch relates this "prophetic self-expression" and the "self-celebratory summons" to Emerson's optimism. He asserts that "Emerson chanted the representative self—a 'dualism' that excludes the alien or unknown—personal and national identity twined in the bipolar unity of auto-American-biography" (179). According to Bercovitch, "dualism" and "the bipolar unity" in Emerson are closely connected to his optimism that Whicher once emphasized and function in the process of "perfection" toward a social *telos*.

In *American Jeremiad*, Bercovitch analyzes Emerson's dualism from the other point of view, as a "jeremiad," which is a speech or literary work expressing a bitter lament originating from the Old Testament. He states that "[n]o one made larger claims for the individual than Emerson did, no one more virulently denounced corruption in America, and no one more passionately upheld the metaphysics of the American system" (182), and epitomizes Emerson's career that "exemplifies the possibilities and constrictions of the nineteenth century jeremiad" (182). Emerson's reliance on the possibilities of future reformation and "the metaphysics of American system" always entails harsh denouncement. Bercovitch suggests that Emerson's process of

magnification carried “a dangerous correlative: if America failed, then the cosmos itself—the laws of man, nature, and history, the very ground of heroism, insight, and hope—had failed as well” (190). He refers to this “dangerous correlative” as “the anti-jeremiad” (191). In short, for Bercovitch, Emerson’s jeremiad can be summed up as a future-oriented lament that always has a dualistic aspect in the potential to turn into the anti-jeremiad.⁵

2. Emersonian Antifoundationalism

Similar to Bercovitch, Stanley Cavell also reads a future-oriented strategy and the aspect of perfection in Emerson’s writings. However, the gist of his argument is clearly different from the early studies like Whicher’s, which attack Emerson’s lack of the tragic sense and interpret his model of the self as independent, solid, anti-social, and even imperialistic. Instead, in “Thinking of Emerson” (1979), Cavell takes up the idea of “abandonment, leaving” rather than “inhabitation and settlement” as Emerson’s characteristic motif (*Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes* 19), and later in “Hope against Hope” (1986), Cavell explains: “he [Emerson] writes in such a way as to *place* his writing in his unending argument . . . an unending turning away from one another, but for that exact reason a constant keeping in mind of one another, hence endlessly a turning *toward* one another” (181; emphasis original). Reinterpreting the link between Emerson’s writing activities and society not as a fixed relation, but as the process of an “unending argument,” an “unending turning away,” and “a turning toward one another,” he grasps Emerson’s “aversion,” a concept resonant with Bercovitch’s “jeremiad” and “dissent,” not as an anti-social and self-centered idea, but in the context of a relationship

⁵ In his next book *The Rites of Assent* (1992), Bercovitch takes on and develops this concept of the “jeremiad” into the concept of “dissent” implied by a utopian vision. For more details on this book, see Chapter 1 and the Conclusion.

in which the self and society mutually provide opportunities for change. With Cavell's observation as a starting point for discussion, the passivity of Emerson's self and its flexibility to transform have attracted a lot of interest from scholars throughout past few decades.⁶

The model of thinking Cavell found in Emerson is of a nature that contrasts with the tendency of research to find in Emerson a linear developmental process, one that is almost Hegelian, that is closely related to US expansionism and Manifest Destiny, which continues to dominate, subjugate, and expand nature and our surroundings. At the same time, however, Cavell's model can also be partly interpreted as a process similar to the one encompassing the steps offered by Newfield in light of Cavell's argument. For the first step, which emphasizes aversion, Cavell's reading is almost identical to Newfield's. However, Cavell differs from Newfield in that he emphasizes the moment of epiphany and the thoroughgoing passivity that awaits the call from genius in the second step. Further, contrary to the third step, which exhibits the inclination to fix the fluidity of the self and extend it, Cavell advocates the aspect of abandonment. This study likewise tries to read an element into Emerson's perfectionism that allows for the completion of the system and the fixation of relationships to be avoided, which relates to Cavell's concept of abandonment rather than Newfield's third process or the perfection linked to a social *telos* as emphasized by Bercovitch.

Cavell frequently takes up the description that seemingly resonates with the westward movement in "Experience" (1844): "I am ready to die out of nature and be

⁶ To name but a few, there is Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (1987); Cameron, *Impersonality: Seven Essays* (2007); Lysaker, *Emerson and Self-Culture* (2008); Arsić, *On Leaving: A Reading in Emerson* (2010); and Horiuchi, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: From Self to The World* (2017). For more details on this trend of studies on Emerson's self, see Chapter 2.

born again into this new yet unapproachable America I have found in the West” (*CW* III 41). Above all, Cavell finds an emergence of an “unattained but attainable self” (*CW* II 5), a phrase Emerson wrote in the essay “History” (1841), in the line “this new yet unapproachable America.” These tropes symbolize what Cavell calls Emersonian moral perfectionism. In Naoko Saito’s view, Emersonian moral perfectionism “has three main characteristics: (1) perfection as perfecting with no fixed ends; (2) as a distinctively American democratic ideal; and (3) with significant implications for education emphasizing conversation and friendship” (Saito 53). As she also points out, in Emerson’s moral perfectionism, “*each* state of the self is, so to speak, final” (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 3; emphasis original), and “[t]he self is always attained, as well as *to be* attained” (12; emphasis original).⁷ Cavell does not read Emerson as saying that “there is one unattained/attainable self we repeatedly never arrive at, but rather that ‘having’ ‘a’ self is a process of moving to, and from, nexts” (12). He also insists that “Emerson’s word for it is taking steps, say walking, a kind of success(ion), in which the direction is not up but on, and in which the goal is decided not by anything picturable as the sun, by nothing beyond the way of the journey itself” (10).

As Saito stresses, this Cavellian type of perfection is not given by theology or moral precepts, as Bercovitch argues. Rather, it is secular and naturalistic, firmly rooted in a natural sense of shame and the pursuit of happiness as a driving force (Saito 91–92). This “sense of shame,” which has been brought to the attention of Masaki Horiuchi and others in recent years, is expressed, for example, in a call to audiences in “The American Scholar” in relation to their antipathy to the corrupt state of American society at the time. Contrary to the interpretation of Bercovitch, Whicher, and others who see

⁷ The possibilities and the problems implied by this reading by Cavell will be discussed again in the Conclusion.

Emerson's critique of the present depravity and his optimistic celebration of the coming future, or the ideal of the New World, Cavell sees in Emerson an unwillingness to let go of his sense of shame for remaining in the dismal state of democracy in the present rather than the future, a situation Emerson detested and called "conformity."

Cavell further emphasizes the "importance of conversation and friendship," which Saito also underlines, and that the recognition of "my accomplished completion (or following)" always requires "the recognition of the other—the recognition of the relationship": "Emerson's turn is to make my partiality itself the sign and incentive of my siding with the next or further self, which means siding against my attained perfection (or conformity), sidings which require the recognition of an other—the acknowledgment of a relationship—in which this sign is manifest" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 31). This reading of Cavell, which emphasizes the presence of friends and others, develops in a way that does not surrender to the idea of Emerson as an individualist, as the following quote shows:

The point of contesting the Kantian task is presumably to be taken in the face of its present failure, or parody, its reduction to conformity. In picking up its standard—and transfiguring it—Emerson finds the intelligible world, the realm of ends, closed to us as a standpoint from which to view ourselves individually (our relation to the law no longer has *this* power for us). But at the same time he shows the intelligible world to be entered into whenever another represents for us our rejected self, our beyond; causes that aversion to ourselves in our conformity that will constitute our becoming, as it were, ashamed of our shame. (58; emphasis original)

The friend invites us to "our beyond" by evoking a sense of shame, an "aversion to ourselves in our conformity." Friendship is a relationship characterized by

enlightenment and awakening, and for Cavell and Emerson, the perfection of the self always requires the presence of friends and a process of education that is closely tied to them, as Cavell also states: “As representatives we are educators for one another” (31). Through the mutual education of friends, Emerson critiques a society that tends to “conform,” while at the same time opening up his ideas to a small-scale society composed of friends. Moreover, it is crucial to note here that Cavell seems to emphasize the element of “transfiguring,” in opposition to Bercovitch, who adopts the model of figure-fulfillment. In contrast to Bercovitch’s method via Auerbach, which moves toward the social *telos* and the fulfillment of an ideal figure in a high place, Cavell’s Emerson does not have any fixed purpose but instead transfigures and transforms the purpose and self. Along with the friends who accompany him, Emerson continues to find, moment by moment, a provisional completion of an “unattained but attainable self.”

This idea, devoid of fixed goals, targets, and stable foundations,⁸ is called antifoundationalism. To be sure, there are fiercely differing views on the abstractness of Emersonian antifoundationalism.⁹ However, some critics place Emerson as the

⁸ The tendency to interpret the link between Emerson’s expanded self and God or reason, especially prominent in early *Nature*, as a “foundation” that can also be fixedly tied to his later work, is one of the common features of the aforementioned research conducted by those such as Bercovitch and New Historicists.

⁹ For example, while Bercovitch in *The Rites of Assent* (1993) values such abstractness for the limited time period, John Carlos Rowe points out that it is this abstractness that sometimes justifies exceptionalism, and that an aspect of Emerson’s appeal to Higher laws can lead to the neglect of women and slaves. Drawing from an earlier study of Eric Sandquist, Lowe reinterprets history in a way that is more conscious of the African American experience by focusing on concreteness. He also points out that Emerson’s abstract and aesthetic ideology, which Bercovitch emphasizes, may work as an endorsement rather than a critique of the social power of the subject. In his view, what can be found in Emerson’s liberal dissent is not a powerful paradox, but a fundamental contradiction. He contends that Emerson fails to distinguish between the bipolarity that has long been essential to American cultural self-definition—a contradiction that at times empowers one person and at other times reverses into a disempowering contradiction—and that in this sense, there is also a negative aspect to the “Emersonian legacy” (40–41). More recently, Jenine Abboushi Dallal has attacked it for its danger of being associated with expansionism. For more details, see also Chapter 1.

forerunner of pragmatists and other influential philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche. For instance, West insists that Emerson “ingeniously and skillfully refuses: (1) its [modern philosophy’s] quest for certainty and its hope for professional, i.e., scientific, respectability; (2) its search for foundations” (36) in his evasion of modern philosophy, and argues that Emerson’s “distinctly American refusal is the crucible from which emerge the sensibilities and sentiments of future American Pragmatists” (36). More specifically, in *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (1987), Richard Poirier also rereads Emerson as the harbinger of American pragmatists, in particular William James. David M. Robinson in *Emerson and the Conduct of Life: Pragmatism and Ethical Purpose in the Later Work* (1993) lays emphasis on Emerson’s shift from mystic to pragmatist chiefly dealing with his later works. Saito reconsiders Emerson’s influence on John Dewey in *The Gleam of Light: Moral Perfectionism and Education in Dewey and Emerson* (2005). Further, as Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, who has recently discussed the history of Nietzsche’s reception in America via Emerson in *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (2011), shrewdly points out, the rejection of the foundations and systems for Europe was likened to “the loss of ground” which had once existed. In contrast, it can be said that the rejection was for America and Emerson “a loss of something never there, an edifice he never had,” namely “the absence of grounds” (302). She succinctly points out that “a mode of life exacts a knowledge. In Emerson, antifoundationalism is the American way of life. Emersonian antifoundationalism is not a theory, it is a way of thinking and living in a world without foundations” (302). Based on Ratner-Rosenhagen’s argument, Emerson and Cavell’s antifoundationalism, which at first glance appears to be a mere abstraction, is at the same time a uniquely American idea, and moreover, as Bercovitch also suggests,

these ideas have a connection to the kind of concrete geographical imagination that is specific to the land of Boston and New England.

Thus, in the genealogy of recent research histories, starting with Cavell, there seems to have been an exaggerated emphasis on images of fluidity and flexibility, particularly in resisting “foundations” and fixations. Nevertheless, as this study will confirm in each chapter, Emerson at times exposed himself to the influences of his surroundings and actively embraced changes, while at other times, he sought to thoroughly separate himself from his surroundings. Accordingly, we relocate the ambivalence of Emerson as neither rigid nor flexible, but rather in the middle and of a plastic character. In other words, this dissertation emphasizes the “plasticity” in Emerson’s ambivalent writings.

3. The Future of Emerson: Emerson and Plasticity

The concept of “plasticity,” which appeared in French and German on the cusp of the nineteenth century, was invented by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,¹⁰ who had a major impact on Emerson. It was then introduced as a concept in the work of Hegel (Dalton, “What Should We Do with Plasticity” 245), and is frequently used by Romantic writers. Emerson probably also encountered the word in the works of Romantic novelists as represented by Goethe. Specifically, Emerson uses the exact word “plasticity” once in his topical notebook in 1866:

The plasticity of the tough old planet is wonderful. As the walls of a modern house are pierced with waterpipes, sound-pipes, gaspipes & heatpipes, so

¹⁰ For further details of the relation between Goethe and the plasticity, see also Chapter 1 and Nassar, “Sensibility and Organic Unity: Kant, Goethe, and the Plasticity of Cognition” (2015).

the geography & geology are beginning to yield to man's power & convenience. Everything has grown ductile. The very Constitution is amended & is construed in a new spirit. Things once not possible are probable now. Women dispose of their own property. Women will vote. Women lecture, preach, are physicians, artists. (*TN* III 272–73)

In this fragment, Emerson first praises “the plasticity of the tough old planet.” Then, his object spreads to everything: “Everything has grown ductile.” Then, “[t]he very Constitution” and even “women” are associated with the plasticity. This interest in plasticity is not limited to his later years; it can also be found in Emerson’s other phrases from early works like *Nature* (1836), where he refers to “the plastic power of the human eye” (*CW* I 12).¹¹ Perhaps these tropes reflecting Emerson’s distinction between “ME” and “NOT ME” (*CW* I 8) do not target the male subject, including Emerson himself. He may see the plasticity only in NOT ME, such as “the tough old planet,” the “Constitution,” “women,” and the object of his gaze. Nonetheless, this study rereads his texts in an exaggerated way from the viewpoint of plasticity and explores the potential to transfigure the self in his rhetoric.

The French philosopher Catherine Malabou has elaborated on the concept of “plasticity” in the context of modern western philosophy, mainly from Hegel to Jacques Derrida, the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and others, and recent developments in neuroscience. She states: “According to its etymology—from the Greek *plassein*

¹¹ Significantly, in addition to the aforementioned notes, Emerson uses the adjective “plastic,” although not the noun form “plasticity,” a total of fifteen times in the essays and lectures compiled in the series of *Collected Works*, except for five instances of “plastic arts,” which refer to sculptural art. In addition, one can find examples of the use of the term around “plasticity” in research that focuses on the Hegelian aspects of Emerson. For example, see Porter: “In ‘Circles,’ *the fluid plasticity* of an active reality has begun itself to be reified and set against the resisting power of people who wish to be settled” (110; emphasis added), and Gilmore’s comment on *Nature*: “*The malleability of nature . . .* is a commonplace of Romantic thought. In the context established by Emerson, however, the poet’s song is a mimicry of the capitalist spirit it otherwise condemns” (29; emphasis added).

meaning to mold—the word *plasticity* has two basic senses: it means at once the capacity to *receive form* (clay is called ‘plastic,’ for example) and the capacity to *give form* (as in the plastic arts or in plastic surgery)” (*What Should We Do with Our Brain?* 5; emphasis original). Malabou holds the plasticity of the brain to be “as something modifiable, ‘formable,’ and formative at the same time” (5). Besides, it is significant for her that “plasticity is also the capacity to annihilate the very form it is able to receive or create” (5). This concept, which is “situated between two extremes: on the one side the sensible image of taking form. . . , and on the other side that of the annihilation of all form” (5) enables her to consider the mode of self-formation that transcends the binary between rigidity and flexibility. Malabou first develops plasticity as a concept in her analysis of the philosophy of Hegel, whose use of the concept has been noted for its similarities with Emerson’s, especially by focusing on the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817) in *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (1996; 2005). In this book, Malabou draws attention to Hegel’s “plasticity” used in a relatively discreet manner and actively rereads the concept from a fresh point of view.

Malabou makes two perceptive comments in the context of this dissertation. First, she views dialectical sublation as not a pre-fixed and coagulated process, but a dynamic one in which Hegelian *Aufhebung* also transforms itself. Next, she asserts that “if we look at Hegel’s philosophical lexicon, there are many words that designate such a ‘self-release’. Thus we can thematize in Hegel’s work a motif of speculative abrogation or letting-go (*dessaisissement*)” (156; emphasis original). This abrogation “seems at first to present a term opposite in meaning to ‘sublation.’ However, contrary to what one would initially imagine, these two processes of sublation and abrogation are completely interdependent” (156). In other words, “[s]peculative abrogation, in no way alien to the

process of the *Aufhebung*, is indeed its fulfillment. Abrogation is a sublation of sublation . . . , the result of the *Aufhebung* 's work on itself and, as such, its transformation" (156; emphasis original).

Through this dual movement of "abrogation" or "letting-go" and "sublation," which clearly resonates with Auerbach's and Bercovitch's "figure-fulfillment," Cavell's "abandonment," "the 'I think' and the objective determinatenesses renounce the fixity and independence of their positions" (165). Malabou continues, from this movement, by suggesting that "[f]orce, previously contained within the strict limits imposed by a transcendental perspective, which the gap between subject and object particularly sustains, now breaks away from these bonds and becomes free for other combinations and other syntheses" (165). According to Malabou, Hegel shows that "the teleological structure ends by reversing its course, in that the forms already actualized discharge their potential energy and consequently liberate future possibilities of actualization" (166). In light of this "antifoundational" reading of Hegel, she concludes that "the individuals are ready to engage again, in new constructions, new readings, new thoughts" (166).

Another more important point Malabou draws from this conclusion is the argument about "the event of reading" or "plastic reading." She declares that "[w]hat the dialectical movement demands is not a passivity, but a plasticity, from the reader" (180), and continues regarding the "new reading" as a creative relationship between the reader and the book: "Far from basing itself purely and simply on the content of what is read, this new reading must in return express the content; and to do so, to form new propositions, all it can do is to transform the content of its reading, that is to interpret it" (180). Further, in the conclusion of this book, Malabou tries to take up the specific possibility of "plastic reading" as an approach that escapes both "the sheer tautology

offered by a paraphrase” and “the absolute heterology posed by an arbitrary commentary” (184). Finally, she insists that “Hegel may well be the first philosopher to think that the author is not a ‘fixed and solid subject’ but an instance of writing, conceived in the joint play and speaking of two subjects of enunciation: a speculative reader, and the one who wrote because he was, first and above all, a speculative reader” (185). Furthermore, in her view, “Interpretation is a *production* that presupposes the accident which gave it birth, which by the same token accepts that it cannot be definitive but promised to other readers. ‘Plastic’ reading has its place in an exegetical economy which, because there is nothing ‘outside the text (*hors texte*)’, places the text absolutely outside itself” (185; emphasis original). In summary, Malabou considers the new reading as an act of “a production that presupposes the accident which gave it birth” and calls it a “plastic reading” compelled by the preceding texts. In return, this “plastic reading” makes a speculative reader express the content “to form new proposition,” or to engage “new construction, new thoughts.”

Based on these arguments, this study situates Emerson, a contemporary of Hegel, as “Man Thinking” who independently holds that “that the author is not a ‘fixed and solid subject’ but an instance of writing, conceived in the joint play and speaking of two subjects of enunciation,” a speculative reader and the writer. In this context, Malabou’s concept of “plastic reading” seems to almost completely overlap with the famous discussion of “creative reading” that Emerson advanced in “The American Scholar”:

One must be an inventor to read well. As the proverb says, “He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies must carry out the wealth of the Indies.”
There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read

becomes luminous with manifold allusions. *Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world.* (CWI 58; emphasis added)

Cavell and Malabou formulate the sequence of cycles or “circles” in which “creative reading” and “creative writing” interweave as a process of inventive exegesis and transformation that persists between rigidity and flexibility, mere paraphrasing and arbitrary interpretation, and an excessive filiofetism and a disregard for history. This sequence or process is the very thing that symbolizes the Emersonian “plastic” epistemology that is closely intertwined with his “poetics of distance.”

By focusing on the concept of “plasticity,” which in a sense deconstructs the opposition between rigidity and flexibility, it is also possible to reevaluate Emerson’s attitudes toward a larger range of relationships between individuals. Emerson was extremely averse to “conformism,” but he remained influenced and transformed by his surroundings. While he disliked churches, Brook Farm, and other institutions that fixed his relationships in conformity with others, he continued to interact with many people through lectures and magazine production. Such ambivalence towards the seemingly contradictory “self and others” or the “ME and NOT ME” can be found consistently in Emerson’s texts, and especially so in the relationships between “self and nature,” “self and friends,” “the study and the parlor,” and “America and Europe.” Based on these associations, what this introduction would like to highlight here as an example of its relevance to “plastic” and “creative” reading is the relationship between Emerson’s thought and the evolution of American Romanticism, especially the movement known as “American Transcendentalism,” which mainly developed in Boston and New England while Emerson and his contemporary transcendentalists were digesting the advances of the European philosophical tradition since the seventeenth century.

4. Emerson's Transatlantic Transcendentalism

There has already been a vast amount of research on the writers of the American Renaissance, within which Emerson is discussed in relation to American Romanticism and American Transcendentalism.¹² Among these researches, the most recent transatlantic studies by David Greenham and Samantha Harvey stress the importance of the genealogy from Immanuel Kant through Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Emerson. This section briefly reviews how Emerson absorbed the influences of the preceding texts and read them in creative or plastic ways.

As is widely known, Emerson encountered the argument over the conflict between reason and understanding, originally established by Kant, mainly through the writings of Coleridge and Emerson's contemporary transcendentalists in New England, who discussed and introduced Coleridge's works, and not through the texts of Kant himself. As Greenham succinctly indicates in *Transatlantic Romanticism* (2012), Emerson used the word "reason" throughout the 1820s. In contrast to Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle, who used reason and understanding with almost equal distinction, Emerson used the two words more freely. While cautioning that Emerson's attitude in this respect is often seen as inconsistent, Greenham chronologically traces the shift in the position of the word "reason" in Emerson's work. Emerson treated the word in a sense equivalent to how it appears in John Locke's writings in 1824, but in a letter to his aunt Mary Moody Emerson in the following year (1825), he showed a more advanced recognition of its implications. The first time Emerson assimilated

¹² Examples include Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941); Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature* (1953); Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* (1973); Packer, *Emerson's Fall* (1982); Ellison, *Emerson's Romantic Style* (1984); Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* (2007); and Tatsumi, *Young Americans in Literature: The Post-Romantic Turn in the Age of Poe, Hawthorne and Melville* (2018).

Coleridge's argument and used the term "reason" as clearly distinguished from "understanding" was in a letter to his brother Edward in 1834 (35–46). Emerson, who had referred to Coleridge only sporadically since his diary entry in 1821, first seriously engaged in a reading of his work through a preface by James Marsh that was appended to Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* in 1829. Since this encounter, and mainly through the thirties, Emerson absorbed Coleridge's ideas most enthusiastically in both direct and indirect ways.¹³

In the first place, Coleridge was frustrated by the limitations of Kant's transcendental philosophy in that its consequences remained epistemological. For Coleridge, especially in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Greenham claims that "the epistemological dissatisfaction of subjectivity, that it is a limitation, is overcome again by faith, by asserting that the self's absoluteness also partakes of God's" (80). As Coleridge states, "philosophy would pass into religion, and religion become inclusive of philosophy" (*Biographia Literaria* 300; quoted in Greenham 80–81). Greenham concludes that this movement, from philosophy to religion, from the finite to the infinite, "from thinking to being, from epistemology to ontology, . . . completes Coleridge's thought" (80). Similarly, in *Transatlantic Transcendentalism: Coleridge, Emerson, and Nature* (2013), Harvey also points out that "[i]n Coleridge's expanded conception, reason became a kind of faith and transcendent vision, far outstripping Kant's more restricted claims of a regulative reason that could not *know* the noumenal world" (32; emphasis original). Namely, Coleridge creatively and plastically reread and misread the transcendental philosophy of Kant based on his "reliance on the historical scriptures as

¹³ Greenham emphasizes secondary influences from Carlyle, Victor Cousin, Marsh, and Frederick Henry Hedge. Harvey also states that Coleridge's influence can be found in Emerson's later work "Quotation and Originality," although he points to *Nature* in 1836 as the strongest example of the impression (9). For more details on Coleridge's influence on the concept of "genius" in Emerson, see also Tatsumi's Introduction in *Young Americans in Literature*.

the most important ground of reason” (Greenham 50). By this redefinition of reason, he was, in a sense, able to mediate between empiricism and idealism.

How did Emerson reread this post- or anti-Kantian creative misreading by Coleridge? Harvey stresses that “Coleridge and Emerson shared a deep intellectual affinity: a desire to mediate between empiricism and idealism” (32). In a similar vein, Greenham insists that “[w]hat Emerson found in Carlyle and in Coleridge was a point of Romantic resistance to the rationalism and materialism of early nineteenth century New England; a way of clearing the ground for a recuperation of faith . . .” (34). These dissatisfactions of Emerson that he shared with Coleridge at the time, which were common elements of “reification and alienation” that Porter found in *Nature*, were almost equal to his “aversion” to the skeptical assertions of Locke, Hume, and other British empirical philosophers, with whose works the young Emerson wrestled, who maintained that man can know nothing but what he has experienced through his senses. However, Emerson could not fully accept Coleridge’s redefinition of reason as a kind of faith; this is because he was also dissatisfied with Unitarianism in New England at that time. Emerson radically developed his aversion to Unitarianism in “The Divinity School Address” (1838), but as Greenham underscores, “Emerson’s attitude to the relationship between scripture and nature was fully formed, though less confrontationally articulated than it would be in 1838. In 1836 nature is the first best source of religious belief” (50–51): In *Nature*, Emerson already states that it is “[i]n the woods [that] we return to reason and faith” (*CW* I 11), and that “[e]very scripture is to be interpreted by the same spirit which gave it forth,—is the fundamental law of criticism” (*CW* I 23). For Greenham, “[w]hat is crucial, and divides Emerson from Coleridge and his aunt Mary, is that in interpreting scripture reason is not accessing a personal God, but a God that, paradoxically, both is and yet stands behind nature” (51).

In other words, contrary to Coleridge and the church institution of Unitarianism, Emerson treated not the Bible nor scripture but instead spirit and nature as the stable ground or foundation of reason and faith in a rather antinomian manner in 1836. On the one hand, as Van Leer emphasizes in his comparison with the later essay “Experience” (1844),¹⁴ it is true that Emerson, when he wrote *Nature*, had a “foundational” or anthropocentric tendency to fix nature as a solid foundation for reason in reaction to his aversion to skepticism. On the other hand, as biographer Robert Richardson notes, “[i]f there is a single moment after which American transcendentalism can be said to exist, it is when Emerson reads Hedge’s manifest” (166; qtd. in Harvey 39). In reviewing Hedge’s argument, from which Emerson was heavily influenced, along with Marsh, an interpretation that foreshadows the system of “antifoundationalism” offered by West, Cavell and Malabou can be found in his own acceptance of Coleridge.

Frederick Henry Hedge, the founder of the Transcendental Club who had interacted closely with Emerson until the 1830s, already raised important points in the context of this introduction in his 1833 essay “Coleridge’s Literary Character” in *The Christian Examiner*. Hedge formulated his thought from a perspective based on Coleridge’s work as well as the writings of German philosophers such as Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. In the section on German metaphysics, Hedge begins by indicating that German philosophy “is a striving after information on subjects which have been usually considered as beyond the reach of human intelligence, an attempt to penetrate into the most hidden mysteries of our being” (120–21); he further states that “in every philosophy there are three things to be considered, the object, the method, and the result” (121). He continues to explain the character of the transcendental system: “In the

¹⁴ For more details, see Van Leer, Chapters 2 and 5.

Transcendental system, the object is to discover in every form of finite existence an infinite and unconditioned as the ground of its existence, or rather as the ground of our knowledge of its existence, to refer all phenomena to certain *noumena*, or laws of cognition” (121; emphasis original). Harvey summarizes this recognition of Hedge as indicating that “the object was to harmonize the Romantic triad by finding a divine ground for every natural object, or for the human mind’s knowledge of that object” (37). Like Emerson’s reading of Coleridge, this perspective is clearly still based on the idea of foundationalism. Nevertheless, in focusing on how Hedge accepts the importance of the method that Coleridge primarily deployed in *The Friend* (1812), which Harvey assumed had been underestimated thus far in comparison with the distinction between reason and understanding (37), it is possible to see the germ of a plastic system in which neither the Bible nor nature can be the ground of reason and faith. According to Harvey, in “Essays on the Principle of Method” in *The Friend*, Coleridge defined his method as “a continual and open-ended process of intellectual inquiry, from lower to higher modes of thinking, according to a leading idea that drives the mind upward and outward in its inquiry” (Harvey 37).

Meanwhile, Hedge reads this statement differently, positioning the divine as an infinite and unconditional foundation: “The method is synthetical, proceeding from a given point, the lowest that can be found in our consciousness, and deducting from that point, ‘the whole world of intelligences, with the whole system of their representations” (121). However, and perhaps more interestingly, Hedge simultaneously draws attention to the aspects of “its provisional conclusions and its emphasis on process” (Harvey 37)

in this method. Referring to the image of “the arch” in Coleridge’s *The Friend*,¹⁵ Hedge argues as follows:

The correctness or philosophical propriety of the construction which is to be based upon this given point, this absolute thesis, must be assumed for a while, until proved by the successful completion of the system which it is designed to establish. *The test by which we are to know that the system is complete, and the method correct, is the same as that by which we judge the correct construction of the material arch,—continuity and self-dependence.* The last step in the process, the keystone of the fabric, is the deduction of time, space, and variety, . . . *When this step is accomplished, the system is complete, the hypothetical frame-work may then fall, and the structure will support itself.* (121; emphasis added)

Like the thought on perfection in the cases of Bercovitch and Cavell, Hedge considers how “the successful completion of the system” can be realized, and it seems to have reached one important turn here. As Harvey also shrewdly points out (38), Hedge insists that Coleridge’s system is only “the hypothetical frame-work,” and in the note to the above quotation, that it does not necessarily need to be completed for it to be effective as long as there is an expectation that it will eventually be completed: “We give the

¹⁵ In Essay X, Coleridge describes “the model of a bridge” in the Royal Observatory at Richmond, constructed by Mr. Atwood: “he [Mr. Atwood] took a sufficient number of wedges of brass highly polished. Arranging these at first on a skeleton arch of wood, he then removed this scaffolding or support; and the bridge not only stood firm, without any cement between the squares; but he could take away any given portion of them, as a third or half, and appending a correspondent weight, at either side, the remaining part stood as before” (496). Concluding this anecdote, he asserts that “the whole is of necessity prior to its parts; nor can we conceive a more apt illustration of the scientific principles we have already laid down” (497). Hedge’s plastic reading of this lines seems to reinterpret Coleridge’s “the whole” as only a hypothetical one. His reading seems to be compatible with Emerson’s metaphor of “the scaffolding” he used in the essay “Love,” which discusses ideal form of love and friendship, Chapter 4 and 5 will take up: “At last they discover that all which at first drew them together, —those once sacred features, that magical play of charms, —was deciduous, had a prospective end, like the scaffolding by which the house was built” (*CW* II 109).

ideal of the method proposed; we are by no means prepared to say that this idea has been realized, or that it can be realized” (121; emphasis original). According to Harvey, “[t]his concept of method as revolutionary for Emerson and the Transcendentalist, allowing them to philosophize in a holistic way without fully systematizing their ideas” (38). This image of perfection, which does not necessarily require completion, is perhaps one of the major sources of inspiration for Emerson to elaborate on the “antifoundationalism” mainly since the late 1830s. The abstractness in Emerson’s work up to the early 1840s that Bercovitch appreciates in *The Rites of Assent*, and the phrases of Emerson which Cavell describes as the symbol of his “Emersonian moral perfectionism,” such as the “unattained but attainable self” and “this new yet unapproachable America,” seem to be partly derived from Emerson’s plastic reading of Hedge’s manifesto. A close reading of Emerson’s texts in the following chapters will expose the system or method that Cavell posits as shifting the focus from transcendence to continuity, through which Emerson was inspired by this creative misreading of Hedge.

5. Circles of Plastic Reading

The system is not absent (Santayana), nor is it anchored in idealism in conjunction with the Bible, capitalism, and possessive individualism (Coleridge, Gilmore, Porter, and Newfield). It is the plastic system that incorporates ambiguity, noted by Hedge, Cavell, and Malabou, that allows Emerson to continue the cycle consisting of a series of creative misinterpretations. After the publication of *Nature*, and especially in the late 1830s and 1840s, Emerson gradually transformed his thought through dialogue and reading from transcendentalism, which was based on nature, to antifoundationalism,

which lacked any foundation but was open to the possibility of a more ideal future, albeit in a plastic way.

The best-known example of an essay by Emerson that succinctly expresses the character of this continuous, unfinished process is “Circles” (1841). At the beginning of the essay, Emerson declares: “The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end” (*CW* II 179). Emphasizing images of difference and repetition without end or purpose, the essay moves on to assert the following:

The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end. The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul.” (*CW* II 180; emphasis added)

The circle that marks “the life of man” starts out invisibly small and gradually expands endlessly and infinitely into larger, new circles, and the extent to which these processes proceed is taken to be determined by “the force or truth of the individual soul.” The genealogy from Kant to Coleridge through Hedge to Emerson does not simply paraphrase the texts of the predecessors, nor does it interpret them arbitrarily. Instead, it is a process of creative, plastic reading that continues to produce an openness to “the new force of the individual soul”; in other words, it is the trajectory of the ever-evolving circle.

Following the trend in recent Emerson studies that has shifted the focus of reading from rigidity to flexibility, this study foregrounds the “plasticity” of Emerson's self-formation, which is difficult to dismiss as merely flexible, both receives and gives form, and is subject to constant transformation, thereby establishing a provisional identity

each time through the “poetics of distance” that continues to regulate relations and distances with the surroundings.

In what follows, Chapter 1 discusses the essay *Nature*. As many critics of this essay have emphasized, Emerson's adherence to “the eye of the reason,” which has been linked to idealism and reason, and his approach to US expansionism are evident in the essay. However, the sense of passivity, which belongs to the second step in Newfield's and Cavell's scheme, has also already been presented as an important one in the context of “the animal eye.” Through Timothy Morton's concept of the “poetics of ambience” and Goethe's account of morphology, this chapter finally considers how, in the process of passively waiting for and enduring the call from “genius,” “the animal eye” and “the plastic power of the human eye” that are linked to it play an essential role, contrary to the dominant reading of *Nature*.

The next two chapters mainly explore the relationship between the self and time. Chapter 2 deals with Emerson's most famous essay, “Self-Reliance.” This chapter reads the essay alongside “Quotation and Originality,” an essay published posthumously in his later years, from the perspective of how creatively Emerson reread the strong, imperialistic self-image involved in the third step described by Newfield. Based on the latest biographical research, this chapter traces the plasticity of Emerson's thinking on originality and reconsiders the path Emerson took in his later years, when he found originality in “the power of coordination,” by linking it to the famous metaphor of “the rose” and the “zigzag line” in “Self-Reliance.”

Chapter 3 reads “Experience” in depth. Contrary to Chapter 2, this chapter traces Emerson's relationship with his son Waldo, who died at an early age, and reconsiders the essay as a process of becoming the child. “Experience” is also the essay that models the connection between the self and the outside world in the most abstract way.

Highlighting the scientific and biological metaphors of the “lenses” and the “embryo” as showing cognitive change through the turn, this chapter aims to capture Emerson’s strategy of transforming the grief caused by his son’s death into “practical power” by relating the power to the scientific debates on epigenesis in his time.

The second half of the dissertation examines the relationship between the self and space. Chapter 4 consists of three sections, with each mainly centered on the essays “Friendship,” “Love,” and Emerson’s theory of friendship in comparison to those of his contemporaries, such as Poe, Fuller, and Thoreau. In the first section of this chapter, Emerson’s essays on friendship are compared to Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” (1840). The eyes of the narrator in Poe’s fiction metamorphose from the “glance” to “gaze.” In contrast, Emerson’s “Friendship” and “Love” are characterized by the aesthetics of glance. This aesthetics is connected to the significance of the dialogue and a poetics of distance in Emerson in the next section. The metaphor of the friend as a “beautiful enemy” as a response to Fuller’s reprimand and the trope of the “nettle” compared with the “echo” are discussed as symbols of Emerson’s poetics of distance. The last section reviews the plastic shift to a metaphor of a renewed appreciation of the “echo” in the eulogy addressed to Thoreau after Emerson’s interaction with him.

Chapter 5 highlights the relatively minor lecture “Home” and the metaphors of space in Emerson’s various writings. It discusses the rise of individualism in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century in parallel with the changes in the structure of the house at that time, and then traces Emerson’s tropes used to account for the relationship between the servant and domestic matters in the intimate sphere of the home. In contrast to “the manifest domesticity” proposed by Amy Caplan, who discusses the Beecher sisters, this chapter argues for Emerson’s awareness of the ambiguous space of the home in relation to the encounter with Fuller and her works. In

the end, this chapter shows that Emerson's style of acknowledging the interchangeability of the "street" and "home" was inspired by his dialogue with Fuller in "the parlor" as a place to speak with others in contrast to "the study" that isolates the self from the outside world.

The Conclusion covers the "The American Scholar." By comparing Emerson's rhetoric of affirming the United States as "a nation of men" with the concept of "Emerson's moral perfectionism" developed by Cavell and others, this concluding chapter reconsiders whether Emerson's ideas on democracy can really be thought of as unrelated to the "structure of feeling" toward "democratic authority" that Newfield criticizes. Inspired by Branka Arsić's emphasis on "the eccentric" and the discussion of the intimate public sphere advanced by Lauren Berlant, this dissertation offers a tentative conclusion and a direction for future research in the possibility of a more inclusive, plastic utopia.

Detailed argument of each chapter will elucidate how the diverse relationships between self and others in Emerson's works are closely intertwined with the concept of "plasticity." Ultimately, this doctoral dissertation aims to shed new light on Emerson's readings of major essays on the plastic relationships constructed by self and "others" (including one's friends, family members, home, society, nature, and the state) on various levels in a non-linear, meandering argument that can be likened to the "zigzag line of a hundred tacks" in "Self-Reliance." In other words, a new circle is drawn.

Chapter 1

“The Plastic Power of the Human Eye”:

“The Animal Eye” and a Poetics of Ambience in *Nature*

In “Speech on Affairs in Kansas” (1856), Emerson asserts that “Language has lost its meaning in the universal cant. . . . *Manifest Destiny, Democracy, Freedom*, fine names for an ugly thing. They call it otto of rose and lavender, —I call it bilge-water” (*W* XI 259). Though he considers “Manifest Destiny” to be “bilge-water,” when a ship is deemed as an analogy of the Emersonian self, “bilge-water” cannot always be completely ignored. In fact, many scholars have focused on what Jenine Abboushi Dallah calls “the intersection between U.S. expansionism and Emersonian individualism” (49).

In *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (1989), West acutely points out: “[Emerson’s] theodicy converges with, though it is in no way identical with, what Richard Slotkin has recently analyzed as the ideological content of the myth of the frontier” (20). He digests the function of “the myth of frontier” as follows: “[n]ot only does this myth —the oldest and most central in American history —justify opposition to the Old World aristocracy of Europe and subjugation of the New World “savages” of America, i.e., Indians, Negroes, and to some extent white women; it also rationalizes the distinctive pattern of U. S. capitalist development” (20).¹ West

¹ West mainly consults Slotkin’s argument in *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (1986). For further details of the origin of the myth, see also *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973), especially Chapter I.

argues that “Emerson’s ideas of power fits well with Slotikin’s analysis of the myth of the frontier” (20) and that “he [Emerson] deepened his mysticism, increased his faith in the nature of things, and adjusted himself (though never fully) to the expanding world dominance of the ‘imperial Saxon race’” (35). He concludes Emerson’s stance as an “intricate interplay of rhetorically supporting American expansionism yet morally contesting its consequences for human victims” (39).

For Sacvan Bercovitch, this abstractness of Emerson’s words is deeply related to his “radical appropriation of individuality” from 1836 to 1841. In *Rites of Assent* (1993), Bercovitch claims that Emerson’s appropriation expresses the antistructures of the process synonymous with cultural expansion and consolidation; which are made by the Jacksonian ideologues “from the manifest destinarian John O’Sullivan to the Locofoco Robert Rantoul, apologist for minimal government” (346). Bercovitch also believes that this form of radical imagining called *dissent* “turns all the power of hope, mind, and imagination unleashed by free-enterprise capitalism in an apparently open, empty, and endlessly malleable New World *against* the tendency toward reaggregation” (346). Emerson’s aesthetic dissent, says Bercovitch, emphasizes the element of “negation and transition, its resistance on principle to institutional controls, its open-ended, *self*-enclosed tropism for reform and change” (346). Dallal acknowledges the subversive potential in this open-endedness, borrowing Bercovitch’s view of Emerson’s deleted description that the character of an ideal “must not be actualized,” at the same time that Dallal criticizes Emerson’s “disembodied, tautological representations of history” which enable “the internalization of conflict” (56-57).

These aspects of Emerson’s discourses between expansionism and individualism are notably emblemized by his metaphors of “eye,” mainly in *Nature*. Whether they

attack or praise Emerson's stance, most critics have concentrated upon the "eye of the reason" and construed it as the abstract and disembodied "gaze" corresponding to "the axis of vision." However, this paper takes up "the animal eye" which reflects another scopic regime, aesthetics of "glance," correlating with "the axis of things." After making a detour via the theory of vision in the nineteenth century and in Emerson's essay "Art," the present paper returns to examining the relationship between man and nature, keenly aware of the ecocriticism of Timothy Morton and Goethe's idea of modern botany. Eventually, this essay stresses the aspect of mutual influence between Emerson and nature, between man and landscape in *Nature* against the biased reviews.

1. Emerson and the Techniques of the Observer: *Nature* and Camera Obscura

The metaphor of the eye is always extremely important for Emerson. In his biographical research Robert D. Richardson observes that the metaphor of the eye had already appeared, at a high frequency, in his journals soon after his recovery from rheumatic inflammation of the eye in 1825 (63-72). After he began to write his well-known essays, the metaphor of the eye became one of the most remarkable one in his metaphor repertoire.² In *Nature* (1836), Emerson pens various, important metaphors about the eye, including the most famous among all his writings: the transparent eye-ball:

Standing on the bare ground, ——my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, ——all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal

² For more details, see also Kenneth Burke's classical paper: "I, Eye, Ay: Emerson's Early Essay on "Nature": Thoughts on the Machinery of Transcendence" (1966).

Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God. (*CW I 10*)

F. O. Matthiessen reads this line as being prepared by Emerson's Neoplatonic quality and "his almost exclusive absorption with seeing" inspired by the special stress that the nineteenth century put on sight, which is "evinced by some of its outstanding creations" like "the perfection of Herschel's telescope, the invention of photography, the development of open-air painting, the advancing power of the microscope" (50-51). In relation to this context, Mary Louise Pratt indicates that the "imperial eyes" of "the main protagonist" as a "seeing-man" in modern travel and exploration writings "passively look out and possess" the material landscape; these eyes seek what she terms "anti-conquest," using "strategies of innocence," which "were constructed in relation to older imperial rhetorics[sic] of conquest" (8-9). Similarly, some critics detects, in this metaphor, an imperialistic sense connected to the concept that justified American expansionism.

For example, Naoto Sasada interprets this metaphor as an imperialistic eye. Sasada emphasizes the confrontation between "the animal eye" and the "eye of the reason," based on Michael T. Gilmore's argument, which regards Emerson's view of nature as ambivalent one in the dialectical process, moving between praising nature and being liberated from nature (120-01). Emerson writes:

Until this higher agency intervened, *the animal eye* sees, with wonderful accuracy, *sharp outlines and colored surfaces*. When *the eye of Reason* opens, to outline and surface are at once added grace and expression. These proceed from imagination and affection, and abate somewhat of the angular distinctness of objects. *If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them.* (*CW I 30*; emphasis added)

For Sasada, however, the metaphor of the “transparent eye-ball” belongs to the “eye of the reason” and these lines shows the triumph of the “eye of the reason” over “the animal eye,” which Emerson depicts in Chapter VI of *Nature*. In this process, “the reason” oppresses “nature” through the ocularcentrism. Although Sasada briefly alludes to the description of a camera obscura in *Nature*, it invites us to rethink the relationship between Emerson and ocularcentrism. According to Merriam-Webster, camera obscura, stemming from the Latin *camera obscura*, means “dark chamber,” and refers to “a darkened enclosure having an aperture usually provided with a lens through which light from external objects enters to form an image of the objects on the opposite surface.”³ In 1836, three years before the birth of photography, such as the daguerreotype and the calotype, how did Emerson react to the images in a camera obscura? This question may be answered by the following:

Nay, the most wanted objects, (make a very slight change in the point of vision,) please us most. In a camera obscura, the butcher's cart, and the figure of one of our own family amuse us. So a portrait of a well-known face gratifies us. Turn the eyes upside down, by looking at the landscape through your legs, and how agreeable is the picture, though you have seen it any time these twenty years! (*CWI* 31)

Obviously, Emerson enjoyed the spectacle of the camera obscura here. The succeeding statement which is often quoted and criticized, also assuredly reflects the sense of the observer in the camera obscura era:

In these cases, by mechanical means, is suggested the difference between the observer and the spectacle—between man and nature. Hence arises a

³ See “Camera obscura.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/camera%20obscura>. Accessed 30 Apr. 2020.

pleasure mixed with awe; I may say, a low degree of the sublime is felt, from the fact, probably, that man is hereby apprized that whilst the world is a spectacle, something in himself is stable. (*CWI* 31)

To judge from these two quotations, Emerson seems to have a kind of imperialistic eye toward “nature” as “the spectacle,” considering his “observer” position to be “stable.” Relating Emerson’s essays to the process of reification, Porter emphasizes that “both the neutral observer and the transcendent seer occupy the same contemplative stance, rooted in reification” (26), and asserts that “[t]he world is motion, but the eye [of Emerson] which confronts that motion finally occupies the same vantage point as that of the owner surveying his factory or his landscaped grounds” (110). Nevertheless, a hasty conclusion would be impossible. A detour should, therefore, be made to the argument of vision in aesthetics, through which an alternative reading may be suggested.

Rethinking modernity and the problem of the observer in *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (1990), Jonathan Crary mainly brings into the focus the shift taking place in the early nineteenth century around the camera obscura:

My connection is that a reorganization of the observer occurs if the nineteenth century before the appearance of photography. What takes place from around 1810 to 1840 is an uprooting of vision from the stable and fixed relations incarnated in the camera obscura. In the camera obscura, as a concept, subsided as an objective ground of visual truth, a variety of discourses and practices—in philosophy, science, and in procedures of social normalization—tend to abolish the foundations of that ground in the early nineteenth century. In a sense, what occurs is a new valuation of visual

experience: it is given an unprecedented mobility and exchangeability, abstracted from any founding site or referent. (14)

This chapter asserts that Emerson's *Nature*, published in 1836 (as Crary says "around 1810 to 1840") not only has "the stable and fixed relations incarnated in the camera obscura," but also reveals an aspect of "an uprooting of vision" from them. In a later chapter, Crary finds in Goethe's experiment from the opening section of *Theory of Colors* (1810) a foundation for "a disordering and negation of the camera obscura as both an optical system and epistemological figure" (68). Crary explains that Goethe's "unsystematized accumulation of statements and findings" contain: "a key delineation of subjective vision, a post-Kantian notion that is both a product and constituent of modernity" (69). In short, for Crary's historical perspective, Goethe's experiment opens the door to uprooting of vision from the camera obscura paradigm.

Goethe is also widely known to be one of the most important authorial influence on Emerson. Emerson expresses this clearly in "Goethe; or The Writer" (1850), an installment of his *Representative Men* lectures:

In optics again he rejected the artificial theory of seven colors, and considered that every color was the mixture of light and darkness in new proportions. It is really of very little consequence what topic he writes upon. He sees at every pore, and has a certain gravitation towards truth. (*CW* IV 159)

Emerson apparently read Goethe's *Theory of Colors*. Though he withholds judgment on the importance of the topic, Emerson rightly points out Goethe "[rejects] the artificial theory of seven colors" connected to the stable and fixed character apparent in the camera obscura, and he indicates that Goethe relates the ambivalent characteristic "of light and darkness in new proportion." Through reading of *Theory of Colors*,

Emerson should have grasped the sense of “a new valuation of visual experience,” derived from “an unprecedented mobility and exchangeability, abstracted from any founding site or referent.” Referring to this recognition, Branca Arsić sharply comments on the “powerful criticism of idealism embedded in *Nature* which has rarely been acknowledged” (56). She puts forward a construction of Emerson’s idealism, which “teaches us the difference ‘between the observer and the spectacle.’” For her, on the one hand, “idealism is pleasing to the mind,” but, on the other hand, “idealism ruins the world, removing it from our sight. The world is ruined precisely by what is desirable to the mind, perspectival idealism” (55-56). Following in this vein, Emerson states: “The ruin or the blank that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque” (*CW* I 43). If “the axis of vision” here corresponds to “the stable and fixed relations incarnated in the camera obscura” or the imperialistic eye in the metaphor of “eye-ball,” then to what kind of scopic regime do “the axis of things” and the “uprooting of vision” hinted by Goethe correspond?

2. Aesthetics of Glance: “Art” and Alternative Scopic Regime

In “Scopic Regimes of Modernity” (1988), Martin Jay elucidates that the scopic regime which has dominated Western culture since the Renaissance, is Cartesian perspectivalism. Jay indicates that the perspectival vision was constituted by a lone eye like “a transparent eye-ball.” He writes:

It was conceived in the manner of a lone eye looking through a peephole at the scene in front of it. Such an eye was, moreover, understood to be static, unblinking, and fixated, rather than dynamic, moving with what later scientists would call ‘saccadic’ jumps from one focal point to another. (7)

This imagery of the “peephole” and a static, fixated character are closely related to the model of the camera obscura we have discussed. Next, Jay indicates, borrowing the binary opposition between gaze and glance from Norman Bryson, that the perspectival vision follows the logic of gaze and that other alternative scopic regimes simultaneously exist within the tradition of Cartesian perspectivalism: “Looked at more closely, however, it is possible to discern internal tensions in Cartesian perspectivalism itself that suggest it was not quite as uniformly coercive as is sometimes assumed” (10). One of the most interesting instances Jay cites is Dutch seventeenth-century art, which Svetlana Alpers calls “the art of describing,” because it seems to follow the logic of glance as an alternative to “Cartesian perspectivalism” (though Jay does not make a definite statement). In *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (1983), Alperse draws comparisons between the pictures of Kepler and Alberti as Renaissance art in the North and South Netherlands:

. . . attention to many small things versus a few large ones; light reflected off objects versus objects modeled by light and shadow; the surface of objects, their colors and textures, dealt with rather than their placement in a legible space; an unframed image versus one that is clearly framed; one with no clearly situated viewer compared to one with such a viewer. The distinction follows a hierarchical model of distinguishing between phenomena commonly referred to as primary and secondary: objects and space versus the surfaces, form versus the textures of the world. (44)

In opposition to the art of the South, the art of the North mainly concentrates on “the surface of objects” and the “unframed image” with “no clearly situated” viewer/observer. This idea is compatible with “the axis of thing” Emerson considered

and with the logic of glance.⁴

Emerson directly discusses how the painter and sculptor see the object and works of their art in his essay “Art” (1841). To begin with, he notes that “[t]he power to detach and to magnify by detaching is the essence of rhetoric in the hands of the orator and the poet” (*CW* II 211). In other words, he takes “[t]his rhetoric, or power to fix the momentary eminency of an object” as “the painter and sculptor exhibit in color and in stone” (*CW* II 211). This rhetoric or power very naturally foregrounds the logic of gaze. Emerson claims that the power of the eye is the fruit of gymnastics and training: “I too see that painting and sculpture are gymnastics of the eye, its training to the niceties and curiosities of its function” (*CW* II 212). Arsić succinctly digests this condition: “seeing a painting requires an eye trained in abstraction and able to see stillness where there are motions” (71). Referring to Bryson’s binary opposition between gaze and glance, Arsić connects this trained, focused eye with the logic of gaze and indicates Emerson calls another eye “glance” in essay “Nature” (1844): “If we look at her work, we seem to catch a glance of a system in transition” (*CW* III 105). She explicates that glance is the eye “capable of catching minute changes,” which “cannot be considered trained.” In short, “glance sees the transition itself” (71). From her perspective, “in reversing the hierarchy of gaze and glance, Emerson negates the privilege traditionally conferred on depth.” Instead, he emphasizes the importance of glance as following “the changes on the surface, which are always sensible, it remains tied to the body” (73). For instance, in “Art,” Emerson contrasts the people, particularly “a beautiful woman” in the street, with the works of art like “picture and sculpture”:

Picture and sculpture are the celebrations and festivities of form. But true

⁴ In “Goethe; or The Writer,” Emerson also briefly refers to “drawing of the lines from Goethe to Kepler” (*CW* IV 165) in the historical portion of *Theory of Colors*.

art is never fixed, but always flowing. . . . All works of art should not be detached, but extempore performance. A great man is a new statue in every attitude and action. A beautiful woman is a picture which drives all beholders nobly mad. (*CW* II 216-17)

It is interesting here that Emerson seems to distinguish “all works of art” from “a beautiful woman,” at the same time that he equates her with “a picture.” Similarly, he likens the people in the street to “the eternal picture which nature paints” in an earlier section of the essay:

And then is my eye opened to the eternal picture which nature paints in the street, with moving men and children, beggars and fine ladies, draped in red and green and blue and gray; long-haired, grizzled, white-faced, black-faced, wrinkled, giant, dwarf, expanded, elfish, —capped and based by heaven, earth and sea. (*CW* II 212)

Coupled with these arguments, Arsić insists “no beautiful sculpture can endure the comparison to a beautiful woman; only the passing of a pretty woman drives the beholder out of his mind” (75). I contend, however, that, in these quotes, Emerson cannot fully separate people, like “a beautiful woman,” from their environments—that is to say, man from nature.

Emerson also seems to acknowledge the possibility that art with the logic of glance—e.g., what Alpers calls “the art of describing” in seventeenth century Netherlands— “drives him out of his mind.” This chapter insists that Dutch painting well suits with this Emersonian ambiguity. He actually writes about it in one of his journal entries:

That which we had *only* lived & not thought & not valued, is now seen to have the greatest beauty as picture; and as we value a Dutch painting of a

kitchen or a frolic of blackguards or a beggar catching a flea when the scene itself we should avoid, so we see worth in things we had slighted these many years. A making it a subject of *thought*, the glance of the Intellect raises it. . . . It admonishes us instantly of the worth of the present moment. It apprizes us of our wealth, for if that hour & object can be so valuable, why not every hour & event in our life if passed through the same process?
(*JMN V 212*; emphasis original)

When evaluating Dutch paintings of ordinary scenes, viewers do not solely see the main object, but, instead, “see worth in things we had slighted these many years.”⁵ At stake here is the relationship between “the glance of the intellect”—which, as Alpers points out, focuses on “the surface of objects” and the “unframed image” with “no clearly situated” observer—and the ordinary scenes or objects that “have the greatest beauty as picture.” Arsić argues “Art” is an essential essay because “Emerson denies, in a radical way, the aesthetic beauty of artistic objects, proposing instead an anti-Kantian aesthetics of the common, as depicted on the streets” (75). Next section will reinterpret this “anti-Kantian aesthetics of the common” from a different viewpoint, holding that it does not necessarily negate “the aesthetic beauty.” In some passages of *Nature*, nature or the landscape and men are hardly distinguishable. This character of nature leads us to an alternative vision, representing not “the eye of the reason,” but, rather, “the animal eye.”

3. A Poetics of Ambience

The image of the “trained eye” in “Art” is reminiscent of two descriptions of the

⁵ In “Art,” Emerson also writes: “I now require this of all pictures, that they domesticate me, not that they dazzle me. Pictures must not be too picturesque. Nothing astonishes men so much as common-sense and plain dealing. All great actions have been simple, and all great pictures are” (*CW II 215*). This passage can be read as if it praises Dutch art.

eye in *Nature*. The first is the “new eyes,” found in the essay’s last paragraph: “So shall we come to look at the world with new eyes. . . . Then shall come to pass what my poet said: ‘Nature is not fixed but fluid. Spirit alters, moulds, makes it. The immobility or bruteness of nature is the absence of spirit; to pure spirit it is fluid, it is volatile, it is obedient’” (*CW* I 44-45). Second is “the eye of the poet,” which appears just before the “eye-ball” passage:

The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. (*CW* I 9)

“New eyes” and “spirit” that alter, mould, and make fluid nature fixed. The poet’s “eye can integrate all the parts.” These characteristics of eyes show that Emerson’s idealism has much to do with the logic of gaze or “the eye of the reason.” Dallal attacks the eye of the poet as representing “inquest,”⁶ “the solitary encounter with beauty in nature” (63). He understands that Emerson is punning on the word “property,” “which is meant as an immaterial counterpart to the material properties before him,” yet this double meaning serves “to guarantee that his gaze will have no grounding, no relief from abstraction.” For him, a horizon is “doubly intangible” since “it is a line at which earth and sky only seem to meet, and this line then recedes when approached” (67). Dallal also criticizes the “eye-ball” passage as showing “Emerson’s epiphany or inquest, the gaze has no object” (68).

It is certain that Emerson’s eye as “more earnest vision” sometimes makes

⁶ Originally, “inquest,” as Emerson’s term for self-inquiry, appeared in “The American Scholar.” In Dallal’s context, it means “an inward search for what is already there — a tautological process of ‘*self-recovery*’” (48; emphasis original).

surfaces transparent: “if the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen” (*CW* I 30). These rapid movements from the surface to the depth or the whole are what are censured as idealistic and Neoplatonic in *Nature*. However, via the glance in “Art” five years later in 1841, “surfaces” turn out to be significant for Emerson in his 1844 essay “Experience”: “We live amid surfaces, and the true art of life is to skate well on them” (*CW* III 35). Not to make transparent, but “to skate well on” surfaces is “the true art of life” for him by this point. This change perhaps parallels the alteration of his relationship with God because of the death of his young son Waldo. Even when he wrote *Nature*, Emerson could not play with the image of “a transparent eye-ball” or “the eye of the reason” in anytime he wanted. For instance, Emerson is fully aware of the discrepancy between man and nature at that time:

We are as much strangers in nature as we are aliens from God. We do not understand the notes of birds. . . . We do not know the uses of more than a few plants, as corn and the apple, the potato and the vine. Is not the landscape, every glimpse of which hath a grandeur, a face of him? Yet this may show us what discord is between man and nature, for you cannot freely admire a noble landscape if laborers are digging in the field hard by. The poet finds something ridiculous in his delight until he is out of the sight of men. (*CW* I 39)

It is true that Emerson or “the poet” in this quote seems to want to “admire a noble landscape” and experience a pure “delight,” yet this cool cognition of the discord and the presence of “laborers” in the field as an obstacle are of more importance. In a sense, the “laborers” enable Emerson to keep his “eye of the reason” blind, not to see the depth connected to God beneath the surface of a noble landscape. Now “something ridiculous

in his delight” is the key.

To exaggeratedly reread *Nature* from this viewpoint, Timothy Morton’s latest study seems instructive. Morton finds fault with viewing nature through an obvious “over-yonder-ness”:

Thinking things as Nature is thinking them as a more or less static, or metastable, continuity bounded by time and space. The classic image of Nature is the Romantic or picturesque painting of a landscape. There it is, over yonder—on the wall in the gallery. And it has over-yonder-ness encoded throughout it: look at those distant hills, that branch suggesting that we follow the perspective lines toward the vanishing point, and so on.

(Hyperobjects 72)

Morton takes up “the Romantic or picturesque painting of a landscape” here. When viewing “those distant hills” depicted in such a painting “on the wall in the gallery,” observers must “follow the perspective line toward the vanishing point.” In other words, the viewers need what Emerson calls “gymnastics of the eye” to get “the power to detach and to magnify by detaching,” or the “power to fix the momentary eminency of an object” in “Art.” Instead of this “static” viewpoint peculiar to gaze, Morton advocates his original theory of environmental aesthetics called “a poetics of ambience,” or “an ambient poetics.” For him, the rhetoric of nature depends upon “ambient poetics,” defined as “a way of conjuring up a sense of surrounding atmosphere or world” *(Ecology without Nature 22)*.

Unlike “the Romantic or picturesque painting of a landscape” in which the existence of the workers disappears, Morton pays attention to “the common lawn” to “get to grips with the disappearing worker” (89). The common lawn, particularly modern American lawns, will provide proper examples of ambient poetics. Morton

likens the lawn's surface to a trend of art: "the suburban garden lawn's flat, almost opaque surface—so like high abstract expressionism—obscures in plain view the work that goes into it." Additionally, "[t]he lawn expresses the disappearing of the worker that resulted in picturesque landscape, the production of distance, of simulated fusions of tameness and wildness, and fascinating points of view." Namely, "[t]he lawn creates ambience, a fantasy space that fuses inside and outside" (89). In the spaces like "modern American lawns" nature cannot be the pure aesthetic object, rather it reflects a mixed relationship between man and nature, allows observers to see the worker disappearing—Emerson's "laborers" digging in the field. This argument is somehow reminiscent of the metaphor of "a nettle," which Emerson cites from Montaigne's words to his friend in his essay "Friendship" (1841): "The only joy I have in his being mine, is that the not mine is mine. I hate, where I looked for a manly furtherance, or at least a manly resistance, to find a mush of concession. Better be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo" (*CW* II 122-23). Like the nearness between "a nettle" and "your friend," the distance between "the lawn" and "laborers" are remarkably different from the fixed interconnection between the observer and the object, man and nature, namely, what Emerson called "ME" and the "NOT ME" (*CW* I 8).

This ambiguous sense of the distance provides a better understanding of the aesthetics of glance not from the perspective of the "disembodied" eye, which Dallah censures as the characteristic of the Emersonian eye, but from the perspective of embodied one: the eye as the organ of the body connected with ambient poetics. Morton keeps his eye on the concept of distractedness, which Walter Benjamin calls "*Zerstreuung*":

Zerstreuung does not imply pacifying intellectual productivity or reflexive phenomena such as irony. *Zerstreuung* is the product of contemporary

capitalist modes of production and technologies. Yet precisely for this reason it holds a utopian aspect, a quality of nonstupefied absorption in the environment, conceived not as reified nature “over there” outside the city or the factory gates, but “right here” —I put the phrase in quotation marks since we will see the extent to which here is both objectively and ontologically in question. (*Ecology without Nature* 163-64; emphasis original)

Morton finds “a utopian aspect” in the environment “right here.” Yet, at the same time, it must be noted that “reified nature ‘over there’” and the environment “right here” cannot be clearly separated. Morton again uses the metaphor of art, this time the “Edwardian miniature” to explain the character of “here”:

Place, even according to this Edwardian miniature, is radically indeterminate— it is intrinsically in question, is a question. When I am “here,” here includes a sense of “there.” *Here* is precisely *not there*. . . . Here is not a solid thing. I mean this much more strongly than Heidegger when he claims, “The human being is a creature of distance!” This idea of distance ultimately aestheticizes the idea of *here*. *Here* becomes an object we are gazing at through the glass shop window of aestheticization. Quite the opposite. We are so involved in *here* that it is constantly dissolving and disappearing. It is not where we look for it. *Here is a question*; indeed, *here is question*. Heidegger's word for the dispersal that fractures *Dasein* from within, thrown as it is into the world, into a particular place? *Zerstreuung*. (174-75; emphasis original)

From the assumption that “we are so involved in *here* that it is constantly dissolving and disappearing,” it is impossible to remain the intact observer from the safe space, “there” or “over yonder.” Rather, “when I am ‘here,’ here includes a sense of ‘there.’”

From “here,” viewers may see nature with the eye linked to the aesthetics of glance, or many contact nature from the distracted stance called “*Zerstreuung*,” linked with ambient poetics.⁷

4. The Plastic Power of the Eye

As Matthiessen mentions, Emerson “reached a fresh decision, after hovering over the cabinets of Natural History in the Jardin de Plantes in Paris” in 1833. He wrote: “I am moved by strange sympathies; I say continually ‘I will be a naturalist’” (15). This experience in a French botanical garden inspired Emerson to finish writing *Nature* three years later. It is true that what impressed him most at that time was, perhaps, the difference between man and animal or nature, ME and the NOT ME. Emerson should also have noticed, however, the indistinctness and reciprocal relation between them at the same time.

In 1836, the year he published *Nature*, Emerson had planted fifteen apple trees. Nine years later, Andrew Jackson Downing, who was one of the most famous landscape designers and horticulturists in the antebellum United States, published *The Fruits and Fruit Trees of America*. According to Richardson, Emerson, who was an acquaintance of him, perused this book in 1846, then he bought a two-acre field east of his house to plant an orchard. He “was especially pleased by those pages in the introduction that talked about Van Mon’s theory of amelioration” (433). With reference to this “theory of amelioration,” Downing’s stance on the land or the garden; namely nature is worth attention. It is notable that Downing regards the garden, not as the distant object to look

⁷ Morton also emphasizes the significance of the objects he calls “Hyperobjects” which inevitably “interact with humans” existing in the environment “right here”: “They bring to an end the idea that Nature is something “over yonder” behind the glass window of an aesthetic screen. Indeed, this very concept of Nature is itself a product of the Romantic phase. Hyperobjects likewise end the idea that things are lumps of blah decorated with accidents, or not fully real until they interact with humans” (*Hyperobjects* 174).

at, but as “the artificial productions of our culture”:

It will be remarked that our garden varieties of fruits are *not natural forms*. *They are the artificial productions of our culture*. They have always a tendency to improve, but they have also another and stronger tendency to return to a natural or wild state. . . . there can be no doubt that if the arts of cultivation were abandoned for only a few years, all the annual varieties of plants in our gardens would disappear and be replaced by a few original wild forms. (4; emphasis added)

On the one hand, Downing’s attitude toward improving or cultivating plants in the garden partly contains imperialistic aspects. On the other hand, if artificially improved “varieties of fruits” surrounding people in the garden, including Emerson’s orchard, are one of the state of nature surviving through the adjustment to “the environment,” they also echo Morton’s poetics of ambience. The garden, as nature surrounding people “right here,” keeps changing through human intervention. “The annual varieties of plants” can survive because of the nearness between plants and humans.⁸

On top of that, Emerson’s actual practices in his orchard perhaps had some impacts on his 1850 account of how Goethe treats nature in texts like *The Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790):

Eyes are better on the whole than telescopes or microscopes. He has contributed a key to many parts of nature, through the rare turn for unity and simplicity in his mind. Thus Goethe suggested the leading idea of modern botany, that *a leaf or the eye of a leaf is the unit of botany, and that every part of a plant is only a transformed leaf to meet a new condition*;

⁸ The theme of “nearness” will be discussed again in the Conclusion in relation to Stanley Cavell’s thought.

and, by varying the conditions, a leaf may be converted into any other organ, and any other organ into a leaf. (CW IV 158; emphasis added)

First, Emerson stresses that embodied eyes “are better on the whole than” mechanical ones in a way that disagrees with the claims attacking his view of eyes as “disembodied,” “abstracted” elements. Second, he epitomizes “the leading idea of modern botany” suggested by Goethe: “a leaf or the eye of a leaf is the unit of botany, and that every part of a plant is only a transformed leaf to meet a new condition.” In this fluid vision of Emerson’s Goethe, apparently nature also does not appear as the distant object. In addition, the phrase “the eye of a leaf” not only refers to the name of an organ, but also works as a part of the rhetoric of “the eye” in which Emerson is continually interested. Surprisingly, for Emerson’s Goethe, this image of “the eye of a leaf” as the organ in flux resembles “one vertebra of the spine” in the human body:

In like manner, in osteology, he assumed that one vertebra of the spine might be considered as the unit of the skeleton: the head was only the uttermost vertebrae transformed. “The plant goes from knot to knot, closing at last with the flower and the seed. So the tape-worm, the caterpillar, goes from knot to knot and closes with the head. Man and the higher animals are built up through the vertebrae, the powers being concentrated in the head.”
(*CW IV 158-59*)

“The eye” of a leaf or “the vertebrae” keeps transforming, as if these organs were undifferentiated from other organs. These incessant changes caused by “the powers” to “meet a new condition,” are responses to the ambience.⁹

⁹ Goethe’s accounts of the metamorphosis of plants and animals seem to correspond with the theory of epigenesis, which emphasizes the plasticity of organs in contrast to preformationism. For the relation between Emerson and epigenesis, see also Chapter 2, and Chapter 3. For detailed relationship between Goethe and the plasticity, see Nassar, “Sensibility and Organic Unity: Kant, Goethe, and the plasticity of cognition” (2015). Nassar compares Goethe with Kant and states: “Goethe’s method clearly differs from that of the

Even in *Nature*, Emerson occasionally shows some early signs of this viewpoint. For example, he records the mystic relation between man and the vegetable:

The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right. (*CW* I 10)

Marek Paryz holds that “Emerson envisages expansion as a form of response to the land” (86).¹⁰ Nonetheless, as Masaki Horiuchi emphasizes, “the vegetable gives a signal to man first” (*Emerson* 118), Emerson’s “nod” to the vegetable here is only a modest response unrelated to “the eye of the reason” or the ideology of expansionism. Actually, when Emerson employs the rhetoric of expansion in *Nature*, rather he accentuates the potential of the self-renewal: “I have no hostility to nature, but a child's love to it. I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons. Let us speak her fair. I do not wish to fling stones at my beautiful mother, nor soil my gentle nest” (*CW* I 35-36). An another “occult relation” between “silent sea” and Emerson also shows the plasticity: “From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake its rapid transformations; the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and

transcendental idealist. The idealist imposes upon nature the structures of mind, and, from there, seeks to determine the laws of nature as the laws of experience. By contrast, Goethe sought to transform the structures of thought and perception so that they accord with the structure of nature” (323). She also demands that only in this methodology of Goethe “do we achieve a necessary ‘plasticity’ in our thinking” (323).

¹⁰ Referring to the study of Dallal, Paryz mainly problematizes the key concept of “inviting,” which Emerson uses in “The Young American” (1844). He contends that the land appears to be an idea, an abstraction for Emerson, along with the “disembodied” rhetoric of expansion in this essay (84-86).

conspire with the morning wind” (*CW* I 13). In these passages, Emerson does not gaze at the landscape from the distant position of the observer; he accepts “the powers” of renewal “in the warm day” or “the morning wind.”

Further, it is important to give ear to the mutual dependence between language and nature. As Matthiessen astutely observes, the second and the third propositions of Chapter IV “Language” are deeply poisoned by Swedenborg’s idealism. However, the first proposition is essential: “Words are the signs of natural facts” (*CW* I 17). This chapter focuses on the surfaces of the words interacting with nature:

Because of this radical correspondence between visible things and human thoughts, savages, who have only what is necessary, converse in figures. As we go back in history, language becomes more picturesque, until its infancy, when it is all poetry; or all spiritual facts are represented by natural symbols. The same symbols are found to make the original elements of all languages. It has moreover been observed, that the idioms of all languages approach each other in passages of the greatest eloquence and power. And as this is the first language, so is it the last. This immediate dependence of language upon nature, this conversion of an outward phenomenon into a type of somewhat in human life, never loses its power to affect us. It is this which gives that piquancy to the conversation of a strong-natured farmer or backwoodsman, which all men relish. (*CW* I 19-20)

Like “nodding” or “dilation” as a reply to nature, Emerson transforms his own language, inspired by “savages” who converse in figures and “the conversation of a strong-natured farmer or backwoodsman.” Their languages depend upon nature “never [losing] its power to affect us.” Their presence does not disappear like “laborers” digging in the field” because Emerson’s eye on them shows “the aesthetics of glance.” They also have

reciprocal relations with nature, and their language symbolizes the “poetics of ambience” or “*Zerstreuung*.” For Emerson, the rough conversations they hold mean much more than “fine names for an ugly thing” like Manifest Destiny. It is certain that their words do not have names so fine. However, they are never “abstract” or “disembodied.”

Lastly, let us consider once again the complex relation between the human eye and nature. Some critics draw a parallel between “eye-ball” passage in *Nature* and the original version in his diary as following:

Standing on the bare ground with my head bathed in the blithe air, & uplifted into infinite space, I become happy in my universal relations. The name of the nearest friends sounds then foreign & accidental. I am the heir of uncontained beauty & power. (*JMN* V 18)

Comparing Emerson and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, David Greenham points out that the line of “I become a transparent eye-ball” was originally “I become happy in my universal relations,” and asserts that “we see a satisfied finite self, aware that it exists because of its ‘relations’ to objects, but not elevating that awareness” (84) in the diary version. Greenham criticizes the diary version because “Emerson is touching but not catching the idea that the self and the not-self are sustained by something else which is neither,” in other words, the idea equals to “Coleridge’s concept of reason” (84), which is one of the most significant source of inspiration for the Emerson’s “eye of the reason.” On the contrary, Horiuchi stresses that the passage “I become happy in my universal relations” is not a representation of the physical sense of sight, but only a metaphor symbolizing Emerson’s “absolute passiveness” (“Two meanings of ‘Happiness’ in Emerson’s Texts” 258-59). This “absolute passiveness” rather than active reason is at stake. Although Greenham negatively indicates “those relations are fading” as Emerson writes “The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign & accidental,” this

ephemerality associated with passivity is precisely the impetus for change in both man and nature.

At the beginning of the third chapter “Beauty,” Emerson shows the best example of “my universal relations” or “occult relation” in which “uncontained beauty & power” is established:

Such is the constitution of all things, or such the plastic power of the human eye, that the primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal, give us a delight *in and for themselves*; a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping. This seems partly owing to the eye itself. The eye is the best of artists. By the mutual action of its structure and of the laws of light, perspective is produced, which integrates every mass of objects, of what character soever, into a well colored and shaded globe, so that where the particular objects are mean and unaffecting, the landscape which they compose is round and symmetrical. And as the eye is the best composer, so light is the first of painters. (*CW* I 12; emphasis original)

Instead of the “transparent eye-ball,” which has the power to “see all,” Emerson locates “the plastic power of the human eye” in relation to “the primary forms” such as the sky, the mountain, the tree, and the animal. This quotation is reminiscent of the statement near the end of the essay: “Nature is not fixed but fluid. Spirit alters, moulds, makes it,” but the eye as “the best composer” is only in a collaborative relationship with light as “the first of painters.” As Greenham summarizes “This is the lowest form of our appreciation of beauty, . . . it is merely the agreement of our sensuous understanding with the not-me” (87), in categorizing beauty, Emerson dismisses such beauty found in nature like “orchard in blossom” as “the least part” (*CW* I 14) and decides that “[t]he presence of a higher, namely, of the spiritual element is essential to its [beauty’s]

perfection” (*CW* I 15). Yet, “the plastic power of the human eye,” which Emerson tried to oppress under the influence of Coleridge, can be read as the precursor to “practical power” (*CW* IV 49) that Emerson reaches in his later essay “Experience.”

Emerson’s rhetoric regarding his way of seeing and contacting nature connected to “the animal eye” expresses more dynamic and mutual relations with nature than the former criticisms of imperialism levied against it considered. Against the strong image of the “eye-ball” passage, *Nature* and related early texts already anticipated Emerson’s more refined thoughts concerning the distance between man and nature in his subsequent essays.

Chapter 2

“A Zigzag Line of a Hundred Tacks”:

Emerson’s Plastic Self in “Self-Reliance”

The question of how to situate his view of self has been great importance in previous studies of Ralph Waldo Emerson. In particular, the essay “Self-Reliance” (1841) is inevitable when considering Emerson’s model of the self. Recent studies on “Self-Reliance” focus on subverting earlier studies which had interpreted his model of the self as independent and solid. Instead, they stress Emerson’s flexible and passive aspects, which were influenced by the people who surrounded him and the situations he found himself in. However, these studies are insufficient in their estimation of Emerson’s occasional but positive withdrawal from others. As an alternative, this chapter illuminates Emerson’s plastic self between society and solitude, taking his famous tropes of the ship and the roses. The plastic self lies “in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude” (*CW* II 31), and makes “a zigzag lines of a hundred tacks.”

By detouring later text “Quotation and Originality” (1876), this chapter will concentrate on the relationship between the concept of “originality” and his self. Through reconsidering Emerson’s tropes as more than mere metaphors, this chapter will explore how Emerson’s plastic self is formed during his zigzagging voyage.

1. Self-Reliance and “Aversion”

When Ralph Waldo Emerson’s concept of self-reliance is mentioned, a conventional image of the firm self, freed from a comparison with others and always

devoted to its own interests, immediately springs to the reader's mind.¹ As Emerson vigorously states in the first paragraph of the essay: "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, —that is genius" (*CW* II 27), Emerson's image of the self seems, at first sight, to be a solid and fixed one. This self-image is permeated by the idea that belief in one's "private heart" is "true for all men" at the same time, and that the most private and internal thought eventually becomes a pathway to the public and external realm. Emerson calls this very ability to believe "what is true" for oneself "genius," which reflects this intricate relationship between public and private. On the one hand, Emerson appreciates the genius of Plato and Milton because it seems not from "books and tradition," but speaking "what they thought" (*CW* II 27). On the other hand, Emerson suggests that "a man" like us "should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within" but indicates that "he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his" (*CW* II 27). Emerson states: "[i]n every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty" (*CW* II 27). At the outset of the essay, young Emerson, who was in his thirties at the time, stresses a new and unique model of the self that is not defined by or subordinate to the foreign cultures of Greece and Rome, the great predecessors to England, nor to the institutions such as the church or the school.

As Emerson forthrightly epitomizes, "envy is ignorance" and "imitation is suicide" (*CW* II 27); this Emersonian self is clearly distinguishable from the modern European one that suffers from what Harold Bloom once called "the anxiety of

¹ Whicher, who was influential in the early history of Emerson's studies, summarizes and values Emerson's self as a process of alteration from an unstable and fragile one that adapts to the influences from the environment, such as the church system, American society, and Britain, to an independent, strong, and unshakable model of the self, which is indigenous to America. For more details, see the Chapter 2 of Whicher. With reference to this reading, Anderson terms Emersonian independent self as "the imperial self."

influence.” Needless to say, this image of the young and original self also overlaps the image of the United States of America, a country in the new world with a relatively short history compared to the old world of other European countries. Emerson clearly discovers these features of the youth “in the face and behavior of children, babes, and even brutes” (*CW* II 28) in comparison with adults. “Children, babes, and brutes” are portrayed as beings who are not swayed by the influence of their surroundings, but live in the present, following their instincts or intuitions. However, while he finds an ideal in them, Emerson also understands the difficulty adults confront in expressing their opinions boldly. Adults or “the man is, as it were,” is “clapped into jail by his consciousness” (*CW* II 29). Moreover, “[a]s soon as he has once acted or spoken with éclat, he is a committed person, watched by the sympathy or the hatred of hundreds whose affections must now enter into his account. *There is no Lethe for this.*” (*CW* II 29; emphasis added). In a rigid society that values appearances and conventions and honors conformity, the idea of self-reliance does not simply take the form of a straightforward expression of one’s ideals, but appears instead as an “aversion” to the stance that conforms to ossified institutions and customs. More specifically, it is important for self-reliant subject to “be a nonconformist,” to do one’s own job and not conform to meaningless conventions and institutions, such as “a dead church,” “a dead Bible-Society,” and “a great party” (*CW* II 32). Therefore, unlike for the cases of children, babes and brutes, self-reliance for adults is of a nature that first presupposes existing institutions and customs and then establishes itself as a denial of them.

It is too simple, however, to sum up this process of self-reliance as being a linear one in which Emerson, adults, and America can find their original identity. For it is impossible for adults to live in complete isolation from society; even if they do avoid conformity, and they still cannot fully trust the intuitions that emerge from within

themselves without skepticism.² Emerson writes: “I shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels of the door-post, *Whim*” (*CW* II 30; emphasis original), but “the lintels,” of course, do not stay up forever. In this context, the following passage is particularly noteworthy.

It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude. (*CW* II 31)

Emerson not only accepts partial influences from others “in the midst of the crowd,” but also “keeps the independence of solitude,” partly immune from the changes around him. In the succeeding sections, he seems to be pursuing a self-image that is not based upon a model of the self that has been criticized as simple, linearly developed, imperialistic, or self-centered, but rather one that is constantly renewed through repeated alterations that do not lead to power or possession, arising from the relationship between individuals in self-reliance and against the pressure to fit in and of lifeless conventions. As Emerson suggests “the voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks” (*CW* II 34); this voyage of the self does not make a straight line from one point to another without contradiction, but instead contains many deviations. To acknowledge these incessant changes, the theme of time is significant.

2. The Fluid Self and “Genius”

What is needed to draw “a zigzag line,” or to keep transforming oneself is an attitude that is not mired in the past. Customs get established and institutions become ossified because long periods of time pass without remarkable change to the nature of

² For example, see the passage just before his powerful declaration: “[w]hat I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think,” the hesitation found in his tone: “[f]ew and mean as my gifts may be, I actually am” (*CW* II 31).

acts or organizations. Similarly, in the second half of “Self-Reliance,” Emerson is critical of those who feel remorse for past failures and who travel overseas to visit historical sites because of their excessive emphasis on the past. This firm self that such actions create, bound by the eyes of others who try to judge its trajectory solely on the basis of the past, is very different from Emerson’s ideal self. He criticizes the condition in which the self cannot accept revision, which is to say, “consistency”: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesman and philosophers and divines” (*CW* II 33). This hostile attitude toward “consistency” is exemplified in the following affirmation: “With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do” (*CW* II 33). Instead, he recommends that individuals “[s]peak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day” (*CW* II 33). Naturally, this attitude is often misunderstood by those in society who try to infer one’s idea from his or her past achievements. However, Emerson, enumerating the specific names of “representative men,” powerfully declares: “To be great is to be misunderstood” (*CW* II 34).

Recent studies on Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” start attacking earlier studies that interpreted his model of the self as independent and solid. Instead, they stress the flexibility and passivity of Emerson’s concepts, which are influenced by the people who surround him and the situations he finds himself in. For instance, in his 1981 study, Stanley Cavell takes up the element of “abandonment, leaving” rather than “inhabitation and settlement” as Emerson’s characteristic motif (*Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes* 19), and later reinterprets Emerson’s “aversion” in the context of a relationship in which the self and society mutually provide opportunities for change. Cavell explains: “he [Emerson] writes in such a way as to *place* his writing in his unending argument . . . an unending turning away from one another, but for that exact

reason a constant keeping in mind of one another, hence endlessly a turning *toward* one another” (181; emphasis original). With this Cavell’s observation as a starting point for discussion, the passivity of Emerson’s self and its flexibility to transform are started to attract attention. In his 1987 book, Richard Poirier emphasizes the element of “flow” in Emerson’s self-image, juxtaposing it with Michel Foucault’s view of the self (170-73), and in her 1998 study, Sharon Cameron reevaluates Emerson’s “impersonality” as attributable to the “erasure of self-identity” (81). In *Emerson and Self-Culture* (2008), John T. Lysaker reconsiders Emerson’s entire works from the viewpoint of “self-culture.” More recently, in the 2010s, Masaki Horiuchi focuses on the importance of the “trembling self,” and a hollow in Emerson’s self (*Emerson* 155-64), and Branka Arsić, sharing these interests, argues for a connection between Emerson’s self-image and the metaphors of “water.” She asserts that water “becomes the very principle of leaving”(4). Borrowing a passage from “Self-Reliance,” “[t]his one fact the world hates, that the soul becomes” (*CW* II 40), she states that “[t]he ontological instability of this oceanic being is famously determined in ‘Self-Reliance’ as ‘becoming’” (5). Arsić considers “the ontology of becoming” in connection with “the ontology of leaving” that Cavell advocated, for they share the fluid power of water.

Critics have shifted their interpretation of Emerson’s self, therefore, from a solid and unshakable self to a flowing watery self. In light of the transition in previous research which has led to this almost contrary view, how is it possible to re-read “Self-Reliance” in a positive light? George Kateb interprets Emerson’s set of essays on relationships with others, such as the essays “Friendship” and “Love,” as depicting the changes that self-reliant subjects undergo in their communication with each other. In doing so, he separates Emerson’s idea of self-reliance into two categories, “mental self-reliance” and “active self-reliance,” and then positions Emerson’s passages on

friendship within the former (17). He places more emphasis on the former, “mental self-reliance” tied to intellectual life, over the latter, “active self-reliance” tied to actual life in an obvious way (29).

While this chapter shares with Kateb the premise that the one-to-one relationships between self-reliant subjects play an essential role in supporting mutual changes, it does not engage with his dichotomy between two types of self-reliance by him. This is because Emerson actually celebrates in this essay more than just the intellectually controlled transfiguration that Kateb emphasizes. In “Friendship,” for example, the impact of the encounter with “a stranger” (*CW* II 113) or is emphasized as opportunities to alter oneself, inspired by the involvement with the unpredictable aspects of others. It is possible for the self to transform passively, step out into a new action, and chart “a zigzag line” because these environmental influences cannot be calculated or predicted beforehand.

In “Self-Reliance,” such unexpected influences are named, for example, spontaneity, instinct, and intuition. To the question “[w]hat is the aboriginal self on which a universal reliance may be grounded?” (*CW* II 37), Emerson answers that “[t]he inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions” (*CW* II 37). It should be noted here that the concept of “genius,” which appeared at the beginning of the essay, is associated with the unconscious processes of “instinct” and “intuition.” Against the elucidation of “genius” at the start of the essay, these words that implicate the outside of one’s consciousness express the fact that one does not fully understand one’s own ideas in advance. In other words, it can be said that the self cannot be controlled by one’s own deliberate thoughts alone. Therefore, for Emerson, these “involuntary perceptions” which he distinguishes

from “the voluntary acts of his mind” (*CW* II 37) are “not whimsical, but fatal” (*CW* II 38). In the following sections of the essay, the acceptance of the divine wisdom coming from outside of his consciousness is presented as an opportunity to live in the present moment, separated from the past and the vision of the future, and the superiority of the present is portrayed around the figure of the “soul” against the perspective of worshipping one’s parents, the past, and history.

In this essay questioning consistency, however, Emerson’s glorification of the present moment in relation to the past, history, and the flow of time is clearly “consistent.” In accepting new impressions received from external objects, people, and words, or in thinking about those impressions once in solitude, “involuntary perceptions” are generated within the self. These perceptions are named “instinct” or “intuition” and are associated with “genius.” Furthermore, it is the task of the subject of self-reliance to widely express the new perceptions that have undergone metamorphosis, sometimes in contradiction to conventional ideas. This persistent focus on the present instant, on “involuntary perceptions” and “intuition” rather than the negation of the past based on the intentional “aversion,” corresponds to the evolution of ideas in precedent studies, which have shifted from the solidity of the self towards an appreciation of its fluidity and flexibility.

In considering the role that “genius” plays in the formation of the self when one accepts these external influences, Richard Poirier’s argument may be useful in the first place. Poirier opposes Emerson’s connotation of the word “talent” as something contrary to “genius.” On the one hand, in the essay “Montaigne; or the Skeptic” (1850) and in various diary entries, Emerson regards “talent” as a gift tied to an individual. Emerson criticizes such talent for making “counterfeit ties.” On the other hand, “genius” connected to “instinct,” “involuntary perceptions,” and “intuition” is interpreted as

more fluid and abstract power that “makes real ones” (84). For him, “genius” does not belong to an individual, but emerges in the midst of the relationships with others, and can be construed as a performative trope rather than as a concept with a fixed definition or meaning (90-91).³ To put it another way, the “involuntary perceptions,” which emerge from the unconscious realm, can be thought of the ability to receive the emanation of “genius” in the impersonal realm.

Closely related to these stances is Emerson’s ambivalent attitude toward the “quotation” of words from the past. The question for Emerson is whether a quote remains at the level of mere imitation, or whether it contains elements that lead to a new originality. Based on the dichotomy of “genius” and “talent,” blind devotion to the past, or filiofetism, is the attitude of conformity to that “talent” of precursors. On the one hand, it is indispensable for the transformation of the self to accept external impressions and stimulations in the present moment. On the other hand, Emerson is severely critical of individuals who continue to depend on and adapt to the “involuntary perceptions” already accepted in the past. However, is it right to affirm that Emerson’s ideal self is a flexible and fluid self that is always open to relationships with the surroundings, that has no particular form, and that keeps changing? To begin with, when one immerses oneself in the flow of power in such an inter-subjective realm, what is the position of the subject who receives that power and sometimes tries to withdraw

³ Drawing on Poirier’s argument, Lysaker further argues for the significance of “tropes”: “I emphasize ‘tropes’ because it says much of what ‘conversion’ says, coming from the Latin, *tropus*, itself a translation (or conversion) of the Greek, *tropos*, which says, at once, ‘to turn’ (from *trepein*), as well as ‘manner and style.’” (*Emerson and Self-Culture* 79; emphasis original). He continues: “To say, then, that writing “tropes” is to say that its conduct or bearing turns or transforms what it quotes, and in a way that conducts prospects as yet unthought (or forgotten) in the course of one’s inheritance” (79). From this perspective on “tropes,” he relates “thinking and writing” with “practical power” in the essay “Experience.” This analysis of the character of quotation seems to suit with late Emerson’s thought that next section will deal with.

from the family with the lintel of “whim”? In order to reconsider the contradictory relationships to the surroundings that Emerson presents in “Self-Reliance” and other texts, next section will re-read the famous metaphor of the rose, which most symbolically embodies Emerson’s paradox concerning living in the present moment and quoting the words of the past, in juxtaposition to a late essay, and reassess the link between his self-image and the rose from a different angle.

3. “The Blowing Rose” and Emerson’s Memory Loss

For a start, let us review Emerson’s renowned description of the rose in “Self-Reliance.” He criticizes man’s incapacity to confidently express one’s own thoughts and opinions through the pronoun “I” as the subject, and the human weakness that refuses to dispense with quotations from “some saint or sage,” and vividly contrasts to “the blade of grass or the blowing rose” that “make[s] no reference to former roses or to better ones”:

Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say 'I think,' 'I am,' but quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose. These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God to-day. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence. Before a leaf-bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more; in the leafless root there is no less. Its nature is satisfied and it satisfies nature in all moments alike. (*CW* II 38-39)

Emerson praises the rose under his window as the symbol of his ideal: “it is perfect in every moment of its existence,” although he also states that “man postpones or

remembers; he does not live in the present” (*CW* II 38-39). Unlike the “timid and apologetic” man, the rose is represented as the timeless being here, and therefore remains perfect in every moment of its own existence. Kateb, who attempts to make a sharp distinction between two types of self-reliance, is also critical of the image of the rose in this passage. He asserts that even if we may look like roses, to the friend or lover, or to the poet, but “only now and then” (27). In other words, “human beings cannot be, as roses are” (27). Indeed, Emerson himself also highlights the traits of the man who always “postpones or remembers,” that is, who does not live in the present but only thinks about the past and the future, in a clear contrast to the rose. However, his subsequent statement that “[h]e cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time” (*CW* II 38-39) does not necessarily seem to deny the possibility of the man being able to live that way like the rose, as Kateb insists.

Arsić, contrary to Kateb, tries to take a positive view of the possibility of a person living like a rose. To do so, she first traces the metaphors of roses that Emerson has used in his texts parallel to the archaeology of roses, or the history of the trope of roses from Cotton Mather to Gertrude Stein, and then ranks them as “the signifier both of staying and of leaving, of love recovered and of love broken” (207). It is certain that her argument brilliantly elucidates the nature of the rose, symbolized by two ambivalent features: the beautiful petals that captivate the viewer and the thorns that hurt those who touch them. However, her strategy of assessing the humane implications in the representations of roses in a series of temporal genealogies is ultimately trapped in the linear current of time that is repeatedly criticized in “Self-Reliance” and fails to completely break away from the anthropocentrism shared by Kant and Kateb.

Graham Harman, who criticizes this Kantian anthropocentrism, attempts to evaluate the relationship between things that do not involve any projections of the

human spirit as absolutely equal to the relations mediated by human being. He stresses that instead of locating the soul inside things like sand and stone, we “find something like sand and stone only in the human soul” (*The Quadruple Object* 42). When accepting this reversal, Emerson’s famous statement that “the soul becomes” will attain a new significance. I will explore the path of affirming Emerson’s writings not in the way Arsić does, by locating the soul in the rose, but instead by trying to find something connected to the rose in our soul, by taking a detour.

In “Quotation and Originality,” included in his posthumous collection *Letters and Social Aims* (1875), Emerson gives an account of the character of “quotation” in a way that seems at first glance to be in conflict with descriptions in “Self-Reliance”: “there is no pure originality. All minds quote” (*CW* VIII 94). He emphasizes the human debt to tradition and denies pure originality, offering a stance in keeping with Kateb’s interpretation of the rose. So what does originality look like if it can never be pure?

And what is Originality? It is being; being oneself; and reporting accurately what we see and are. Genius is, in the first instance, *sensibility, the capacity of receiving just impressions from the external world, and the power of coordinating* these after the laws of thought. (*CW* VIII 105; emphasis added)

First, it should be noted that Emerson considers “being oneself” in connection with “reporting accurately what we see and are.” This link reflects his new definition of “genius.” In addition to “the capacity of receiving just impressions from the external world,” he freshly accentuates the role of “the power of coordinating” here. When read in conjunction with the passage “[n]ext to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it” (*CW* VIII 100), this essay seems to suggest the possibility of quotations that go beyond imitation to acquire a kind of originality. These reconstruction, intended

to grasp values of “genius” and “quotation,” can perhaps be interpreted as the result of Emerson’s confrontation with his own aging.⁴ It is interesting to note when thinking about these revisions that the aged Emerson was suffering from a partial loss of memory when he wrote this essay.

In his latest research on Emerson’s late essays, Christopher Hanlon pays attention to the fact that “Quotation and Originality” has been mainly edited and corrected, not by Emerson himself but by a transcendentalist James Elliot Cabot and Emerson’s daughter, Ellen. According to Ellen’s letter to her sister Edith in 1874, which Hanlon quotes, when Emerson looked over Ellen’s proofs of his poems, the contents of which he had already forgotten, he exclaimed that they kept rising, “each as fresh as a star” (*Ellen Tucker Emerson* 148; qtd. in Hanlon 11). In this very moment, Emerson seems to reencounter the texts he once wrote thanks to not only his own “involuntary perceptions” but also “the power of coordinating” evoked by Ellen and Cabot’s editing. In a sense, Emerson here “lives with nature in the present, above time” (*CW* II 34) as if his “soul becomes” the rose. The following passage, the most famous part of “Quotation and Originality” quoted by many critics, is of great interest when re-read from this perspective.

In hours of high mental activity, we sometimes do the book too much honor, reading out of it better things than the author wrote; reading, as we say, between the lines. You have had the like experience in conversation, —the wit was in what you heard, not in what the speakers said. *Our best thought came from others.* We heard in their words a deeper sense than the speakers

⁴ Although many scholars, including Poirier (228), have negatively assessed the discussion in this essay as little more than a repetition of early works, it seems rather that the alteration found here is one of the best example of the performative transformation of the idea of “genius” itself.

put into them, and could express ourselves in other people's phrases to finer purpose than they knew. (*CW* VIII 103; emphasis added)

Emerson depicts the way of "creative reading" as "reading between the lines," and hearing in the speaker's words "a deeper sense than the speakers put into them." In this case, Emerson's "others" will reorganize his own past self and his own texts, which have already been lost from his memory. Emerson susceptibly receives the texts interactively woven by the literal other, Ellen, that is, "our best thought from others," in a state of partial memory loss.

This idea of plastic originality makes it possible for us to anachronistically question the relationship between youth and old age. Margaret Morganroth Gullette argues that "aging is constructed by culture and could therefore be critiqued and reconstructed" (13). She astutely points out that aging is characterized by the two opposite narratives, "progress narrative" and "decline narrative" (13-20) and criticizes "how the life-course opposition of progress and decline constraints narrative options in our [American] culture" (19). Emerson's involuntary way of dealing with aging or the memory loss perhaps gives an alternative to critique these opposite narratives. Relatedly, in the lecture "The Protest" (1839), Emerson describes the power of youth:

By resistance to this strong Custom and strong Sense, —by obedience to the soul, is the world to be saved. The Redemption from this ruin is lodged in the heart of Youth. The Saviour is as eternal as the harm. The heart of Youth is the regenerator of society; the perpetual hope; the incessant effort of recovery. (*EL* III 90)

Arsić rightly argues that this part shows Emerson's unusual stance on the power of youth. For Emerson here, "youth is precisely the capacity not to fix one's ideas into anything firm and dogmatic" (42), and "youth represents the capacity to let oneself be

affected by the outside, and so to become new. Youth, therefore, stands for the practice of self-renewal through radical reforming” (42). These description of the power of youth is clearly resonant with late Emerson’s definition of “genius,” “the capacity of receiving just impressions from the external world,” and “the power of coordinating.” In short, late Emerson’s idea of plastic originality enables one to detect “the power of youth” in Emerson himself, not characterized by “decline narrative.” By detecting and watching the “gleam of light” which flashes across his mind from within, Emerson once again returns to a state of “self-reliance,” like the rose that exists moment by moment without being trapped in memories and remembrance of the past.

4. “A Zigzag Line” and Plastic Self

Catherine Malabou, in her book reinterpreting Kant’s transcendentalism, which had a profound influence on Emerson, against contemporary neuroscience, takes notice of the notion of “epigenetics,” a biological figure of the spontaneity of the intellect that became widely accepted at the end of the eighteenth century. She rethinks “the dynamic of transcendental philosophy” arguing that it “proceeds both from the formal anteriority of the a priori —the archeological dimension—and from its modifiability through successive corrections—the teleological dimension” (174).⁵ Her idea here, especially that of “modifiability through successive corrections,” is an expansion of her previous research, which has focused on the “plasticity” of the brain as an organ and the possibility of partial reshaping in it. This concept of plasticity is critically important in

⁵ In reference to the argument of “epigenetics,” based on the study of Walls, Jason de Stefano emphasizes Richard Owen’s influence on Emerson’s idea of creativity. He suggests that Emerson read his book and actually met him in 1848, and inspired by his “theory of creative evolution,” which was “developed in large part through a practice of epigenetic embryology” (177). For more details of Emerson and epigenesis, see also Chapter 3.

considering how new and original ideas and selves can emerge through quotations and learnings.⁶

This chapter has so far argued that the self-reliant subject praised in “Self-Reliance” is also open to “modifiability through successive corrections,” and therefore does not follow the fixed dichotomy suggested by Kateb. This process of renewal, however, does not lead to a state of chaos in which the identity of the subject is completely lost. The self is characterized by neither the rigidity that early studies focused on, nor the flexibility highlighted in recent research, but an incessant process of self-reformation linked to what Malabou calls “plasticity,” in which Emerson’s plastic self not only continues to transform, inspired by Ellen’s and Cabot’s “the power of coordinating,” but also always retains a kind of frame or the core of an identity at the same time. Emerson’s tropes, such as “the soul becomes,” also need to be reconsidered from this viewpoint. Indeed, in his texts, the roses, children, and babes, and perhaps the old people as well, are depicted as being who face the present moment more than the adults who are forced to live in linear time and depend on the past. Nevertheless, there is no dramatic alteration in the sense that a rose will continue to be a rose tomorrow. For instance, in “Circles” Emerson states: “[t]he one thing which we seek with insatiable desire, is to forget ourselves, . . . to lose our sempiternal memory, and to do

⁶ Unlike this creative concept of plasticity, in *Ontology of the Accident* (2009), Malabou focuses on the connection between “destructive plasticity” and the problem of ageing. She argues that the problem of ageing is widely characterized “as a loss of ‘good’ plasticity” (39). She compares two competing conceptions of aging; one is gradual process of decline like Guillette’s “decline narrative,” while the other defines ageing “as an event” (41). She terms the latter conception, possibility of changing “all of a sudden” as “the instantaneity of ageing,” and emphasizes that it challenges the continuity and upsets traditional definitions of old age as plasticity (48). Referring to the cases of brain lesions, she relates the character of “destructive plasticity,” which is opposed to good or creative plasticity, with “the instantaneity of ageing” or “ageing before ageing” (55). In summary, Malabou deconstructs what Guillette calls “decline narrative” from the opposite direction to Arsić. Malabou’s stance here is perhaps deeply intertwined with Emerson’s skepticism that Chapter 3 will mainly deal with.

something without knowing how or why; in short, to draw a new circle” (*CW* II 190), but each circles that changes shape also has a center, always forming a closed area separated from the outside.⁷

Similarly, regarding “the voyage of the best ship,” he also indicates the tendency when seeing a line from a sufficient distance for a zigzag line to straighten itself to “the average tendency” (*CW* II 34). Emerson’s self/ship is not operated by himself alone, nor does it sink beneath the surrounding water.⁸ As this chapter has demonstrated, Emerson’s definitions of words like “quotation,” “originality,” and “genius” have also been updated and modified over time. However, all of these revisions affected by the flow of the water around the ship, are consistent in the sense that they demand that the ship always keeps sailing so that the self can live through critical moments in daily life without being dissociated. In other words, Emerson and his ship, continually taking dramatic turns and forming “a zigzag line of a hundred tacks,” practice “a poetics of distance,” which is requested as resistance again the collapse of the self, such as occurs during aging and death.

⁷ In association with this part, Tatsumi discusses the relationship between the circles Emerson draws and its constantly reconstructed center, especially referring to the interrelationship between “autobiography” and “biography” in Emerson’s texts such as “Montaigne; or the Skeptic.”

⁸ Arsić, for example, emphasizes the conflict between “genius” and the “body,” suggesting that Cavell and his predecessors emphasized the former, while attaching great importance to the latter. In this chapter, however, I rather focus on the very position of the conflict between the two, which is likened to the maintenance of the hull. See also Chapter 3 of Horiuchi for more information on the relationship between the “body” and “genius.”

Chapter 3

From “Genius” to “Practical Power”:

The Logic of “Moods” in “Experience”

On February 4, 1842, a week after the sudden death of his child Waldo, Emerson wrote a letter to his friend Caroline Sturgis:

Alas! I chiefly grieve that I cannot grieve; that this fact takes no more deep [sic] hold than other facts, is as dreamlike as they; a lambent flame that will not burn playing on the surface of my river. Must every experience—those that promised to be dearest & most penetrative, —only kiss my cheek like the wind & pass away? I think of Ixion & Tantalus & Kehama.” (*L* III 9)

Strangely, though only one week after the death of his child, Emerson wrote that he had not directly suffered as a result of his son’s disappearance. Rather, he had suffered *indirectly* in anguish of the impossibility of grieving in the way that he thought he should. In the writings of Emerson, deaths of close relatives or friends¹ were always important. In particular, the death of his first child, Waldo, had an enormous impact on Emerson, as many critics have indicated. Two years after writing the letter to Sturgis, he finished writing the essay “Experience” (1844). With this connection between Waldo’s death and a motive behind the essay as a beginning, this chapter will trace Emerson’s thought on “grief” and its more ambiguous affects, or what he called “moods” and “temperature.”

¹ Emerson lost his first wife Ellen in 1831, his brother Edward in 1834, and his brother Charles in 1836.

“Experience” consists of the poem as epigraph, seven sections of an essay, and the last part as epilogue. Scholars have read this composition from diverse perspectives. For example, David Van Leer reads each section of “Experience” in comparison to each chapter of *Nature*. Laurence Buell interprets this essay based on three pairs of six sections as “Illusion/Temperament, Succession/Surface, Surprise/Reality” (133). Different from Buell’s construction of “zig-zag lines,” Masaki Horiuchi groups the first three sections together given their focus on “a limit” or “negative aspects” of life, while the last three sections serve as “a logical and philosophical refutation of the first half of the essay,” and the fourth, the middle section “Surface,” as “the central partition of the essay” (64–65). This chapter basically relies upon Horiuchi’s grouping, but concentrates on the opposing characteristics of the first three and the last three chapters rather than the function of the fourth section.

Roughly speaking, the first three sections are characterized by strong skeptical moods, and the latter half of three sections is governed by a more positive tone. Specifically, as Barbara Packer and other critics point out, the extremely skeptical accounts in the first half were highly influenced by the texts of David Hume, whose books Emerson continued reading eagerly since he was young.² Hume’s main argument, which denied idealism and endorsed empiricism instead, could not be ignored by the young Emerson who had a temperament charmed by Neoplatonic idealism. For instance, after he repeatedly states that men can only connect with objects indirectly and obliquely, he argues in the last phase of the essay that “All I know is reception; I am and I have: but I do not get, and when I have fancied I had gotten anything, I found I did not. I worship with wonder the great Fortune” (*CW* III 48). Packer summarizes these

² Richardson states that “Emerson was to struggle against Hume for years. To a great extent Emerson’s life and work—indeed, transcendentalism itself—constitutes a refutation of Hume” (31).

lines from a balanced viewpoint, indicating that “Emerson’s mature position can best be characterized by saying that he accepts Hume’s argument but reverses his conclusions” (159), but many scholars interpreted this line negatively as a general endorsement or embracement of Humean skepticism. Among others, in *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1953), Stephen Whicher compared *Nature* (1836) with the essay “Experience” and criticized the latter as a harbinger of his subjection to fate. For Whicher, this essay was the turning point at which the gist of his argument moved from “freedom” to “fate.” Emerson’s position is therefore “such that a lasting release is no longer to be found in egoistic rebellion, but only in acquiescence” (122).

However, beginning in the 1980s, critics such as Sharon Cameron and Stanley Cavell began to recognize this essay as one of the most remarkable of Emerson’s texts, thereby reevaluating Emerson’s stance on skepticism in this essay from other perspectives. Based on these studies, this chapter tries to connect the latest “affect theory” with various tropes around “moods” in this essay in a concrete way. In particular, metaphors of the “lens” and “embryo,” each appearing two times in the essay, are reevaluated as showing Emerson’s own radical transformation within the essay. This metamorphosis is linked together with his fluctuating stance on grief and other moods. At the outset, though, we need to examine the first half of this complicated essay “Experience,” which resists easy summarization.

1. The Logic of Moods

The first thing to note in considering the relationship between this essay and Waldo’s death is that Emerson’s lament manifests itself in a bizarre way. As many previous studies have already pointed out, the death of his son is directly referred to

only in a few pages in the first section of the essay. Even in these passages, Emerson's main concern is not so much Waldo's death itself as how the tragedy affects him and brings about changes in his mood. For example, he uses metaphors associated with play, such as "scene-painting and counterfeit" (*CW* III 29), and states "[w]hat opium is instilled into all disaster! It shows formidable as we approach it, but there is at last no rough rasping friction, but the most slippery sliding surfaces" (*CW* III 29). He repeatedly shows that any grief cannot be experienced directly, as it is always experienced indirectly. For Emerson, "The only thing grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is. That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality, for contact with which we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers" (*CW* III 29). This shallowness of grief is also likened to that of personal finances:

Well, souls never touch their objects. . . . Grief too will make us idealists. In the death of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful estate, —no more. I cannot get it nearer to me. If tomorrow I should be informed of the bankruptcy of my principal debtors, the loss of my many years; but it would leave me as it found me, —neither better nor worse. (*CW* III 29)

Even today, not a few readers may be embarrassed by this account given Emerson's comparison between his grief and the loss of property. It is as if Emerson's grief or soul were only a form of currency never to be directly touched by reality. Grief "falls off from me and leaves no scar. It was caducous. I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature" (*CW* III 29). Tactile images reappear right after this quote: "The Indian who was laid under a curse that the wind should not blow on him, nor water flow to him, nor fire burn him, is a type of us all. The dearest events are

summer-rain, and we the Para coats that shed every drop. Nothing is left us now but death” (*CW* III 29). It is widely known that this allusion to the Indian is influenced by the poem “The Curse of Kehama” (1810) by the English poet Robert Southey. Though Emerson referred to this poem several times soon after the death of Waldo, it is remarkable that his letter to Sturgis, which was quoted at the beginning of this chapter, already displayed the indirectness of grief.³ In that letter, grief was described as “a lambent flame that will not burn playing on the surface of my river,” or as “only kiss my cheek like the wind.” Similarly, the first section of “Experience” closes with the emphasis that “[o]ur relations to each other are oblique and casual” (*CW* III 30). Through the negative and repeated use of tactile tropes like “surface” and “touch,” this section impressively suggests that grief cannot reach the depth of one’s mind.

In the next two sections, Emerson focuses on how “moods” or affects like grief fleetingly shift. As Stanley Cavell claims in “Thinking of Emerson” that this essay “is about the epistemology, or say the logic, of moods” (*Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes* 11), “the logic of moods” is not only vague but also clearly one of the most significant ideas in the essay. In the second section “Temperament,” he asserts: “Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus” (*CW* III 30), and “[t]emperament is the iron wire on which the beads are strung” (*CW* III 30). Each bead of moods connected to temperament contains a different colored lens. Through the lens of each mood, which is inseparable from our own temperament, we can touch the realities distorted by illusions at different refractive rates. The

³ In addition to the letter to Sturgis quoted at the beginning of this chapter, he also repeatedly refers to Kehama in his journals. See Mikics (*AE* 228).

relationship between temperament, illusion, and glass is articulated in different words as follows: “Temperament also enters fully into the system of illusions and shuts us in a prison of glass which we cannot see. There is an optical illusion about every person we meet” (*CW* III 31). Emerson further indicates that “they [every person we meet] are all creatures of given temperament, . . . whose boundaries they will never pass” (*CW* III 31). “The individual texture” (*CW* III 31) or temperament can be basically assumed to be unchangeable. In other words, “[g]iven such an embryo, such a history must follow” (*CW* III 32).

In conjunction with the nuances in the use of “temperament” and “moods,” John T. Lysaker compares these terms with “genius,” “talent,” and “involuntary perceptions” focusing on the essays “Experience” and “Self-Reliance.” Succeeding the Richard Poirie’s opposition between “genius” and “talent” that we discussed in Chapter 2, Lysaker insists, “On my reading, at stake here is the difference between mood and temperament . . . Because it orients our thought and action in the world, temperament, like mood, names a perceptual and practical power. But it is an enduring one, so I think we can regard temperament as coextensive with what Emerson also terms ‘talent’” (*Emerson and Self-Culture* 44). Lysaker connects “temperature” with “talent” and treats them as rivals to “genius,” “involuntary perceptions,” and “moods”: “Genius thus also marks the ways in which thought, or better yet, an involuntary perception, leaves temperament and talent behind. In this sense, it is as improbable as temperament is probable” (46). Against the deterministic assumption connected to the implication of the word “temperament,” Emerson implies that “it is impossible that the creative power should exclude itself” (*CW* III 32) and that there is “a door which is never closed, through which the creator passes” (*CW* III 32). Nonetheless, at this point, he cannot tell

how this power manifests itself. The result of this “epistemology of moods” against “temperament” will appear in the latter half of the essay.

In the third section, “Succession,” Emerson delves deeply into the relationship between illusion and moods that unfolded in the last section. He insists: “The secret of the illusoriness is in the necessity of a succession of moods or objects. Gladly we would anchor, but the anchorage is quicksand” (*CW* III 32). For Cavell, “the given bases of the self are quicksand” (12-13). Moods and the self both have no secure foundation.⁴ Emerson describes this groundlessness of objects as “the most unhandsome part of our condition” in the first section: “I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition” (*CW* III 29). Cavell starts from this evanescence and condition regarding “a succession of moods or objects,” and asserts:

The fact that we are taken over by this succession, this onwardness, means that you can think of it as at once a succession of mood (inner matters) and a succession of objects (outer matters). This very evanescence of the world proves its existence to me; it *is* what vanishes from me. I guess this is not realism exactly; but it is not solipsism either. (13; emphasis original)

Cavell values neither realism nor solipsism, but an epistemology, or a “logic of mood” consisting of various illusions, as the main theme of the essay “Experience.” This epistemology of mood draws a conclusion that one cannot keep a stable link or a certain mood with an object for a long time. In other words, it is impossible to maintain a stable relationship with an object: “We need change of objects. Dedication to one thought is

⁴ For more details of the relation between Cavell’s thought and antifoundationalism, see Introduction.

quickly odious. We house with the insane, and must humor them; then conversation dies out” (*CW* III 32-33).

Furthermore, Emerson also compares the partiality of a man to a stone: “A man is like a bit of Labrador spar, which has no lustre as you turn it in your hand until you come to a particular angle; then it shows deep and beautiful colors” (*CW* III 33). Likewise, another situation of “a train of moods” is narrated in the image of a bird: “Like a bird which alights nowhere, but hops perpetually from bough to bough, is the Power which abides in no man and in no woman, but for a moment speaks from this one, and for another moment from that one” (*CW* III 34). These images of Labrador spar, a bird, and tropes implying unstable relations with objects seem to overlap with Emerson’s stance on his friends in the essay “Friendship,” where Emerson declares, “We will meet as though we met not, and part as though we parted not” (*CW* II 126).⁵

In summary, the first three sections tend to consider from a bird’s eye view that various moods, including grief, can only have “oblique and casual” relationships with objects, and that life is shaped by the experience of shifting between various moods and objects, like a bird “hops perpetually from bough to bough.” This fluid disposition of the “moods” as shifting from one to the next is of an intersubjective nature. As Charles

⁵ The latest research on Emerson’s essay about friendship shows that this subject that Emerson did not and perhaps could not discuss in “Friendship” was succeeded to “Experience.” For example, Lysaker and William Rossi summarize Russell B Goodman’s paper in *Emerson and Thoreau: Figure of Friendship* as indicating the following: “While ranging through the experiential ebb and flow of the gift of friendship in our lives, Emerson nonetheless fails to address the death of friends, a failure he later amply redressed in ‘Experience’” (11). Further, in his own paper, Lysaker focuses on the description of “Friendship,” where it is stated, “Our impatience is thus sharply rebuked.” He juxtaposes this line with the last section of “Experience”: “I know that the world I converse with in the city and in the farms, is not the world I think. I observe that difference, and shall observe it” (*CW* III 48) to answer the question of “why patience?” Lysaker thinks “the answer lies in appreciating Emerson’s reasons for redirecting our inquiry toward ‘life’ and away from ‘curiosity’” (92). He also interprets “Experience” as a sequel to the preceding essay “Friendship.”

Guignon claims, “our moods are not ‘Private’ or ‘Personal,’ but rather are essentially public, part of the ‘World’ instead of something in the ‘Self’” (Guignon 240; qtd. in Ngai 43). Furthermore, this definition of “moods” seems to correspond with several definitions of “affect,” after what Patricia Clough and Jean Halley call the “affective turn,” that have been summarized as “a quality that escapes emotions and feelings because it does not belong to a particular body or subject but, rather, enables a bidirectional capacity to affect and be affected” (Jensen and Wallace 1254). At the beginning of the *Affect Theory Reader* (2010), Gregg Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth assign primary importance to this in-between-ness and state that “Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. . . . affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations intensities and resonance themselves” (Gregg and Seigworth 1; emphasis original). This in-between-ness of “affect” could perhaps be compared to the implication of the word “emotion” in nineteenth-century America.

In the *PMLA* October 2015 issue dealing with the special topic of “Emotions,” Katharine Ann Jensen and Miriam L. Wallace analyze the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of “emotion” and suggest that “the dictionary implies that we know when we are experiencing an emotion . . . we are the subjects of our emotions, even the owners of them” (1252). This definition “reflects the individual self-possession that continues to pervade much Western philosophy and in particular North American culture’s reliance on the possessive individual (MacPherson)” (1251).⁶ According to Jensen and

⁶ Merriam-Webster’s definition and MacPherson’s argument of possessive individualism show the position of “affect” in the first half of the nineteenth century in America when

Wallace, theories testifying to what is identified as the “affective turn” call into question “Merriam-Webster’s self-possessed individual who is conscious of her or his emotions” (1254). They also suggest that this individualistic premise is “the principal blind spot in Merriam-Webster’s definition” (1255). Instead of this “static individual possession or state in its current definitions” (1252), “[a]t its root, then, *emotion* implies movement, a crossing between bodies, subjects, locations—or a failed attempt to make that crossing” (1252; emphasis original). Fuhito Endo emphasizes that these definitions of the word “emotion” imply not only the idea of “individual property,” but also the mental affectivity or the semantic contradiction that cannot be controlled by the “individual,” further pointing out this character is shared by the definition of “affect” (8). Moods or affects have public aspects; they are not limited to the “self” or subject, but are part of the “world” and have a measure of “in-between-ness.” That is to say, as Lysaker indicates, “Emerson runs counter to the notion that knowledge takes place only when we banish the affects” (42). Contrary to the cases of Merriam-Webster’s definition of “emotion” and Emerson’s “temperament,” one cannot possess his or her own “affect” or “mood.” Any “individual” cannot intentionally control the “affects” and “moods” around him or her solely by oneself. Instead, people are always passively detonated from the “affects” and “moods,” and “hops perpetually from bough to bough.” Emerson illustrates, in the first half of the essay, how the passive state of the self is influenced and inspired by moods or affects through one’s own temperament.

For Emerson, however, writing essays and lecturing were acts of attunement between conscious and unconscious thinking processes, whereby one is trying to overlook and attune oneself to the relationship with various moods at all times. Hence,

Emerson wrote the essays this chapter deals with. See also the argument of American individualism in Chapter 5, section 1.

the viewpoint of the affect cannot be applied easily to the texts of Emerson as if affect exclusively belongs to the unconscious body against the conscious mind. Nevertheless, from the fourth section, Emerson refuses to look down upon “a train of moods” and instead develops the argument inherent in one’s own experience itself.

2. “Walking” and “Mourning”: Goalless Process in “Experience”

Emerson drastically and suddenly changes the “mood” of this essay with the introduction of questions in the opening of the fourth section: “But what help from these fineries or pedantries? What help from thought?” (*CW* III 32). Masaki Horiuchi emphasizes the literary more than the ideological importance of this section that functions as a partition of the whole essay (78). To put it another way, this section proceeds from thinking through the character of one’s experience to describing “a train of moods” inherent in experience itself. As Emerson articulates, “Life is not dialectics. We, I think, in these times, have had lessons enough of the futility of criticism” (*CW* III 34). This assertion perhaps shows the subjective and internal rather than the objective and external viewpoint of this section. How, then, should the move from bough to bough, or from a mood as a bead to the next mood, be made? Using the word “surfaces” again, Emerson elucidates this part of the journey: “We live amid surfaces, and the true art of life is to skate well on them” (*CW* III 35). Walking through “the highway” (*CW* III 36), like “the temperate zone” (*CW* III 36) and “a narrow belt” (*CW* III 36), or “the mid-world” (*CW* III 37) consisting of various surfaces, is as hard as moving through “the line he must walk,” which “is a hair’s breadth” (*CW* III 38-39). In particular, the attempt to juxtapose the movement from one mood to another with skating and walking reminds us of the opening inquiry of the essay: “Where do we find ourselves?” (*CW* III 27), something that Cavell took notice of.

All affects, including grief, are only one of the succession of moods and cannot penetrate the surface of the object and touch reality. Cavell examines the way to confront these skeptical tendencies in this essay from the standpoint of “the mid-world.” Cavell affirmatively reevaluates Emerson’s statement “All I know is reception” (*CW* III 48) not as the submission to skepticism, nor the conquest over it, but as the “acknowledgment” of it. For him, Emerson’s attitude as represented by this passage is important in that it recaptures skepticism as the problem that cannot be solved, in comparison with what can be found in *Nature*, in which “Emerson is taking the issue of skepticism as solvable or controllable” (112). In drawing this conclusion, Cavell first pays attention to the outset of the essay “Experience”: “Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight” (*CW* III 27). It is important that the beginning and the end of stairs cannot be seen by “us.” These stairs are described as the step from and to the unknown place. In response to the opening question, Cavell asserts, “Finding ourselves on a certain step we may feel the loss of foundation to be traumatic. . . . But on another step we may feel this idea of (lack [sic] of) foundation to be impertinent, an old thought for an old world” (134). Together with Emerson, we “find and found” ourselves only in the process of walking along the stairs and continuing the journey. For Cavell, “[t]he step I am taking here is to receive the work of ‘Experience’ as transforming or replacing founding with finding and to ask when our lives would look like if the work is realized” (134). Here, walking and taking steps are interpreted as an endless process that has no fixed purpose or goal, expressing “the ideas of indirection and of succession” (134). In addition, Emerson’s

process of writing, and the continuation of writing so many diaries and essays, is also comparable to these processes.

During these continuous and goalless processes like walking and writing, it cannot be imagined that what would happen in the next moment would be something like his son's sudden death. Although Emerson dispassionately expresses this obscurity in saying, "Life itself is a bubble and a skepticism, and a sleep within a sleep. Grant it, and as much more as they will" (*CW* III 38), he continues, "stay there in thy closet and toil until the rest are agreed what to do about it" (*CW* III 38), and vigorously claims that one must "know that thy life is a flitting state, a tent for a night, and do thou, sick or well, finish that stint." (*CW* III 38). In this passage, Emerson starts to reconsider "a flitting state" as a goalless process of one's life not from the skeptical perspective, but from a more positive position of surprise. This idea sets up the next section to reevaluate the "oblique and casual" relationship with objects. At the same time, as Horiuchi astutely points out, this line was originally narrated to the dead son Waldo. Emerson once wrote "o small boy" (*JMN* VIII 433) in the diary entry instead of "thou," but later erased the trace of his death in the essay (201-02).⁷ As this chapter has confirmed, this essay directly refers to Waldo's death only in the first section. It therefore gives readers the impression that Emerson's sense of grief is diluted. However, taking into account that Emerson had always assembled his essays by editing and revising his diaries and

⁷ Relatedly, Barbara Johnson scrutinizes *apostrophe*, a rhetorical figure that means "the calling out to inanimate, dead, or absent being" (6) used by Emerson here. She cites Coleridge's poem "The Eolian Harp," which "sees the poet as being a sounding board for the voice of nature" (7) as an example, arguing that "the poet's voice depends on the other voices that *play him*" (8; emphasis original). She claims that the problem of poetic authority depends on poet's "capacity to *call*" (9; emphasis original), and concludes that "apostrophe enables the poet to transform an "I-it" relationship into an "I-thou" relationship, thus making a relation between persons out of was in fact a relation between a person and non-persons" (9). "The other voices" here can be interpreted as one of the source of "practical power" this chapter will discuss later. Additionally, the relationship between "the poet" and "other voices that play him" here is reminiscent of Emerson's stance in Henry David Thoreau's eulogy. For more details, see also Chapter 4, section 3.

lecture drafts, it can be suggested that he deliberately attempted to delete any trace of Waldo from the text.

Cameron affirmatively rereads this erasure based on Sigmund Freud's argument in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917). Cameron considers the entirety of "Experience" to be a work of mourning for Emerson's dead son Waldo. According to Cameron, "Emerson cannot 'experience' the child's death. Cannot and does not wish to. Because to mourn the child in the only way mourning can be done is also to relinquish him. Thus, from one point of view, the deficiency of reality—or our deficient relation to it—protects not only the self (from the same fate as the dead child) but also the self's relation to the dead child" (66). In other words, the incompleteness of the work of mourning keeps Emerson from relinquishing Waldo. At first glance, the theme of the essay gradually seems to depart from the son's death and grief itself, instead moving to the nature of affects in general. However, for Cameron, the disappearance of the traces of Waldo can also be interpreted as a legitimate process of mourning. Like Cavell, she regards this essay as indicative of the endless process of mourning that can never be completely done. She also reconsiders this incompleteness from a psychoanalytic perspective: "The man can mourn the same indirect relation to experience and to grief ten times because each time—every single time —what he says is both fleeting and partial. Thus the parts of the essay and the expressions of grief that they represent are not disparate and they are not integrated. *They are continuous, but as a series of continuous displacements*" (71; emphasis added). Emerson can keep mourning because his grief always has a "fleeting and partial" character. His indirect, oblique, and casual relation to experience and objects is construed as a series of continuous "displacements," a psychoanalytic term referring to those functions that protect the self. From this point of view, not only is Emerson's deliberate edit from the journal to the essay significant,

but it is also crucial that his unconscious works of continuous “displacements” never led to the cure or the completion of the works of mourning.

Both Cavell and Cameron reread and decipher this essay, which has often been criticized for its lack of integration, as a consistent one in that its incompleteness or endlessness has a certain meaning.⁸ This chapter also reconsiders that the change in this essay has an inherent meaning. In our view, the latter three sections of this essay address the metaphors raised in the first half, like beads or lenses, from a different angle. Concerning the radical transformation in the latter half, whether the frame or the form of the self is also fluidized or not is at stake. Between Cavell and Cameron, the remainder of this chapter focuses on the plastic form of the self.

3. From “Genius” to “Practical Power”

One of the main themes of this essay is the relationship between the inside and the outside, which is normally divided in terms of surfaces. In the middle of the fourth section, “Surface,” Emerson takes up the trope of the “atom” in considering this issue: “Then the new molecular philosophy shows astronomical interspaces betwixt atom and atom, shows that the world is all outside; it has no inside” (*CW* III 37). This account of the “outside” seems to resonate with the definitions of affect we introduced in menu 1 of this chapter and Catherine Malabou’s explanation of an affect as “a gift that comes from the absolute outside of being.” She continues, “This ‘outside’ or exteriority of

⁸ At the same time, their comments to one another on their respective papers display distinct differences in their interpretations. On the one hand, Cavell emphasizes “the necessity of ‘synthesis’” (117) and “the idea of succession” (134-35) in relation to what he terms “the call to philosophy” in the essay, though he admits Cameron “represent so decisive a break with the idea of Emerson’s prose as mist or fog” (116). On the other hand, Cameron takes up the concepts of “dissociation” and “impersonality” as key elements in the text. In doing so, she construes the second half of the essay differently than Cavell. She also reacts to Cavell’s claim by stating, “I continue to believe that something more specific than the call to philosophy is being described in Emerson’s essay” (221).

being is characterized again as a ‘space’ or a ‘spacing’ that has no interiority but marks the irretrievable distance between being and the subject” (*Self and Emotional Life* 25). Before and after this quote, Malabou discusses the non-self-centered origin of affects mainly by using the examples of wonder and generosity. As Tony Tanner emphasized in *The Reign of Wonder* (1965), “wonder” has always played a major role in Emerson’s texts. Malabou describes affects like “wonder,” which is also common to the title and theme of the next section of this essay “Surprise,” as “not my affect; they are given to me” (24) and stresses their passivity. She also draws attention to the nature of “space” in which affects and moods move back and forth, stating that the “outside” or exteriority of being is characterized as a “space” or “spacing.” Indeed, as Cameron suggests with respect to the impersonal aspect of this essay, it cannot be consciously decided whether to open ourselves to such others, affects, and moods from the outside world: “The opening cannot be my decision but an ontological movement, impersonal and anonymous. It is existence itself that gives me the feeling of existence, not ‘me.’ Therefore, the affective opening of the self cannot signify autonomy or autoaffection any longer. It is to be thought, each time, as an event: something coming from outside, from the other” (25). This “affective opening” to the external moods or affects, which can be compared to the moment of the encounter with the friend discussed later in Chapter 4, leads to the “power” of the self, arising from within, newly distinguished from the outside, after accepting the transfiguration of the self.

According to Emerson’s summary near the end of the fourth section, “Human life is made up of the two elements, power and form, and the proportion must be invariably kept, if we would have it sweet and sound” (*CW* III 38). To keep “the proportion” or the balance between “power and form” is essential because “[e]ach of those elements in excess makes a mischief as hurtful as its defect” (*CW* III 38). This idea of “the

proportion” against “the excess” is one of the most significant factors in the succeeding three sections. In the early part of the next and fifth section, “Surprise,” Emerson sets “power” against “choice and will”: “Power keeps quite another road than the turnpikes of choice and will; namely the subterranean and invisible tunnels and channels of life” (*CW* III 39). As David Mikics notes, this passage also “depict[s] an oblique, adventurous path rather than an orderly succession” (238), succeeding the reference to “a narrow belt” in the last section, the metaphor of “tunnels” expresses the “oblique and casual” character of power. These tunnels are “subterranean and invisible” because the realm of the unconscious cannot be controlled by “choice and will.”

Positively depicting this unexpectedness for the first time in the subsequent passage, this section radically transforms the mood of the essay yet again. As Emerson states, “Life is a series of surprises, and would not be worth taking or keeping if it were not. God delights to isolate us every day, and hide from us the past and the future. We would look about us, but with grand politeness he draws down before us an impenetrable screen of purest sky, and another behind us of purest sky” (*CW* III 39). Considering that every casualty of human experience is the act of God, Emerson here mediates the conflict between a passion for idealism and skepticism that has never been harmonized in this essay so far. The skepticism about “oblique and casual” relationships is attributed to “the grace of God” (*CW* III 40) and recedes at once into the background. It is impossible to appreciate this stance from a modern perspective. However, if we reread the passage showing Emerson’s concern about the self and experiences during infancy⁹, this withdrawal can be evaluated from another perspective. After the

⁹ Object relations theorists such as Melanie Klein and Donald W. Winnicott have focused on the self during infancy in conjunction to psychoanalysis. Particularly, Winnicott’s argument focusing on the nature of space is of great importance to this dissertation. For more discussion of space in Emerson’s writings and lectures, see also Chapter 5.

repetition of “the individual is always mistaken” (*CW* III 40) at the end of the section¹⁰, Emerson describes the biological process, or “the growth of the embryo,” once again:

In the growth of the embryo, Sir Everard Home, I think, noticed that the evolution was not from one central point, but coactive from three or more points. Life has no memory. That which proceeds in succession might be remembered, but that which is coexistent, or ejaculated from a deeper cause, as yet far from being conscious, knows not its own tendency (*CW* III 40-41).

In the line referring to an embryo earlier in the essay, Emerson linked its growth process to fatalism, and to inevitability. Instead of that model of growth along a linear time stream, here Emerson presents the surprises of embryo growth filled with chance in a way that conjures up images of taking steps with no fixed destination.

What is particularly noteworthy here is that he is imagining a situation before an individual is established, a situation in which multiple elements in the embryo work together while remaining undifferentiated from one another. This shift in Emerson’s perceptions of embryo growth and transformation, inspired by the power that escapes the control of consciousness (like moods and affects), seems to be similar to the zigzag trajectory of the ship detailed in Chapter 2. This perception of embryo can be taken in parallel with the transition from the preformation theory, which had been defended by seventeenth and eighteenth century biologists with respect to the ontogeny of organisms and the theory of the epigenesis, which secured widespread popularity from the end of the eighteenth century through to the nineteenth century. As opposed to the

¹⁰ As Horiuchi points out, we should note that repeated allusions to “the individual” stand for not only human beings but also all life forms (73).

preformation theory, which assumes that all the structures and morphologies of adults are already determined at the beginning of development, the “modifiability through successive corrections” was considered to be a crucial factor in the development of the epigenesis. Malabou reinterprets Kant’s transcendental philosophy from this perspective: “The permanence and mobility of form are thus combined in a single economy: the system of the epigenesis of pure reason” (*Before Tomorrow* 174).¹¹ This simultaneous pursuit of “the permanence and mobility of form” is the survival technique Emerson found in the second half of the essay that was essential to keep alive with the “plastic” proportion of “form and power.”¹²

Emerson, who states that several elements coexist inside us humans as well as in this example of embryonic formation, begins to shift his orientation to interpreting the self as a collection of fragments after looking at the embryo from a new angle. According to the perceptions of the first three sections, one is trapped in a glass cage, separated from the other and the object, and can only establish an “oblique and casual”

¹¹ In this book, Malabou highlights Kant’s phrase “system of the *epigenesis* of pure reason” (Kant 265; emphasis original) in 27th paragraph of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and thus belongs to the second edition. She emphasizes the opposition between “epigenesis” and “preformation” in the argument of Kant. In addition, for her, the preformationist theory of “implantation” is attributed to Hume’s hypothesis of “pre-established harmony” in Section V of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (23). In other words, Malabou connects Hume’s skepticism and preformation theory; that are both one of the central theme of the former half of the essay “Experience.”

¹² In relation to this biological process of growth, the theory of autopoiesis is also a profoundly interesting example. F.J. Varela and joint researchers have analyzed the way in which “the embodied mind,” lacking an inner self, interacts with the object, without falling into an easy mind-body dualism, by referring to Buddhist philosophy such as Zen and Chikan school of thought: “Thus our human embodiment and the world that is enacted by our history of coupling reflect only one of many possible evolutionary pathways. We are always constrained by the path we have laid down, but there is no ultimate ground to prescribe the steps that we take. . . . This groundlessness of laying down a path is the key philosophical issue that remains to be addressed” (Varela et al. 214). They draw the “groundlessness of laying down a path” that clearly resonates with Emerson’s steps in this essay, which lack an unshakable foundation, from “our history of coupling.” Regarding the connection between the essay “Experience” and Zen Buddhism, see also Packer, *Emerson’s Fall* 164.

relationship with the object. In the following lines, however, Emerson seems to depict the possibility of a more direct approach at first blush: “By persisting to read or to think, this region [a new and excellent region of life] gives further sign of life, as it were in flashes of light, in sudden discoveries of its profound beauty and repose” (*CW* III 41). Invoking the images of a child, Emerson continues, “every insight from this realm of thought is felt as initial, and promises a sequel. I do not make it; I arrive there, and behold what was there already. I make! O no! I clap my hands in infantine joy and amazement before the first opening to me of this august magnificence, . . .” (*CW* III 41). This statement echoes the earlier sentence: “The plays of children are nonsense, but very educative nonsense” (*CW* III 34), which appears abruptly at the end of section three, just before the image of a bird hopping from tree to tree is invoked. Some scholars have noted that, here, the idea that Emerson, or “I,” “clap[s] my hands in infantile joy” before the solemn scene has in a sense facilitated his transformation into his late son Waldo. At the same time, however, these references to the infant seem to evoke an image of the disunited self in childhood, before the formation of the glass cage that separates us from others. Emerson, or the infantile, dissociated “I,” do not make the “insight.” Instead, it can be made only by accepting moods or affects passively, or in other words, “by persisting to read and to think.”

After this turning point, the “insight” opens up “a future” and active state of mind again: “And what a future it opens! I feel a new heart beating with the love of the new beauty. I am ready to die out of nature and be born again into this new yet unapproachable America I have found in the West” (*CW* III 41). Cavell attaches a great deal of importance to this “turn” triggered by “the power of passiveness” (137). He also detects a “modifiability” of Kant’s transcendental philosophy in this essay: “A secular sacrifice would be for a transcendence not to a higher realm, but to another inhabitation

of this realm—an acknowledgment, let us say, of what is equal to me, an acceptance of separateness, of something ‘which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me’” (132). This “transcendence,” “acknowledgment,” or “acceptance of separateness” leads to a new consciousness equal to “a sliding scale, which identifies him now with the First Cause, and now with the flesh of his body; life above life, in infinite degrees” (*CW* III 42). A consciousness as “a sliding scale” is compatible with the realm of the unconscious that cannot be measured by the scale. This trope of the scale shows Emerson’s middle position or polarity between “conditions handsome and unhandsome” that results in neither passionate faith nor sober skepticism.

Emerson begins the seventh section with a reference to the fall of man, and he once again reconsiders the subject-object relationship developed in the first half of the essay together with the epilogue. The other idea this chapter wants to focus on, following that of the “embryo,” is a certain transfiguration brought to the metaphor of the “lens.” He depicts the indirect relationship with the object using the metaphor of the lens again, but the relationship through the lens, which in the first half was viewed pessimistically and skeptically and connected with the impossibility of mourning, is reread positively as having “creative power” this time around:

We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting *these colored and distorting lenses which we are*, or of computing the amount of their errors. *Perhaps these subject-lenses have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects.* Once we lived in what we saw; now, the *rapaciousness of this new power, which threatens to absorb all things, engages us.* Nature, art, persons, letters, religions, objects, successively tumble in, and God is but one of its ideas. Nature and

literature are subjective phenomena; every evil and every good thing is a shadow which we cast.” (*CW* III 43-44; emphasis added)

It is extremely vital to note that in this passage, the same terms used in the first half are used again, but this time in a subtle shift in position. In the first half, the existence of “we” or “us,” separated from “a string of beads,” “colored lenses,” and “a prison of glass,” are clearly assumed. In contrast, “we,” or the self itself, is expressed here as “subject-lenses.” Thus, it is no longer that we have lenses, but that we ourselves *are* the lenses. It is these “subject-lenses” that are said to “have a creative power.” The statement that follows, “perhaps there are no objects,” means that there is no subject inside these lenses through which one looks at the objects, and that is independent from the surface. The rapaciousness of this new power engages us since there is only a force at the surface of the lens, a diffused reflection of light. Even in the first half of the essay, where the human being is compared to a Labrador spar, immediately afterwards, the perspective of “you,” a human being holding the stone and looking at its reflection of light, is introduced.

Despite its obvious correspondence to the structure of the first half of the essay, the word “surface” does not appear again in the second half of the essay (from the fifth section onwards) because the inner, or the interior, which is assumed to exist behind the surface when the word is used, is no longer a problem. Furthermore, the absence in the second half of the essay of the word “temperament,” a word with the connotation of limiting the fluidity of moods and power that appeared so often in the first half of the essay, is likewise evidence of this change in the second half of the text. Following trope like “globes” also shows the image of contact only in the surfaces: “Two human beings are like globes, which can touch only in a point, and whilst they remain in contact all other points of each of the spheres are inert; their turn must also come, and the longer

a particular union lasts the more energy of appetency the parts not in union acquire” (*CW* III 44). Again, while the two human beings are considered to be “globes” in contact with each other at a single point, as in the earlier lens example, the inside of their contact points is never discussed. This image of contact between globes, which have no inside, also recalls the relationship between “atom and atom” in the fourth section.¹³ Similarly, Cameron shrewdly points out “the concluding pages of the essay put grief at a remove because there is no reason for it. In these pages grief is not inaccessible—grief is gratuitous” (74) and asserts that “the subject considered” in these pages “is not the death of the child but rather the death of the self” (74). Nevertheless, I emphasize “the power” between surfaces instead of the death.

“Creative power” does not spontaneously arise inside an individual. As Malabou insists, the affective opening occurs when affects and moods, arising in the midst of in-between-ness and coming from outside, are transmitted in a space shared with other objects, and this is thought “as an event.” What is foregrounded here is the form of the fragmented, infantile self that is parallel to the “embryo” of Everard Home, before the

¹³ From these more fluid images of the self never coalesces into a single self in contrast to the model in the first half of the essay, it is possible to find an engagement with the notion of “dissociation,” a state of partial or total loss of identity of the self, which Cameron invokes. Cameron compares the concept of “dissociation” and that of “introjection” and “incorporation” to analyze this essay of Emerson. In *Wolfman's Magic Word*, Nicola Abraham and Maria Troke use Freud’s case of the Wolf Man as the subject of their analysis. They formulate the development of the Wolf Man’s symptoms as the intertwining of two concepts: “introjection,” which has to do with mourning processes and trauma, and “incorporation,” which has to do with melancholy. Once the process of embodiment and mourning is completed, the object is successfully integrated into the ego, but when this fails, the object is incorporated into the ego like a crypt, which generates melancholy. They radically reinterpret the case of the Wolf Man by focusing on “the cryptonymic displacement of a taboo word” (26). The presence of Waldo for Emerson, as well as his incorporation into the ego as a crypt, may have been a factor giving rise to the rhetorical tropes of “displacements” in the essay, or so Cameron argues. As Jacques Derrida suggests, “The fact that the cryptic incorporation always marks an effect of impossible or refused mourning (melancholy *or* mourning) is ceaselessly confirmed by *The Magic Word*. But at the same time the incorporation is never finished. It should even be said: It never finishes anything *off*” (xxi; emphasis original), this process of “incorporation,” like the work of mourning, is also something that is never completed.

establishment of the modern subject, which shares a similar plasticity with the aging Emerson in the previous chapter. By keeping the surface of the self in contact with others, changing the surface of “subjective lenses” and its boundaries on the one hand but keeping the temporary form like the developing embryo on the other, the self does not completely lose its boundaries, nor is it led to chaos. Thus, the self receives power and opens itself up to surprise.¹⁴

Coda

At the beginning of the epilogue, Emerson states, “I know better than to claim any completeness for my picture. I am a fragment, and this is a fragment of me” (*CW* III 47). For him, the acknowledgment of this fragmentation is not only a temporal one in which new active power is organized in the process of responding to external moods and affects received at the surface, but it is also a spatial one, as Malabou describes in the nature of affect. Cavell also paraphrases Emerson’s tentative answer to the opening question of the essay in the epilogue section: “The first and last answers in ‘Experience’ to the question of realizing philosophy’s worlds are recommendations to ignorance—not as an excuse but as the space, the better philosophy, of our action” (124). In the process of unconsciously repeating the transformation through interaction with his surroundings, including Waldo, Emerson creates new powers along with a new time and space.

¹⁴ In relation to this claim regarding “surface,” Malabou pays attention to the etymology of the phrase “epigenesis.” The prefix “*epi*” means “above.” “‘Epigenesis’ therefore means literally ‘above genesis’ or ‘over genesis’” (*Before Tomorrow* 35), but rather she brings “the geological meaning of the prefix ‘epi’” (35) into focus. For her, the meaning connected to the “epicenter” in geology helps us understand “above” “not as an extension that come ‘over’ something else, but as a *surface effect*” (35; emphasis original). She also suggests that “*this founding at the point of contact—unlike the founding by the root or focus—corresponds exactly to the Kantian conception of the origin*” and that “in Kant the transcendental is a surface structure” (36; emphasis original).

As mentioned in the passage on embryogenesis, life has no memory. Lenses, globes, or atoms with no inside do not view, remember, or recall relationships from the objective viewpoint. Captured anew in these impersonal images, we continue to walk in fleeting relationships with various objects each time. Emerson calls this situation “the world I converse with” to distinguish it from “the world I think” which arises again in the midst of solitude: “I know that the world I converse with in the city and in the farms, is not the world I *think*. I observe that difference, and shall observe it. One day, I shall know the value and law of this discrepancy” (CW III 48; emphasis original). He then rephrases the difference between the two more specifically: “We dress our garden, eat our dinners, discuss the household with our wives, and these things make no impression, are forgotten next week; but, in the solitude to which every man is always returning, he has a sanity and revelations which in his passage into new worlds he will carry with him” (CW III 49). At first glance, Emerson, who maintains that the things that constitute everyday life “make no impression, are forgotten next week” here, seems to value “the world I think” more than “the world I converse.” However, given Emerson’s metamorphosis or turn in the second half of the essay, which this chapter has reviewed so far, it is clear that he recognizes the interaction that always occurs on the surface and that traffics affects and moods is the essential condition for the birth of a new power within the self as comprised of subjective lenses.

At the end of the essay, Emerson leads the reader to a temporal answer to the question posed at the start, “Where do we find ourselves?,” on the way to the stairs, unsure of what past or future would unfold, drinking water from the Rête River in a state of amnesia:

Never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat; up again, old heart! —it seems to say, —there is victory yet for all justice; and the true romance

which the world exists to realize will be the transformation of genius into practical power. (*CW* III 49)

Emerson transforms “genius” into a “practical power” that enables him to jump to a new tree, stimulated by the moods and affects he receives from the outside in affirming the groundlessness of the step he takes next. As Lawrence Buell also stresses (*Emerson* 131), in the essay “The Poet” just before “Experience” in *Essays: Second Series*, Emerson utters, “the quality of the imagination is to flow, and not to freeze” (*CW* III 20). Nevertheless, these performative and flow-like forces, which are also recognized in the concept of “genius” as Poirier and Lysaker emphasize, are still not, by themselves, “practical.”

The composition of this essay, which seems to constantly reconfigure the scaffolding of argumentation as it proceeds, resists definition as a solid outline that does not allow itself to be inspired by its surroundings and forerunner¹⁵, but neither does it lead to the complete destruction of the form of the subject, as Cameron refers to as the “death of the self” with impersonality or dissociation. Rather, it parallels the plastic self of the infant or developmental embryo, which retains the tentative contours of the self and at the same time does not break the flow and continue to transfigure. This process of passively receiving the moods and affects that arise in relation to the object, and actively transforming oneself, creating new space and time without being able to look down on one’s own position, has been compared to a bird flying from branch to branch, or to the unpredictable steps we take on a very narrow path. It is only when this process is uninterrupted, escaping excesses like the “death of the self” and suspension of

¹⁵ Basically, as we saw in Introduction, Cavell’s argument has a plastic aspect. Nonetheless, confined to the interpretation of the essay “Experience,” his reading, which emphasizes “the idea of succession” in connection with Romanticism, seems to retain some anthropocentric aspects.

movement, that Emerson's genius, which continues to oscillate between faith and skepticism, is able to embrace the "practical" power, namely the power to survive by partially becoming his dead son Waldo.

Right now, the call from genius, mood, and affect to bring about a definitive transformation has not yet reached the surface. However, neither is it possible to assert that it will not come in the future. It is because of this conviction that Emerson writes: "One day, I shall know the value and law of this discrepancy" (*CW* III 48), and with this belief, he calls on future readers with the idea that, with "[p]atience and patience, we shall win at the last" (*CW* III 48-49). In doing so, Emerson left open the possibility of simultaneously acknowledging skepticism and affirming freedom to readers who would appear in the future.

Chapter 4

Conversation and a Poetics of Distance:

Emerson's "Friendship" and His Beautiful Enemies

The theme of friendship has been minimized for a long time in research on Emerson outside of biographical works.¹ Since the 1990s, however, a remarkable number of studies focusing on relationships with others and passivity in Emerson, mainly with respect to his works on friendship and love, have continued to appear in various fields of academic research. Particularly, in *Emerson and Self-Reliance* (1994, with a new edition published in 2002), George Kateb explores Emerson's lectures and essays on friendship and love in detail and extracts the theme of distance as a significant factor in Emerson's idea of friendship. More recently, Branka Arsić has taken a serious view of flexibility and passivity in Emerson's self in *On Leaving: A Reading in Emerson* (2010). Further, in a series of academic papers published in *Emerson & Thoreau: Figures of Friendship* (2010), the first collection specifically focusing on friendship in Emerson, many scholars provide accounts of Emerson's view of friendship within broader contexts and themes, ranging from the connection with the western tradition of fraternity down to the relationship between Henry David Thoreau, Friedrich Nietzsche, Margaret Fuller and others.

¹ A few of these works include Strauch, "Hatred's Swift Repulsions: Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Others" (1968); Sattelmeyer, "When He Became My Enemy: Emerson and Thoreau, 1848-1849" (1989); Steele, "Transcendental Friendship: Emerson, Fuller, and Thoreau" (1999); Crain, "The Unacknowledged Tie: Young Emerson and the Love of Men" and "Too Good to Be Believed: Emerson's 'Friendship' and the Samaritans" in *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation* (2001); and Lawrence, "The Dry-Lighted Soul' Ignites: Emerson and his Soul-Mate Caroline Sturgis as Seen in her Houghton Manuscripts" (2005).

Grounded on these latest developments, this chapter tries to recapture the importance of friendship in Emerson from various perspectives, mainly by spotlighting his essays “Friendship” and “Love” in *Essays: First Series* (1841), which are both based on his lecture “The Heart” (1838). The first section foregrounds the images of “the street,” “the stranger,” and Emerson’s rhetorical use of “eyes” in these texts and draws a comparison with Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), through which consideration is given to the historical changes happening in American urban spaces around 1840. Emerson’s aesthetics of glance, which was also discussed in Chapter 1, is closely related to his poetics of distance in the essay “Friendship.” More specifically, the metaphors of “the stranger” and “the book” in these texts show the clear contrast between Emerson and Poe. In the second section, the connection between ideal conversation and the theme of distance is brought into view. Referring to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue (and specifically Open Dialogue, an up-to-date method of psychotherapy), this section analyzes the transformative potential in Emerson’s argument on lofty conversation, which deconstructs the binary opposition between the body and the mind. The third section then compares Emerson’s stance on friends with the case of Thoreau in the “Wednesday” section of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849). It will be shown how Emerson’s eulogy on the late “Thoreau” (1862) illustrates Emerson’s transformation as it was inspired by his deceased friend and mentee.

1. The Eyes of Strangers in the Street: Emerson’s “Friendship” and “Love” with Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd”

In essays like “Friendship” and “Love,” Emerson used the concept of “the street” to explore intimate relationships mainly through representations of conversations

between strangers in the large antebellum cities of America. At almost the same time, Edgar Allan Poe depicted a variety of people in “the street” in London, including the strange old man in “The Man of the Crowd” (1840). The eyes of the narrator in Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” metamorphoses from a “glance” to a “gaze.” More specifically, near the end of the story, the eyes of the narrator who initially “glanced” from the coffee house are transformed into eyes that “gazed.” In a similar way, Emerson’s “Friendship” and “Love” can be characterized by the aesthetics of the “glance.”² Emerson also describes ambivalent encounters with strangers through the exchange of glances in the street, which is situated within a historical context that is similar to the urban area Poe describes. However, Emerson aims to keep a proper distance from others as he converses, unlike Poe’s narrator.

At the end of this section, the focus shifts to the metaphors of books used in the texts of both Poe and Emerson. This trope clearly shows the difference between their perspectives on strangers. The link between reading and writing in the metaphor of books could well be compared with the dynamics of seeing and being seen, thereby echoing the theme of eyes in the relationship between strangers in the street.

1-1. From “Glance” to “Gaze”: Poe’s Eyes in “The Man of the Crowd”

The setting for “The Man of the Crowd” is a London street. This short story begins with the comment that a certain German book “*er lasst sich nicht lesen,*” or “does not permit itself to be read” (506). The story then reveals the broader indications of a scene in which the narrator, who is said to be recovering from an illness, spends an afternoon in a coffee house. While smoking a cigar, he first reads a newspaper, “poring

² For more details of connection between Emerson’s aesthetics of glance and the scopic regime of the nineteenth century, see also Chapter 1.

over advertisements,” and then he “peer[s] through the smoky panes into the street” (507). The street is crowded with people coming and going, partly because gaslights had recently become widespread in the metropolis. The narrator observes things in the street, abstractly at first, but he soon “descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expressions of countenance” (507).

As Kevin J. Hayes points out, the German reference to a book in the opening line together with the narrator’s perspective that moves from the newspaper to advertisements and then to the crowds in the street all concern the reading of “signs” that represent modern cities and people; in other words, these acts involve the interpretation of images via the seeing of signs in spaces like the street or a coffee house that symbolize the modern city (Hayes 445-46). The shifting of the eyes from one thing to another through the window appears to be “a glance upon each visage” (511), rather than a “gaze,” the latter of which would thoroughly focus on one object. As Hayes also suggests, the idea that one can read “the history of long years” from objects “even in that brief interval of a glance” includes an element of phrenology, which regarded the shape of the cranial bone or face as a sort of natural language that represented the essence of a person (Hayes 452, 465). In this story, the ability to read the true nature of an object from a glance, by tracking its surface briefly, reflects a keen power of observation.

As a matter of fact, this narrator, who can quote passages from many classic novels, has a more than adequate ability of observation. He starts to sort out strangers in the street according to their appearance and from superficial information without asking them directly about their employment or personal character. He is able to discern many kinds of people, from a businessman to a pickpocket and even a gambler, and this

may remind us of a new type of person that was emerging in the metropolis at that time: the flâneur. Walter Benjamin is well known for his suggestion that the representation of London in “The Man of the Crowd” is very close to the description of Paris by Charles-Pierre Baudelaire. Benjamin extolled “The Man of the Crowd” as an early work that characterizes the flâneur who strolls around the urban space without an exact aim but with an observant eye (28–39). These arguments of Benjamin have had a major impact on the study of this story. Some critics insist, however, that Benjamin was not actually referring to the cities of America, and that a genuine metropolis like London or Paris did not exist in America at that time.

Dana Brand, to take one example, places the origin of the flâneur as a spectator in sixteenth and seventeenth century London. Nevertheless, Brand also points out that most of the flâneur sketches in the *Knickerbocker* magazine after 1835 are set in New York. According to Brand, “In the *Knickerbocker*, it is possible to trace the developing self-consciousness of New York as a setting suitable for the flâneur” (Brand 71). Indeed, this connection between New York and the flâneur who looks about seriously at the surface of things corresponds well with what Emerson wrote in his journal after a trip to New York in 1842. As Robert H. Byer points out, Emerson tried to explain the characteristics of the city by using the word “surface” repeatedly: “In New York City lately, as in cities generally, one seems to lose all substance, and become *surface* in a world of *surfaces*. Everything is external, and I remember my hat and coat, and all my other *surfaces*, and nothing else” (*JMN* IV 165; emphasis added).³

If the American metropolis (as exemplified in the streets of New York) is described as “a world of surfaces” that strongly influenced the setting of “The Man of

³ For further details on Emerson’s stance on “surfaces,” see quotes from the essay “Experience” in Chapter 3.

the Crowd,” exactly what kind of influence was this? For instance, “to be with them, and yet not of them—to see, and yet not be seen— . . . to know and comprehend, and yet not be known or comprehended” (Brand 71) is an extract from the flâneur’s sketch in the *Knickerbocker* that seems to afford the narrator the perspective of looking at the crowds in the street one-sidedly, almost as if through the glass of a coffee house window. This viewpoint is reminiscent of Emerson’s famous metaphor of the “transparent eyeball” used in *Nature* (1836). Shoichiro Fukushima criticizes Emerson’s perspective in this metaphor, for the reason that the flâneur, who sees and yet is not seen, is saying that a man who sees from one side only can be liberated from his own ideological responsibility (225). However, a notable feature of Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” is that the narrator cannot maintain this viewpoint from the coffee house, as representing a safety zone, because of the uneasiness and anxiety permeating the New York of those days.

According to Karen Halttunen, the mobility of society in American cities increased dramatically from the 1830s due to the development of the capitalist economy and improvements in the railroad network. These changes were followed by a great influx of young people into urban areas. Owing to this increase, the population density in large cities approached its peak by about 1860, and it became increasingly difficult to distinguish established members of the community from strangers who had moved in from the small town areas of the early eighteenth century. In the streets of the cities, anonymous encounters between strangers gradually began to replace face-to-face communication between acquaintances.

These changes in the large cities allowed for the presence of people like prostitutes, pickpockets, and confidence men to become highlighted. For instance, in New York especially from the late 1830s to the early 1850s, the “flash press” came into

fashion, which aggressively exposed those people who were barely considered in the major media, such as newspapers, and were unrecognized as members of the cities. The flash press served an important function in enabling inhabitants of the urban areas to acknowledge the changes that were happening in the cities when the literacy rate was improving sharply at the same time.⁴ Due to these changes, one could no longer have a heart-to-heart talk with someone one met in the street and assume that it was possible to judge whether he or she was trustworthy. For this reason, and in order to thrive in a world of strangers and avoid hypocrites, people needed to have an observant eye and read the surface of strangers properly. They also needed to adapt themselves to social conventions by adjusting their own surface indicators through such things as clothing, expressions, and behavior. Young immigrants, in particular, were strongly motivated to learn about the situation in the cities because they were very much at risk of being deceived by strangers. They studied how to be trusted and whom to trust by reading so-called advice books. Halttunen suggests that “the art of engineering all outward expressions of the self in order to impress others had become a central concern of antebellum popular self-improvement literature” (40). The growing popularity of the new media, such as newspapers, the flash press, and advice books, in mid-nineteenth century US cities shows that analyzing the character of strangers in the street was closely connected to reading texts, not only for Poe’s narrator but also for the people of antebellum New York City.

Advice writers of Antebellum America insisted “that all aspects of manner and appearance were visible outward signs of inner moral qualities” (40). Ironically, the recommendations of the advice books to engineer “all outward expressions of the self”

⁴ For further details, see Cohen, Gilfoyle, and Horowitz.

were also available to the swindler whom the advice books supposedly helped one to avoid. Such tendencies, which for Halttunen constitute what she terms a “sentimental typology of conduct,” or the belief that “every aspect of social behavior should transparently display the contents of the heart” (60), add up to relationships that are based on mutual skepticism, where people become constantly frightened of an imaginary enemy.⁵ The people in such circumstances could allow themselves to build a relationship of trust only after they had confirmed “all outward expressions” as being appropriate to the prevailing social customs. Bearing this situation in mind, the attitude of Poe’s narrator classifying strangers in the street, one after the other, indicates not only the pleasure of the flâneur, but also the motives inspired by a deep anxiety relating to a “sentimental typology of conduct.” In addition, the process of grouping removed the fear of the unknown, which was analogous to the manner of connecting the “outer” with the “inner” in pseudo-sciences such as phrenology or physiognomy,⁶ and seemed to be linked with the process of recovering from a mental illness described as a “peculiar mental state” in Poe’s story (511).

However, in this story, the position of the narrator changes dramatically after he meets with an old man who resists any kind of classification. The narrator, who had already become unable to move his eyes smoothly from one object to another, fails to avert his eyes from the old man as he leaves the coffee house:

I felt singularly *aroused, startled, fascinated*. . . . Hurriedly putting on an

⁵ For instance, blackmail, a threat to reveal the scandalous behavior of the bourgeois who had otherwise properly arranged their surface image, was one of the main contents of the flash press.

⁶ As James Werner explains, “This assumption—that there is a correlation between outward appearance and inner characteristics, and that through careful scrutiny of the former one may discern the latter—is at the heart of both physiognomy and flânerie” (Werner 3).

overcoat, and seizing my hat and cane, *I made my way into the street, and pushed through the crowd in the direction which I had seen him take*; for he had already disappeared. With some little difficulty I at length came within sight of him, approached, and followed him closely, yet cautiously, so as not to attract his attention. (Poe 511; emphasis added)

First, it is important to note that the narrator “felt singularly aroused, startled, fascinated.” In other words, he feels simultaneously startled and fascinated by the old man because of his impression that the old man was contradictory and complex. While he is able to list the “surface” expressions of the old man, like those of the strangers in the street, he fails to fit the old man into any particular category. What, then, is the real purpose of this unusual old man?

The narrator anticipates that he will be able to solve the mystery while following the man who appears to be so mysterious, and so he keeps pursuing the man. The old man never stops, even when other people in the city go back to their homes to sleep; instead, he “forced his way to and fro, without aim, among the host of buyers and sellers” in “a large and busy bazaar” (513). Next, the old man repeats his unpredictable movements and comes back to the street where the narrator had first seen him. This course of behavior makes the narrator feel uncomfortable. However, the old man’s stance indicates no particular interest in any specific object as he strolls in the streets, and the movement of his eyes, “glance,” corresponds with the narrator’s own when sitting in the coffee house at the start of the story.

The old man does not stop even after dawn, when people start to walk around the streets again. By the afternoon of the second day, the narrator is exhausted from following the old man; finally, “stopping fully in front of the wanderer,” he “gazed at him steadfastly in the face” (515). The narrator concludes that the old man “noticed me

not, but resumed his solemn walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation” (Ibid.). By the end of the story, then, the eyes that “glanced” from the coffee house are transformed into eyes that “gazed.” Although the narrator senses a “genius of deep crime” in the old man, he gives up trying to follow him. By breaking off the relationship with the old man, their dual relation is suddenly dissolved. It is clear, however, that the sense of mystery or anxiety that the narrator felt does not completely fade away as he names him “the man of the crowd” (515), the one who refuses to be alone, since a connection between the old man and the potential for “deep crime” is suggested at the same time.

This ending triggers interpretations that leave this story, which has neither crime nor suspect, as a harbinger of the detective stories of Poe’s Auguste Dupin series. In fact, Benjamin writes of “The Man of the Crowd” that it “is something like an X-ray of a detective story” (Benjamin 27). Brand also points out that this story demonstrates the limit to the strategy of the flâneur in a manner that is similar to Benjamin (Brand 102).⁷ These recognitions correspond with Hallutnen’s study and are probably adequate. Nevertheless, encounters with strangers in the streets of large cities do have other possibilities. In Emerson’s essays, such as “Friendship” and “Love,” the scene of a meeting or encounter, which resembles that of Poe and the old man, will lead to very different kinds of relationships.

1-2. Aesthetics of “Glance”: Emerson’s “Friendship” and “Love”

⁷ Relatedly, Tatsumi rightly points out that this Benjamin’s account is based on an anachronistic misreading, relying on the fact that his first detective novel, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” was published in the next year, 1841 (*American Renaissance Re-presented* 76-77). However, this misreading, which has continued to have a significant impact on later Poe studies, can also be considered a creative and plastic reading in light of the context of this dissertation.

The relationship between Emerson and Baudelaire has received considerably less attention than that between Poe and Baudelaire, although Emerson and Baudelaire have direct connections through their translations. Margaret Gilman has indicated the possibility that Baudelaire was referring to Emerson's essay "Circles" (1841) when writing an essay published in 1846 because the two works contain many similar descriptions. Dudley M. Marchi also contends that Baudelaire was familiar with the essays of Emerson, and that he both cited and appropriated lines from the *Conduct of Life* (1860) a few times. Marchi even suggests that Emerson and Baudelaire might have passed by each other as strangers in Paris when Emerson made a trip there in May 1848. Branka Arsić asserts that Baudelaire began to read Emerson in 1857 at the latest, arguing further that nineteenth century Boston that Emerson describes in his essays had some transatlantic impact on Baudelaire's image of Paris, which Benjamin found to be an exemplar of the modern city (Arsić 78). If these suggestions are correct, then not only New York, as the "city of surfaces," but Boston have the dimensions of the modern metropolis, as these cities are described in a similar manner by Baudelaire, Benjamin, and Poe.⁸

Similar to the way in which Poe's narrator sees the street from a coffee house, Emerson also describes eyes that glance into the street in an urban space in "Art" (1841):

And then is my eye opened to the eternal picture which nature paints in the

⁸ According to David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman, "[o]ne of America's earliest and most prolific authors of pulp sensation fiction, George Thompson (1823–ca. 1873) catered to the antebellum public's thirst for sex and violence while exposing hypocrisy and corruption on the part of the nation's ruling class" (Thompson ix) by writing "city mysteries" like those found in the flash press. The setting for his novels *Venus in Boston* (1849) and *City Crimes* (1849) were Boston and New York. This might also illustrate the modernity of Boston in the 1840s. For the case of Concord, see also Chapter 5, footnote 10.

street, with moving men and children, beggars and fine ladies, draped in red and green and blue and gray; long-haired, grizzled, white-faced, black-faced, wrinkled, giant, dwarf, expanded, elfish, —capped and based by heaven, earth and sea. (*CW* II 212)

Here Emerson enumerates various images that pass across his vision. He also takes visual pleasure in the shifting sights, like the flâneur in New York, yet he does not attempt to classify those images according to an established category, unlike Poe's narrator. Emerson describes the moment of encountering others at the outset of both his essays, "Friendship" and "Love," as the process of an accidental passing of each other on the street. An intimate feeling is then achieved through an exchange of glances. In "Friendship," he utters, "How many we see in the street, or sit with in church, whom, though silently, we warmly rejoice to be with! Read the language of these wandering eye-beams. The heart knoweth" (*CW* II 113), and suggests the following in "Love": "Perhaps we never saw them before, and never shall meet them again. But we see them exchange a glance, or betray a deep emotion, and we are no longer strangers. We understand them, and take the warmest interest in the development of the romance. All mankind love a lover" (*CW* II 101).

Emerson's position in "read[ing] the language of these wandering eye-beams" has something in common with Poe's narrator; however, taking into account the passage on an "exchange [of] glance" with strangers, and that we "never saw them before, and never shall meet again," Emerson (unlike Poe's story) seems to "permit himself to be read." In addition to the street, the house is described as another site for encountering friends in "Friendship."⁹ These events of meeting strangers arouse both an uneasiness

⁹ For the significance of the space of the house, see also Chapter 5.

and a charm that make the experience differ from a visit with intimate companions because it is uncertain what kind of person has appeared at the front door of the house or on the street. Emerson describes the “nameless charm” of these encounters in “Love”:

Who can analyze the nameless charm which glances from one and another face and form? We are touched with emotions of tenderness and complacency, but we cannot find whereat this dainty emotion, this wandering gleam, points. It is destroyed for the imagination by any attempt to refer it to organization. (*CW* II 104)

This ambivalent moment of meeting strangers resembles that of the encounter between Poe’s narrator and the old man, but here it causes the self to feel a “palpitation,” which is a completely different reaction from Poe’s case: “See, in any house where virtue and self-respect abide, the palpitation which the approach of a stranger causes” (*CW* II 113).

The palpitation of the self that accompanies the encounter of a stranger is, as Arsić and Masaki Horiuchi stress, a concept that brings the passive and flexible self into the light, which is an image that stands contrary to the rigid self that scholars normally take for granted as one of the main characteristics of Emerson himself as the thinker of “Self-Reliance.” While Aristotle’s model of friendship is one in which one’s own ideal or emotional attachment to the object of love and friendship is based on the impression that the self has already had, Emerson’s passive palpitating self is open to the transformation of self, and to borrow Arsić’s expression, it “announce[s] [a] collapse of representation” (Arsić 181). The encounter with the stranger in “Friendship” also causes fear and has a traumatic impact on the self: “A commended stranger is expected and announced, and an uneasiness betwixt pleasure and pain invades all the hearts of a household. His arrival almost brings fear to the good hearts that would welcome him”

(*CW* II 113). Emerson also represents the new person he sees in the moment of meeting as “a great event, and hinders me from sleep” (*CW* II 113).

In Emerson’s essays, then, these ambivalent moments of encounter presuppose that intimate feelings like friendship and love are nurtured after the meeting. This reciprocal relationship distinguishes Emerson’s position from Poe’s one-sided relation to strangers. Unlike Poe’s narrator, Emerson tries to get past the limitations of the flâneur, or the “pure observer,” by accepting that he himself is to be exposed to the stranger’s eyes; this perspective is advanced against his famous metaphor of the “transparent eye ball.” In other words, around 1840, Emerson challenged the reader to ascend above the viewpoint of the “pure observer” not by closing in on the stranger, but by maintaining a discrete distance. This singular “poetics of distance”¹⁰ was first described as a way to develop relationships.

After the initial moment of encounter, two people in love or friendship cultivate their relationship mainly through conversation. In his lecture “The Heart,” Emerson said that conversation is the “first office of friendship” (*EL* II 292).¹¹ At the same time, Emerson realistically recognized that these ideal relationships were hard to realize, and if achieved, they must be seen as momentous and ephemeral. For Emerson, friendship and love ended when an ideal conversation could not be maintained as an event. In “Love,” Emerson uses the metaphor of “scaffolding” (*CW* II 109) to explain this ephemerality, and in “Friendship,” the moment of ending a lofty friendship is compared to the turning of a friend into “no stranger” (*CW* II 114).

¹⁰ In *The Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida relates his concept of “teleiopoiesis” with “a poetics of distance” (32). For more details of “teleiopoiesis,” see also the third section of this chapter and Nitta, “To Love the Distant Things.”

¹¹ For more details about Emerson’s ideal conversation, see the second section of this chapter.

Emerson knew people could rarely maintain a respectable distance from others for a long time, so he respected the stance: “We will meet as though we met not, and part as though we parted not” (*CW* II 126). This way of thinking is in stark contrast with the ideas of Poe’s narrator. If Emerson were in the streets of London, contemplating a crowd as described in “The Man of the Crowd,” and he happened to see an old man as Poe’s narrator did, Emerson would not have kept following him for over two days. He would have surely “part[ed] as though they [had] parted not.”

1-3. The Stranger as the Book

Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” and Emerson’s essays “Friendship” and “Love” both present similar scenes of meeting in the street with strangers who both charm and frighten one. After the initial encounter, Poe and Emerson begin to build different kinds of relationships in which they attempt to overcome “the viewpoint of pure observer” in their own ways. The narrator in Poe’s work gradually becomes absorbed in an obsessive relationship with an old man whom he keeps following. In contrast, in Emerson’s essays, he aims to maintain a proper distance from others. However, for both, these challenges ultimately come to an end. Both also use impressive metaphors of books to describe the transience of relationships.

In Poe’s case, a quote from the review of a German book, “*er lasst sich nicht lesen*,” meaning “it does not permit itself to be read,” appears at the beginning of the story: “It was well said of a certain German book that ‘*er lasst sich nicht lesen*’ —it does not permit itself to be read. There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told” (Poe 506). It also appears at the end of the story: “The worst heart of the world is a grosser book than the ‘*Hortulus Animæ*,’ and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that ‘*er lasst sich nicht lesen*’” (Poe 515).

The essence of the German book is apparently connected to the old man, showing that the narrator cannot probe the inner thoughts and feelings beneath the surface of “the man of the crowd.” After writing “The Man of the Crowd,” Poe wrote several stories in which the protagonist calls a detective who is known to resolve “deep crime,” something that was only hinted at in this story. In those detective stories, the protagonists cannot keep a proper distance from the criminals, for they have to face bloody crimes, including murder scenes; the settings are full of violence, and there is a sense of distance from others that must be vanquished. In “The Man of the Crowd,” Poe compares strangers to a book that “does not permit itself to be read” and distances his narrator from others. In his subsequent writing, however, he starts to expose himself to the desires of the crowd and exploits the common appetites to earn more money in the capitalistic society as a cunning journalist and a writer of fiction for the general public, or the crowd. The detective can thereby resolve his cases because the suspect becomes a book that “permits itself to be read.” Finding who the culprit is and reading books are thus deeply analogous to understanding and appropriating the other’s mind.

Poe appears to assume that the people who make up the crowd cannot stand others who are not prepared to be judged against their own standards, and who cannot help but project their own fears and anxieties onto others. In other words, for Poe, the old man in “The Man of the Crowd” is not a friend in the Emersonian sense with whom he can make a two-way exchange, but is instead a mysterious stranger with whom he can build only a one-way relationship that heralds the link between the detective and the criminal.

Emerson, however, likens a friend to a book he seldom picks up near the end of the essay “Friendship”: “I do then with my friends as I do with my books. I would have them where I can find them, but I seldom use them” (*CW* II 126). This metaphor is

important because it indicates the sense of distance that characterizes Emerson's position on friendship. Emerson does not get absorbed in a single book; he is rather a flâneur, strolling around among his various books. At the same time, it is significant that Emerson here juxtaposes words written in books with words exchanged in conversation with friends. As is well known, an exchange of letters was one of the central features of his sense of fraternity.

The process that takes us from reading letters or books to writing letters, journals, and essays as responses can be seen as parallel to the process of conversation, which moves from listening to responding. That is to say, for Emerson, words function as a kind of call that triggers the response of the readers or listeners and also transforms them, not only mentally but also physically. Emerson passively transforms himself within the process of digesting the traumatic impact of his friends' words, and then he produces new verbal expressions, enabling him to transform actively again. Thus, for Emerson, the value of transforming through friendship depends on the level of words and how to respond to a friend's call by producing a new expression of words. This process reminds us of another of Emerson's analogies for books used in "The American Scholar":

There is then creative reading, as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world. (CWI 58; emphasis added)

Apparently, the link between reading and writing is here paralleled with that between seeing and being seen. If so, what kind of act does the word "creative reading" indicate?

The old man for Poe is a book that "does not permit itself to be read." It is

impossible to read a book that contains “the hideousness of mysteries which will not suffer themselves to be revealed” (505). However, after this work, Poe kept writing stories about a detective who can read such books that ought not to permit themselves to be read, partly due to Poe’s interest in the progress of science and technology and the capitalistic economy. On the contrary, for Emerson, a friend is also a kind of book that “does not permit itself to be read,” since they maintain a certain distance and always have some secrets that are not shared with others. Nonetheless, Emerson tries to reopen these books as he does not want to be afraid of misreading them, even though he knows he cannot understand mysterious strangers or books perfectly. Unlike Poe, who attempts to curtail his reading and abandon his books, Emerson strives to continue to see his friends and his books, even if in just a glance of the eye, and thereby remains in a faint relationship with them. It is this attitude that made Emerson’s “creative reading” possible. Very differently from Poe, Baudelaire, or Benjamin, then, Emerson seems to think that people are able to foster intimacy despite the distance between them and other strangers in the streets of Boston, even though such intimacy must be established through a poetics of distance symbolized by a glance of the eyes.

2. Friend as Beautiful Enemy: A Poetics of Distance in “Friendship”

Needless to say, “Self-Reliance,” which is one of Emerson’s most famous concepts, is an extremely important idea not only for Emerson himself but also for his readers. At first glance, the concept is often misinterpreted by readers as if it were indicative of an egocentric ideology, but this idea of Self-Reliance actually seems to be a self-sufficient one, whereby one does not need others like a friend or intimate partner. As some recent research has emphasized in an exaggerated way, however, even a Self-Reliant subject does not completely disconnect and have no communication with others.

Actually, as Emerson wrote in “Friendship,” “The soul environs itself with friends that it may enter into a grander self-acquaintance or solitude; and it goes alone for a season, that it may exalt its conversation or society” (*CW* II 116–17). Thus, conversation and communication with friends and partners are indispensable factors in constructing a Self-Reliant subject. For example, as Kateb shrewdly points out, “Only friendship establishes the true reciprocity between society and solitude—a reciprocity that cancels the question as to which of them is a means and which is the end. Society and solitude exist for each other, as friends do” (101). Namely, for Emerson, conversations between Self-Reliant subjects were really an essential element when thinking about the relationship between “society and solitude.”

At the same time, however, the friendship Emerson presupposed here was always based on a “one to one” relationship, as he states in “Love”: “The introduction to this felicity is in a private and tender relation of one to one” (*CW* II 99). Basically, Emerson did not regard friendship that arose between three or more people as a relevant object of consideration. This is because such friendships were likely to constitute a small scale society and become a rigid system, which he disliked most: “You shall have very useful and cheering discourse at several times with two several men, but let all three of you come together and you shall not have one new and hearty word. Two may talk and one may hear, but three cannot take part in a conversation of the most sincere and searching sort” (*CW* II 122). Despite his famous idea of Self-Reliance, in Emerson’s theory of friendship, it is the conversation between friends based on a “one to one” relationship that was always the most basic unit. After modeling Emerson’s theory of friendship by focusing on the scene of encountering strangers, the problems of how to build up a friendship, and on what condition that ideal relationship can be realized, the following section reexamines how conversations had a transformative impact for Emerson and

his friends, one of whom was Margaret Fuller.

2-1. Intellect and Affection: Emerson's Theory of Friendship

At first, Emerson's view of friendship was inspired by traditional arguments of fraternity (*philia*) that could be found in the work of Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero as well as in Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (1580), especially "Of Friendship," which was based on the writings of Cicero, Aristotle, and others.¹² As Arsić forthrightly states, "From Aristotle via Cicero to Montaigne, friends are few and always noble" (191). In those preceding works, true friendship, or what Aristotle terms the virtue of friendship, could be achieved only by men. In ancient Greece, only male citizens of the polis could form ideal friendships with other male citizens. In the age of Montaigne, the one and only form of true friendship was that between aristocratic men, as exemplified in the relationship between Montaigne and his best friend Étienne de la Boétie. Emerson's view of friendship was also regulated by elitism, as was particularly evident when he gave the lecture "The Heart" in 1838; in this lecture, Emerson focused specifically on the friendship between elite men.

In 1841, when he published *Essays: First Series*, however, Emerson presented a reformed version of his views on friendship in essays like "Friendship" and "Love." Specifically, Emerson deployed a more open view in these essays, and some recent critics, especially Stanley Cavell, have drawn attention to the aspect of the democratic perspective in Emerson's texts: "I please my imagination more with a circle of god-like

¹² In addition, it is also notable that Emerson read Coleridge's *The Friend* (1809–10/1818) and what many critics categorize as his "conversation poems" (*The Eolian Harp*, *Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement*, *This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison*, *Frost at Midnight*, *Fears in Solitude*, and *The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem*, *Dejection: An Ode*, *To William Wordsworth*, 1795–1807). For further details on Emerson's relationship with Coleridge, see the Introduction.

men and women variously related to each other and between whom subsists a lofty intelligence” (*CW* II 121). His use of “women” here suggests that there are more than two women in the circle at least.¹³ He also regarded women as candidates for lofty friendship, unlike traditional scholars.

This Emersonian Kantian model of fraternity, especially as it is presented in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), is one that passively takes the direction of aligning the self with the relationship. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, after the ambivalent moments of encountering strangers as “a great event,” one begins a metamorphosis inspired by “fear,” “uneasiness” and “palpitation” of the self.¹⁴

It is worth noting here that these tropes are related to affect and the body rather than reason and the intellect. In the first place, the essays “Friendship” and “Love” are texts inspired by Emerson’s actual friendships with those like Margaret Fuller. Rather than applying an established theory or model to real experiences and relationships, Emerson kept formulating new concepts retrospectively based on his own affects or moods, like experiencing “palpitation” from an encounter with strangers.¹⁵ As Arsić emphasizes, “the seat of friendship in Emerson is not ‘genius’ (as Cavell proposes) but its embodiment” (193). Emerson seemed to pursue the idea that thought is driven by affect against the segregation of reason and understanding in “Intellect and Affection.” After the moment of encounter, two people in love or friendship gradually cultivate

¹³ As this section will argue later, this transformation of Emerson was apparently influenced by his actual women friends, like Fuller, Sturgis, and Anna Barker.

¹⁴ This image of the friend as stranger seemed to reverse Cicero’s model of “judge before love,” whereby one must aggressively choose candidates for friends among male elites. In contrast, Emerson tried to enter into the relation with oncoming strangers no matter whom they were. Arsić also summarizes this passivity in Emerson as follows: “Hence, I do not adjust relations to the interest of my self but, rather, adjust the self to the relation. In that way I craft myself so as to meet the demand of the other” (192).

¹⁵ For a more detailed account of the relationship between “new words” and “affects or moods,” see Chapter 3.

their relationship mainly through conversation. It can be said that Emerson, who succeeded Aristotle's traditional model of friendship in that he assigned higher priority to the friendship of virtue rather than that of usefulness and pleasure, interpreted the ideal relationship as a process of finding virtues and charms in each other through "one to one" conversation.

However, even in a situation where only the "Intellect" seems to be involved, "Affection," which is always as strong as the moment of encounter itself, must not be forgotten; the same is true of "fear" and "pleasure." Before he wrote the essays "Friendship" and "Love," Emerson stated the following in the seventh lecture "Society" of the lecture series on "The Philosophy of History" (1836):

The first Society of Nature is that of Marriage, not only prepared in the distinction of Sex, but in the different tastes and genius of Man and Woman.

This society has its own end which is an integrity of human nature by the union of its two great parts, Intellect and Affection. For, of Man the predominant power is Intellect; of Woman, the predominant power is Affection. (*EL* II 102)

Now Emerson conservatively sets up analogies between "Intellect" and "Man," and "Affection" and "Woman." Nevertheless, this does not mean he thought that we should only pursue the intellect. As he valued a kind of hermaphroditism that was influenced by his friendship with Fuller,¹⁶ this "marriage of the intellect and the affections" was the ultimate inspiration for Emerson. Besides, in the lecture "The Heart," Emerson

¹⁶ Emerson makes an allusion to the "hermaphrodite" in his journal of 1843: "Much poor talk concerning woman, which at least had the effect of revealing the true sex of several of the party who usually go disguised in the form of the other sex. Thus Mrs. B is a man. The finest people marry the two sexes in their own person. Hermaphrodite is then the symbol of the finished soul. It was agreed that in every act should appear the married pair: the two elements should mix in every act" (*JMN* VIII 380). For more details on the relationship between Emerson and Fuller, see also Chapter 5, section 3.

praises this marriage and the nature of conversation as being related to friendship:

Analogous to the laws of society are those of *conversation, which is the first office of friendship*. In able conversation we have glimpses of the universe, perceptions of immense power native to the soul, . . . *The highest conversation seems to be a marriage of the intellect and the affections* and to derive from these last that exhilaration which distinguishes it from the lonely hours of thought. (*EL II 292*; emphasis added)

Conversation is “the first office of friendship” and can be “a marriage of the intellect and affections” if it is in its highest form.¹⁷ Based on this recognition, the next section examines how the highest level of conversation is realized.

2-2. Friend as “Beautiful Enemy”: The Lofty Conversation and Distance

On what condition is the lofty conversation as an event fulfilled? Many critics have noted the significance of “truth” and “tenderness” in “Friendship”:

There are two elements that go to the composition of friendship, each so sovereign, that I can detect no superiority in either, no reason why either should be first named. One is Truth. A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him, I may think aloud. (*CW II 119*)

With the help of good friendships, one attempts to access truths outside of oneself. The key concept in this case is “sincerity” (*CW II 119*), which refers to a dedication to the pursuit of virtue and truth. In order to pursue truth, it is essential to have a sincere

¹⁷ Furthermore, in the following passage, Emerson states: “Conversation among the witty and well-informed hops about from spot to spot around the surface of life. Like the bird we peck at this moss and that bud and that leaf upon the bark, and the interior of the tree seems to us inedible, stringy, uniform, uninteresting” (*EL II 292*). This trope of bird and reference to “the surface” are analogous to the passages in the third section of “Experience,” which is discussed in Chapter 3.

relationship with someone other than oneself, which would be a friend. However, in practice, being with friends always puts “sincerity” in danger of being lost: “Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of second person, hypocrisy begins” (*CW* II 119). This very statement contains a direct characterization of the Emersonian friend, which will be equated with a paradox elsewhere. What is requested to resolve this double bind over the friend is “tenderness,” the second component of friendship:

The other element of friendship is Tenderness. We are holden to men by every sort of tie. . . by fear, by hope, by lucre, by lust, by hate, by admiration, by every circumstance and badge and trifle, but we can scarce believe that so much character can subsist in another as to draw us by love. Can another be so blessed, and we so pure, that we can offer him tenderness? (*CW* II 120)

“Tenderness” here can be thought of as an emotion directed toward human beings, including Emerson himself, who pursue the truth but are unable to reach it, and who are caught up in affects or moods, including negative ones like “fear,” “lust” and “hate,” or what Sianne Ngai calls “ugly feelings.” As David Robinson points out, “friendship is not the product of philosophy, but of effort and affection. It is the one resource left to us after philosophy fails” (“In the Golden Hour of Friendship” 65).

Thus, in the process of repeating conversation, the self is inevitably captured by several kinds of affects or feelings of inadequacy directed toward lofty friends and lovers. To put it concretely, these moods are described in Emerson’s texts as indicative of a sense of inferiority, shame, and hollowness, as Horiuchi emphasizes with quotations from Emerson’s journals and letters (164–72), or the sense of “unworthiness” (*CW* II 105) depicted in “Love.” In fact, a part of the letter to the dead friend in “Friendship” also expresses a mixed, ambivalent feeling as “delicious torment”: “I am

not very wise; my moods are quite attainable, and I respect thy genius; it is to me as yet unfathomed; yet dare I not presume in thee a perfect intelligence of me, and so thou art to me a delicious torment” (*CW* II 117). It is only by immersing oneself in this sense of weakness and passivity, or one’s “unworthiness” and “a delicious torment,” which is clearly at odds with the superficial view of Emerson as a strong and Self-Reliant subject, that the self is able to hear a friend’s speech as a call. Indeed, it is in the process of responding to that call that the possibility of reaching a sense of “self-reliance” again arises via self-abandonment. It is only in the midst of the dialogue that the other path to truth emerges, once via “tenderness,” by reflecting on one’s own inadequacies.

This distinction between “truth” and “tenderness” in “Friendship” probably corresponds to the opposition between “intellect and affection” in the lecture “Heart” and the disparity between “the world I think” and “the world I converse” in the essay “Experience” discussed in Chapter 3. It is in the constant movement back and forth between these concepts that Emerson’s own poetics of distance from his friends can be found. It is also this movement that provides the necessary path to the marriage of “intellect and affection,” and to the establishment of “the highest conversation.”

Arsić provocatively suggests this character of the ideal conversation is “a process of mutual depersonalizing of the parties involved,” which “happens on condition that it triggers the abandonment of egotism and the suspension of self-reflexibility” (195). She insists that not only the moment of the encounter but also the “conversation should itself be an event” (196). To consider what makes the conversation of the highest quality or a lofty one, Arsić problematizes the attitude of the listener: “Speaking should function as an effect of a practice of listening” (196). Dialogue can have an impact as an event only if it assumes the posture of a listener who abandons the boundaries of self-protection as much as possible and exposes the self to the speaker. For the listener

in a posture of listening, the utterance of an intimate other becomes a call with a performative and “less informative than transformative” (196) effect. By fulfilling the responsibility to this call, the self, starting from passivity, can again actively reshape the self in a new way (211-13). Namely, to use a metaphor from the essay “Circles,” the self can describe a new circle. In the essay “Love,” Emerson describes this process as follows: “Hence arose the saying, ‘If I love you, what is that to you?’ We say so because we feel that what we love is not in your will, but above it. It is not you, but your radiance. It is that which you know not in yourself and can never know” (*CW* II 105). To feel a “radiance,” which the listener can “know not” in oneself and “can never know,” inspires one’s passive, depersonalizing transformation.

As discussed in the first section, however, Emerson recognized that these ideal relationships were hard to realize and, if achieved, that they must be momentous and ephemeral. Why, then, did Emerson think it difficult to sustain a mutual depersonalizing conversation, and hold that if it could not be sustained, then the relationship should be dissolved? The reason is that in order to develop a listening posture, which is a prerequisite for ideal dialogue, an appropriate distance is required from the friend, and this is where the greatest difficulty lies.

The problem of mental and metaphorical “distance” between intimate partners or friends is truly an important theme that has recently been attended to by critics dealing with Emerson’s theory of friendship. According to Kateb, Emerson “sometimes advocates distance, knowing that the passion of friendship is to overcome distance” (108). As Kateb emphasizes, Emerson asserted the following in “The Heart”: “In strict science it must be confessed that all persons, the very nearest and dearest, underlie the same condition of an infinite remoteness” (*L* II 279). Emerson even chided his own

family in cases where they were too close for him.¹⁸ In general, people confront their own family members or lovers within a close distance, but Emerson consistently preferred to establish enough distance so that he could welcome as a stranger whoever communicated with him, even if his companion was his own family member, lover, or friend.

Related to this analysis, Arsić sees the motif of anti-appropriation, or the principle of “do not appropriate” (193), in Emerson’s sense of distance. Emerson criticized the desire of appropriation: “We seek our friend not sacredly, but with an adulterate passion which would appropriate him to ourselves. In vain” (*CW* II 117). In relationships between individuals who are too close to each other, where one is owned by the other, it becomes impossible to constitute an ideal conversation in which both parties passively transform each other. In other words, a loved one needs to take the proper distance not to be appropriated, and the lover does not need to appropriate. This, in turn, means that when these appropriate distances cannot be maintained, it is necessary to abandon the relationship and leave the friend. In fact, Emerson had voluntarily distanced himself from his friends and gestured away from them on many occasions during his life.¹⁹ Although he was often criticized for being cold-hearted, he preferred to continue to beautifully recall old relationships and friendships after a certain distance had been established rather than to remain in a relationship that was too close and stagnant. The passage “[w]e will meet as though we met not, and part as though we parted not” (*CW* II 126) seems to show his feelings regarding distance clearly. These cycles of dialogue, repeated at a certain distance, from listening to response and

¹⁸ See the following from a journal entry: “I chide and rate my wife or my brother on small provocation if they come too near me” (*JMN* VII 149; qtd. in Kateb 109)

¹⁹ For example, writers such as Henry James, Sr., Fuller, Sturgis, and Thoreau all interpreted Emerson’s sense of distance as “coldness.”

back again, never reach a single and absolute truth, and therefore they necessarily take on a polyphonic aspect. In this sense, Emerson's argument for ideal conversation is reminiscent of Bakhtin's theory of dialogue. However, if the absolute truth can never be attained, why and how could Emerson's view affirmatively change through conversation in the first place?

In order to take another step forward in addressing this topic, it is important to begin with the aforementioned metaphor of the book which "he seldom use[s]" in the essay "Friendship," and which Arsić has not detailed. According to Emerson in "The American Scholar," as I already mentioned, "There is then creative reading, as well as creative writing." Dialogue in Emerson's work is also a process of reading into the text of the friend/book in a creative way, one that the author is not even aware of, and then responding to it with a new text of one's own.

Given that Emerson had repeatedly written most of his journals so that they could be read by family and intimate friends, it is clear that not only his speech but also his acts of writing always contained elements of appeal to others, or a dialogical narration. Actually, "Friendship" was the text written during the period of his separation from some friends, and of mourning after the death of his family members, darling Ellen and dear brother Charles. Therefore, descriptions of the impact of encounters and the related sense of distance contained many indicators of his actual responses to his friends.

For instance, the account of an encounter as an event previously mentioned that was taken from his journal recorded the impression of a new friend, Samuel Ward, whom Emerson had become acquainted with through Fuller, and whom he was already estranged from when he completed writing this essay. Similarly, the following metaphor symbolizes Emerson's "poetics of distance" as it relates to this interesting biographical fact:

Guard him as thy counterpart. Let him be to thee for ever a sort of beautiful enemy, untamable, devoutly revered, and not a trivial conveniency to be soon outgrown and cast aside” (*CW* II 124).

The metaphor of friend as “beautiful enemy” in itself splendidly describes his mixed feelings of distance. Kateb compares this metaphor with Aristotle’s ideas as follows: “What makes friends enemies is not that they are, in the usual sense, competitive. They are not competitive in Aristotle’s sense, either: they do not try to see which of them can do more good to the other, and thus turn perhaps into mutually overbearing rivals” (112). As argued by Arsić before, proper distance that retains an enemy’s beauty is needed to avoid the case of “mutually overbearing rivals.” Here, Kateb also seems to read the importance of mutual distancing in this metaphor. Accordingly, this must be one of the most vital phrases in the essay.

However, this expression could not be seen in the prototype of the passage in the journal of June 21, 1840.²⁰ The phrase most resembling this metaphor can be found in the letter from Fuller to Emerson written on September 29 of the same year: “But did not you ask for a ‘foe’ in your friend? Did not you ask for a ‘large formidable nature’? But a beautiful foe, I am not yet, to you. Shall I ever be? I know yet” (*The Letters of Margaret Fuller Volume II* 160). At that time, Fuller had demanded from Emerson a deeper relationship than ever. However, she announced that she had taken a certain distance from him in this letter because Emerson had refrained from facing her claim to strengthen the relationship. Here, Fuller took the image of “beautiful foe” she seemed to hear from Emerson before and fiercely criticized him, indicating that “I am not yet”

²⁰ In a journal entry, Emerson wrote: “Why should we desecrate noble & beautiful souls by intruding on them? Can we not guard them from ourselves? . . . Let him be a soul to me. A message, a compliment, a sincerity, a glance from him, — *that* I want” (*JMN* VII 370; emphasis original).

a beautiful foe “to you.” How could Emerson reply to Fuller’s reprimand in the text of “Friendship”? By adding the lines of “beautiful enemy,” Emerson seemed to develop a “poetics of distance” in the final manuscript sent to the printing office on New Year’s Day of 1841. This amendment is the very thing that can be interpreted as a response to Fuller’s provocative call.

2-3. “A Nettle in the Side of Your Friend”: Emerson’s Pharmacy and Open Dialogue

In his article comparing Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue with Emerson’s essay, David Dickson first gives a certain amount of credit to Bakhtin’s discussion of the distinction between everyday conversation and ideal dialogue that involves a surplus of imagination. However, at the same time, he points out that Bakhtin does not specifically describe what kind of changes occur through ideal dialogue that do not occur in everyday conversation, and then brings Emerson to the forefront of the debate as a supplement to the problem. How did Emerson connect the rift between intellect and affection, and truth and love, that Bakhtin failed to bridge? Dickson draws attention to the aspects of “storytelling and fiction,” referencing the arguments of Donald Pease in that “the bridging work between visionary and quotidian space is analogous to storytelling and fiction. With Emerson the chasm between the spaces of spirit and the spaces of temporal reality is bridged by an activity that is analogous to narrative fiction” (81). Through creative narration, “emotional events are transformed into meaningful experiences” (Pease 173). It is important to emphasize here that the writing of narratives and texts in a new language is said to positively transform not only the recipients of the words but also the creator of the new language. As a matter of fact, Emerson’s major essays share the same structure that exhibits recovery from traumatic loss or morbidity

through the act of writing. “Friendship” also includes a perspective on how to positively reclaim difficult emotional situations, such as the loss of friends and the dilution of relationships. This view of writing and storytelling as a kind of technique of affective regulation is reminiscent of certain psychotherapeutic methodologies.

“Open Dialogue,” a new family therapy that emerged in Finland based on Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue, has become a trendy topic in psychotherapy circles as an epoch-making treatment for schizophrenia. The method is quite simple. A small team is convened by the person responsible for the treatment at the request of a patient or family member, and a meeting is held immediately after the request, with all members of the team participating. Unlike, for example, the doctor-patient relationship in psychoanalysis, there is no leader or moderator to guide the dialogue, and treatment issues are discussed in the familiar surroundings of the patient’s home (and not in the confines of a hospital), where all team members repeatedly and carefully listen and respond to each other. This approach has gained prominence after a number of cases reported relief without medication after just a few days of daily meetings under this rule (Seikkula and Arnkil 24-33).

Seikkula and Trimble stress the importance of embodiment and affect in the practice of “Open Dialogue” from various viewpoints. In their view, the symptoms of the patients and the new language produced in the therapeutic process can be thought of as “embodied experiences”:

Just as symptoms are comprehensive, embodied experiences, so is the new language generated through comprehensive, embodied experiences more than by rational explanation. As network members share feelings of togetherness, they begin to give voice to the not-yet-said. (Seikkula and Trimble 472)

The juxtaposition of “symptoms” and “the new language” implies the possibility that language can cause changes in symptoms. In another co-authored paper, Seikkula and Arnkil writes:

Through joint sharing, a new language may emerge. In this new language, stories can be told that were not previously possible because of either the anxiety aroused or the traumatic content of the experience. Words arrive in the place of the symptoms, provided that it is a dialogical meeting. The body can start to function towards dissolving the symptoms after a relaxing of the tension in the meeting. (Seikkula and Arnkil 125–26)

This composition of creating a new language and having it reach someone as a story, or a call to action, produces a positive metamorphosis in the narrator, relieves the symptoms, and completely overlaps with the characteristics of Emerson’s narrative and writing, which Dickson presents as a complement to the problems of Bakhtin’s theory. There is a notable metaphor in the text of “Friendship” that also illustrates this theme of the writer/narrator healing through the creation of a new language along with a sense of distance:

The only joy I have in his being mine, is that the not mine is mine. I hate, where I looked for a manly furtherance, or at least a manly resistance, to find a mush of concession. *Better be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo.* The condition which high friendship demands is ability to do without it. That high office requires great and sublime parts. There must be very two, before there can be very one. Let it be an alliance of two large, formidable natures, mutually beheld, mutually feared, before yet they recognize the deep identity which, beneath these disparities, unites them. (*CW* II 122–23; emphasis added)

As critics note, this passage is based on Montaigne's description of his relationship with his best friend, Étienne de La Boétie, in "Of Friendship" and can be seen as a kind of response to Montaigne. In this context, the word "nettle," a new term that is not included in the original text of Montaigne, is of strong importance. It seems that "nettle" here means a stinging nettle, which is a species of annual herb with weakly poisonous thorns that is widely used for medicinal purposes. The poisonous and medicinal nature of the stinging herb resonates with the metaphor of the "beautiful enemy." It must also be noted here that the stinging herb is "in the side of" the friend. It is precisely this ambivalence, both poisonous and medicinal, that is required in order to stay close to the friend's side and still introduce an appropriate psychological distance.

What is more, this characteristic of the "nettle" also fits with the nature of *pharmakon* that Jacques Derrida analyzes in "Plato's Pharmacy," which is included in *Dissemination* (1981). Derrida points out that the Greek word *pharmakon*, key concept in Socrates's dialogues, means both medicine and poison, and that the word is frequently used in Plato's text, which Emerson also loved due to its polysemous nature. Derrida summarizes the characteristics of *pharmakon* as follows:

If the *pharmakon* is "ambivalent," it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.). It is on the basis of this play or movement that the opposites or differences are stopped by Plato. The *pharmakon* is the movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) difference. It is the *différance* of difference. . . Contradictions and pairs of opposites are lifted from the bottom of this diacritical, differing, deferring, reserve. (Derrida

127)

A distance not too close and not too remote can transform friend into enemy, then enemy into friend. Here, Derrida sees ambiguity as the “différance of difference” that cannot be captured by a single logos. Similarly, in the chapter dealing with Plato in *Representative Men*, Emerson himself also explains the characteristics of Socrates that are exhibited against the opponent and related to poison by using the metaphor of a crampfish: “this crampfish of a Socrates has so bewitched him” (*CW* IV 41).

Emerson’s ideal of a fraternal relationship through the union of reason and affect is realized only in the process of dialogue, in which the companion and the self are both transformed by exchanging words that are both poison and medicine. Thus, the ambivalent metaphors in Emerson’s theory of friendship, written in a “new language” that has its own dialogical origins, are not mere wordplay. These terms in this “new language” are the outcome of the sincere attempts by Emerson to transform himself, often unsuccessfully, as he listens to and responds to the calls of his friends and books; they are also an invocation that fascinates not only his friends but his future readers and listeners as well.

Without a doubt, Henry David Thoreau was one of Emerson’s most notable friends, who carefully read and listened to his texts and words. The next section traces the mutual influences between Emerson and Thoreau. In fact, Emerson’s metamorphosis as inspired by Thoreau did not stop even after the death of the disciple.

3. Conversation in the Echoes: Friendship in Emerson and Thoreau

Thoreau elaborates on his thoughts on friendship for the first time in the “Wednesday” section of his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849). Thoreau’s texts in the “Wednesday” section were clearly inspired by Emerson’s

“Friendship” (1841); as Alan Hodder notes, this book seems to be “a kind of palimpsest of Emerson’s essay” (137). Since their first meeting in 1837, Emerson and Thoreau had developed a strong relationship over many years. The “Wednesday” section and his later thoughts on friendship were not only influenced by Emerson’s texts on the topic but also by the complex relationship he actually had with Emerson. As many critics have indicated, Emerson’s attack on *A Week* shocked Thoreau. Thoreau later recorded his bitter feelings in his journal:

I had a friend, I wrote a book, I asked my friend’s criticism, I never got but praise for what was good in it—my friend became estranged from me and then I got blame for all that was bad, —& so I got at last the criticism which I wanted. While my friend was my friend he flattered me, and I never heard the truth from him, but when he became my enemy he shot it to me on a poisoned arrow. (*PJ* III¹ 18)

It is worth emphasizing that Thoreau depicts Emerson here as his friend who “became my enemy.” This shift from friend to enemy is one of the most remarkable characteristics of Thoreau’s stance on friendship, as this section will take up later. This essay focuses on their complicated mentor-mentee relationship. Although their stances on friendship share some characteristics of the affinity-distance paradox, Thoreau stresses the repeated friend-enemy reversal in recollecting lost friends and addressing future friends aggressively. In contrast, Emerson emphasizes ambiguity and the need to always passively distance oneself from friends to converse more sincerely.

3-1. The Language of Friendship in Thoreau

Emerson and Thoreau both similarly describe the moment of encounter when they welcome strangers into their houses as a privileged point at which a lofty friendship

begins to develop. Emerson writes, “[h]ow many persons we meet in houses, whom we scarcely speak to, whom yet we honor, and who honor us!” (*CW* II 113), while Thoreau remarks as follows:

[A]s you approach the sunny door-way, awakening the echoes by your steps, . . . and you fear that the gentlest knock may seem rude to the oriental dreamers. The door is opened, perchance, by some Yankee-Hindoo woman, whose small-voiced but sincere hospitality, out of the bottomless depths of a quiet nature, has travelled quite round to the opposite side, and fears only to obtrude its kindness. (*A Week* 242)

Like Emerson in “Friendship,” Thoreau in *A Week* also considers the moment of meeting as “half pleased, half astonished” (242-43), although he assumes that “friendship takes place between those who have an affinity for one another” (269). The ephemerality of friendship is one of the main themes of Thoreau’s *A Week*, which is also the case with Emerson, who states, “Friendship is evanescent in every man’s experience, and remembered like heat lightning in past summers” (261). Thoreau “know[s] that [he has] frequently disappointed them by not giving them words when they expected them, or such as they expected” (278). For him, friendship “is always a tragedy” (264). He too thinks that “[t]here are times when we have had enough even of our Friends, when we begin inevitably to profane one another, and must withdraw religiously into solitude and silence, the better to prepare ourselves for a loftier intimacy” (272).

Emerson and Thoreau largely share a similar stance on friendship. These ideal-reality, affinity-distance paradoxes characterize the essays of both Emerson and Thoreau. In the past, scholars have underestimated the importance of friendship theory as they stereotypically tended to see Emerson and Thoreau as being self-reliant,

independent, and self-sufficing. In recent years, however, critics have paid attention to their essays on friendship, especially in regard to the role that “distance” plays in its formation.

In the wake of the initial moment of encounter, two people in love or friendship cultivate their relationship mainly through conversation. Alan D. Hodder and Maki Sadahiro compare Emerson and Thoreau by examining their reactions to the critical moments of the ideal-reality paradox of friendship. For both Emerson and Thoreau, virtually none of the relationships they had with friends corresponded to what they saw as the ideal friendship, so they had to decide how to react when relations became strained. Emerson expresses this aspect of friendship as “delicious torment,” and the retreat or flight from intimacy is “not to be indulged” with “uneasy pleasures and fine pains” (*CW* II 117). In contrast, Thoreau doggedly maintains an allegiance to such troubled relationships. For Sadahiro, Thoreau kept such relationships in order to praise the “dearer” aspects of tragic friendship (150). For Hodder, Thoreau reviled and excoriated tragic friendship to become independent through temporarily strong dependence (149–50):

I sometimes hear my friends complain finely that I do not appreciate their fineness. I shall not tell them whether I do or not. As if they expected a vote of thanks for every fine thing which they uttered or did. . . What sort of companions are they who are presuming always that their silence is more expressive than yours? (*A Week* 277-78)

Thoreau heard the complaints of friends, but he did not quickly reply to satisfy their expectations. Instead, he underscores the importance of silence in the interest of having lofty communication with others. This shows that he did not think of language as the best tool for communication. As Jeffrey Steel notes, in several excerpts from his diary,

it is evident that Thoreau believed “language could never capture the subtle play of love and faith that constituted true friendship” (Steele 134). As Thoreau also noted, “The language of Friendship is not words but meanings. It is an intelligence above language” (*A Week* 273). Instead of language and conversation, he stresses the importance of silence and non-verbal communication, seeing friendship as a “mystic relation” that includes inexpressible factors (*PJ* III 40).

3-2. Conversation and Recollection: The Paradox of Friendship in Emerson and Thoreau

Following continuous experimentation within his conflicts with friends, Thoreau also broke off with them and distanced himself to a certain degree. In other words, Emerson and Thoreau demonstrate a clear contrast not in the result, but in the process of distancing itself. A definite character of anti-appropriation can be clearly found in Emerson’s attitude: “We seek our friend not sacredly, but with an adulterate passion which would appropriate him to ourselves. In vain” (*CW* II 117). In contrast, Thoreau temporarily needs an intimate relationship, appropriated by a mentor he surely depended on, in order to liberate him from his friend’s or mentor’s strong influence. Hodder and Sadahiro highly appreciate Thoreau’s attitude, especially his complex feelings for “the violence [of] love” (*A Week* 274), more than Emerson’s. Nonetheless, Emerson’s “retreat” or “flight” from intimate relationships can be interpreted positively from another perspective. As Derrida notes on “teleiopoiesis” in *The Politics of Friendship*, “Teleiopoiesis makes the *arrivants* come—or rather, allows them to come—by withdrawing; it produces an event, sinking into the darkness of a friendship which is not yet” (42–43). Withdrawing is not necessarily a negative reaction to others. Thus, Emerson sought out the possibility to be a “beautiful enemy” to his friends and

“produce an event” by retreating or withdrawing.

After breaking away from friendship, neither Thoreau nor Emerson would normally resume communications with friends directly. They recollect, however, ideal friendships of the past. Here, too, “affinity-distance” is a key concept. For these writers, how to recollect the best moment of a friendship is as important as the actual relationship. Thoreau, in a sense, turns his enemy-equals-former-friend back into a friend again through recollection. Dead friends are especially important to recollect because there is no possibility of meeting or conversing with them again. As has been pointed out, despite the fact that *A Week* takes the form of a travel book, Thoreau mostly uses the first-person plural pronoun “we”; this is because the book was also a recollection of and for his dead brother, John. Thoreau was remembering an actual trip from Concord to Merrimack made with John, which he took to write his first book in solitude at a small house at Walden. David Robinson notes that with this “remarkable unified ‘we’, [Thoreau is] essentially absorbing John’s vision into himself, or in another sense, giving John new life through his own eyes”; the narrator (Thoreau) “not only remembers his brother but remembers for his brother” (*Natural Life* 60).

As for Emerson, he also recollects beautiful amity with friends, including Thoreau, after their estrangement. Although Emerson does not write about dead friends directly in “Friendship,” at the time, he had already experienced the deaths of his first wife, Ellen, and his brothers, Charles and Edward, and it is very likely that these had some impact on “Friendship.” As Russel Goodman observes, after the sudden death of his child, Waldo, Emerson at length recollects and mourns the dead “friend” in another essay, “Experience” (83-84). It should also be noted that Emerson’s and Thoreau’s stances on future friendship show some contrasts. On the one hand, Emerson passively waits to welcome new strangers into his house or on the street. On the other hand,

Thoreau more aggressively tries to call his friends to come: “Actually I have no friend. I am very distant from all actual persons—and yet my experience of friendship is so real and engrossing that I sometimes find myself speaking aloud to the friend” (*PJ* III 58).

As stated earlier, Thoreau’s sense of distance is mainly a temporal one, in contrast to Emerson’s spatial or mental one. In other words, Thoreau pursues ways to love those who are remote as if they are near, while Emerson seeks out possibilities to love those who are near as if they were remote. Despite this difference, the “here and now” is always important for them both: for Thoreau, it is a starting point to recollect the past or address the future, whereas for Emerson, it is important for conversing with friends.

3-3. Becoming an Echo: Emerson’s Eulogy “Thoreau” and Friendship with Nonhuman Beings

Thoreau stresses temporal distance, silence, and recollection, while Emerson emphasizes spatial or mental distance and conversation. It seems adequate to summarize their differences in the theory of friendship in this way. However, is there any situation where they switch roles, so that conversation plays a key part for Thoreau and recollection for Emerson? In May of 1862, the day after Thoreau had died, Emerson eulogized his younger friend. During the recollection of his memories of his dead friend, with whom he could never again converse, Emerson mentioned Thoreau’s way of communing with animals and plants without the use of language:

He confessed that he sometimes felt like *a hound or a panther*, and, if born among Indians, would have been a fell hunter. But, restrained by his Massachusetts culture he played out the game in this mild form of *botany and ichthyology*. His *intimacy with animals* suggested what Thomas Fuller

records of Butler the apiologist, that “*either he had told the bees things or the bees had told him.*” (CW X 424; emphasis added)

Emerson here recollects non-verbal communication between Thoreau and others. Quoting Thomas Fuller’s words that “either he had told the bees things or the bees had told him,” Emerson points out the affinity Thoreau built with animals. The conversation between Thoreau and the bees should be read not as a mere metaphor but as an actual form of communication through some kind of signs. What exactly is this supposed to mean?

In the field of anthropology today, focusing on the connection between human and nonhuman beings, it is said that every kind of living thing, including animals and plants, creates signs, even if they take on forms other than human language, and they exchange and interpret each other’s signs.²¹ For instance, Eduardo Kohn explains that “[s]emiosis (the creation and interpretation of signs) permeates and constitutes the living world, and it is through our partially shared semiotic propensities that multi-species relations are possible, and also analytically comprehensible” (Kohn 9). Communication with nonhuman beings through signs can be established even with objects or things. Jane Bennett, who directed much attention to Thoreau’s relationship with nonhumans early on, notes the term “anchorite,” which is “from the Greek *anachorein* to withdraw; from *ana chorein*, to make room; from *choros*, place” (26) and detects Thoreau’s attitude to keep a certain distance, even with objects or things:

All our lives want a suitable background. They should at least, like the life of the anchorite, be as impressive to behold as objects in the desert, a broken

²¹ In reference to this interpretation connecting nature and signs, please also see Chapter 1 discussing *Nature*’s “language” chapter. In that section, Emerson thinks that it is possible for man to read nature as an open book, but he does not suppose the opposite.

shaft or crumbling mound against a limitless horizon. Character always secures for itself this advantage, and is thus distinct and unrelated to near or trivial objects, whether things or persons. (*A Week* 46)

Like “a broken shaft or crumbling mound against a limitless horizon,” for Bennett’s Thoreau, “[t]he ideal relationship to the land, like relations among Friends, preserves and defends an element of distance” (Bennett 26). For her, this model of relationships is like the structure of a Native American’s intercourse with nature. “Breaking” or “crumbling” here seems to reflect the conflict, as a sort of friend-enemy relationship between these things and nature.

As many critics, including Emerson, have already pointed out, for Thoreau, the arrowhead is one of the most significant objects linked with his keen interest in Native Americans. Like Kohn’s observation of the natives’ communication with other species and things in nature, Ryuta Imafuku interprets the arrowhead as “a kind of philosophical sign” (248) and focuses on Thoreau’s remark that “he drunk an arrowhead” in his journal: “It is not in vain that I have drunk,” Thoreau writes, “I have drunk an arrowhead. It flows from where all fountains rise. . . . There were some seeds of thought, methinks, floating in that water, which are expanding in me” (*PJ* III 369-70). According to Kohn’s argument, drinking or eating can also be construed as semiosis. Relatedly, Viveiros de Castro associates the ritual cannibalism in Tupinamba society with friend-enemy relationships: “[I]f it is always necessary to imagine an enemy—to construct the other as such—the objective is to really eat it . . . in order to construct the Self as other” (149). Together, these insights indicate how Thoreau constructs his new self as the other by “drinking” an arrowhead, an object created by and once belonging to Native

Americans.²² This process of becoming other can be paralleled with his stance on friendship, as this section has described, which is exhibited in the continuous reversal of the friend-enemy position.

Emerson also pays much attention to Thoreau's semiosis between animals and things in nature. However, Emerson insists on the significance of "the echoes," which are more faint relationships that reflect his way of approaching friends, rather than direct interactions like drinking or eating. Thoreau depicts his communication with animals and things in *Walden*:

When, as was commonly the case, I had none to commune with, I used to raise the echoes by striking with a paddle on the side of my boat, filling the surrounding woods with circling and dilating sound, stirring them up as the keeper of a menagerie his wild beasts, until I elicited a growl from every wooded vale and hillside. (*Walden* 174)

In this scene, it stands out clearly that Thoreau did not meditate in solitude in deep forests, but instead raised and listened to the echoes from "the surrounding woods" and "wild beasts"; namely, he conversed with animals and things in nature without using language. To put it another way, silence in Thoreau's stance on his friends is also nothing but a sort of conversation using different kinds of signs. Emerson refers to Thoreau's interest in echoes near the end of his eulogy, as David Mikics also points out in connection with the quote from *Walden* above²³:

He thought the scent a more oracular inquisition than the sight, —more oracular and trustworthy. The scent, of course, reveals what is concealed

²² As quoted earlier, it should also be noted that Thoreau once compared Emerson to his enemy, who shot his criticism to Thoreau "on a poisoned arrow."

²³ Mikics quotes above lines from *Walden* and points out that "*Walden's* chapter "Sounds" describes a spectrum of echoing animal calls (*AE* 489).

from the other senses. By it he detected earthiness. He delighted in echoes, and said they were almost the only kind of kindred voices that he heard.
(*CW* X 429)

Here, Emerson emphasizes the scent and sense of hearing that are related to non-verbal communication as a sort of semiosis. It is important that he read some excerpts from Thoreau's unpublished manuscripts regarding animals, plants, and things in nature after writing this, and in a sense, he became Thoreau's echoes. As Emerson once wrote, the reason is that it departs from his principles on friends, since it is "[b]etter be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo" (*CW* II 122-23). Similar to his experience of the death of his brother and friends for Thoreau, Emerson's metamorphosis was inspired by the death of his former friend Thoreau. Not by taking adequate distance from the dead friend Thoreau, but by using his own body as a medium, Emerson lets Thoreau's voice echo in him, like an Aeolian harp²⁴ in Concord, and gets closer to Thoreau, which is a much different approach from his ordinary attitude toward friends. Thus, he ended up by conversing with Thoreau in the echoes again.

Coda

As Caleb Crain scrutinizes, when Emerson quoted a famous phrase, "O my friends, there is no friend," in sermon 140, delivered in 1832, he "observes that even between intimates, there is no perfect communication between men on earth" (185).

²⁴ In "An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry," Timothy Morton takes up an argument advanced by Percy Shelly in *A Defence of Poetry* that humans are like Aeolian harps (wind harps), and claims "sentience . . . is vibrating in tune with (or out of tune with) some other entity: sentience is attunement" (205). Further, he insists "if a sentient being is like a wind harp, and if, moreover, sensation and thinking are ontologically similar to one another, then we can invert the image. Wind harps *are like sentient beings*" (*Ibid.*; italics original). These images of Aeolian harps may suit not only the image of Emerson reading Thoreau's manuscripts, but Thoreau's "broken shaft" or "crumbling mound."

Although Montaigne once pointed out that Aristotle often repeated this passage, “O my friends, there is no friend” is, in practice, “a mistranslation of a secondhand report on Aristotle” (184). Like the trope of the “nettle” in “Friendship,” Emerson creatively rereads and quotes Montaigne’s call to friends, which was already a mistranslation of the original text of Aristotle, against the intention of both Montaigne and Aristotle. Then, after the sermon, Emerson recorded this phrase “O my friends, there is no friend” in his journal once (*JMN* VI 161).²⁵ Emerson’s poetics of distance advocates these misreadings as “creative reading” showing the fundamental ambiguity between friend and no friend. Contrary to the narrator of Poe’s “Man of the Crowd,” Emerson reinterpreted and transfigured the texts and speech of his predecessors and friends like Montaigne, Fuller, and Thoreau. Through these processes, his stance on friends itself, having repeatedly metamorphosed, centers around the distance and the echo.

²⁵ In August 1837, Fuller borrowed these lines from Emerson’s journal in her letter to him: “For I have been in an irreligious state of mind, a little misanthropic and sceptical[sic] about the existence of any real communication between human beings. I bear constantly in heart that text of yours “O my friends, there are no friends” but to me it is a paralyzing conviction. Surely, we are very unlike the Gods in “their states of eternal tranquility” that we need illusions so much to keep us in action. However, I must say I feel a desire, . . . to see my dear *no friends*, Mr and Mrs Emerson, . . .” (*Letters* 294; emphasis original). Like her reprimand using the trope of “beautiful foe,” Fuller ironically used the phrase, “my dear no friends” to rebuke Emerson’s indecisive attitude. Fuller also creatively rereads Emerson’s already borrowed lines “O my friends, there is no friend.”

Chapter 5

“A Household is the School of Power”:

Emerson’s Domestic Economy in Representations of Space

In October 1834, Emerson moved to Concord to visit Ezra Ripley, who was the grandfather of his dead wife Ellen. He lived for a while in the house his own grandfather William had built, which would eventually be named Old Manse, with his brothers and mother. In September of the following year, he married his new wife Lydian in a new house nearby, which he had bought in July of the same year (Richardson 208-09). Emerson continued to live in this house for the rest of his life, and the property, which has since been restored, remains open to the public.

Almost all of Emerson’s major works, except for his diaries, were written after this move to Concord in 1834. The space of the house, or the place of the home¹, is never unrelated to the reality of the words and tropes that he wrote and spoke. For example, in “Love,” “Friendship,” and other essays included in *Essays: First Series* (1841), Emerson stresses the importance of “home” as the central site for developing intimate relationships with others. As was also detailed in chapter 4, the representation of space in terms of the boundary between the private and the public, especially those boundaries around the house, like the door that separates a house from the street, emerges as an important factor in the essays. Without a doubt, these individual expressions have already been analyzed from various angles in previous studies.

¹ According to Oxford English Dictionary, “home” means “[t]he place of one’s dwelling or nurturing, with the conditions, circumstances, and feelings which naturally and properly attach to it, and are associated with it” and “[a] place, region, or state to which one properly belongs, in which one’s affections centre, or where one finds refuge, rest, or satisfaction.” When using the word “home,” this chapter emphasize these connotations in comparison with the word “house,” which simply means a dwelling-place.

However, no study has inclusively argued that the spatial representations of Emerson, which appear across multiple essays and lectures, are deeply related to a specific space, including the house, and to his own experience of living in that space.²

Therefore, this chapter first surveys the transformation of consciousness in perceiving space in America in the middle of the nineteenth century, and then focuses in particular on Emerson's peculiar sense of regarding the character of the site of "home" and issues related to his domestic economy such as his relationship with servants and his second wife Lidian. Emerson's views are then compared with those of his contemporary female writers, such as the Beecher sisters and Margaret Fuller. As Martin Heidegger notes, since "[b]uilding and thinking are, each in its own way, inescapable for dwelling," (158), this chapter will not categorize the trope of the house or home in literary works simply as the literal or figurative representation of space from the perspective of independent institutions like "architecture" and "literature." Instead, the focus will be on how space and language are linked and have a mutual influence on each other through the concrete experiences of one's life. Based on this recognition, which Henri Lefebvre succinctly summarizes as a viewpoint that reimagines the space as "directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols" (39; emphasis original), this chapter reconsiders the literary coloration of space in Emerson's lecture "Home" and other texts with a renewed focus on the perspective of gender. It also takes notice

² Branka Arsić comments on various kind of tropes of space in Emerson's works; nonetheless the theme of space is not centrally treated in *On Leaving: A Reading in Emerson* (2010). In *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature* (2006), Milette Shamir explores representations of spaces, including houses in antebellum American literature, in connection with privacy and intimacy. Although this book sporadically refers to Emerson in the chapter on Thoreau, Shamir does not treat Emerson as the main subject of the book. In another vein, Diana Fuss compares the change in living spaces in the nineteenth century with the establishment of individual subjectivity and interiority in *Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them* (2004), but Emerson is never mentioned in the book.

of class and race issues, and reexamines the themes of “intimacy” and “solitude” in his essays and lectures through this point of view.

1. Closing the Door: “Private Space,” the “Study,” and Individualism

In antebellum America, “individualism,” a term that had been introduced into use in the late 1820s with the development of a market economy, the rise of the middle class through industrialization and the improvement of the law on property rights expanded rapidly in association with “domestic ideology,” which stressed the aspect of ownership.³ It was precisely because boundaries have been drawn that it was possible to clearly distinguish between the inside and the outside of an individual household as a unit, and the idea that a patriarch owns family members, servants, and private property was born. Simultaneously, an “interior” that is different from the “appearance” of the independent individual of the group was also established a posteriori. Namely, the ideas of American individualism and ownership were both generated retrospectively by the border line that divides the inner and the outer realms. For instance, Alexis de Tocqueville emphasizes the phase of “isolation” and “withdrawal,” which is peculiar to American individualism, when he states, “Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of his family and friends” (506-07). Within individuals who made such a sharp distinction between the public and the private, or within small communities that shared a certain sense of value that constituted an interior, the changes seen in the structure of houses and living spaces were more than just a metaphor at that time. They held significance as one of the various boundaries that enabled isolation

³ See Brown 1-2. For more details on the tradition of individualism linked to ownership, see also what Macpherson calls “possessive individualism” in *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*.

from one's surroundings, thereby enabling attention only to one's own thought or, in other words, self-reflection.

Yi-Fu Tuan shows that the birth of the so-called modern Western self, self-consciousness, and individualism characterized by introspection and isolation are temporally synchronized with the emergence of private rooms and spaces. Tuan illustrates this connection while also referring to anthropological research on indigenous peoples living in spaces where there is little or no effective partition between them. One can become aware of the image of "the self" as different from the people around him or her only when he or she can escape from the gaze and contact of others and obtain "private space," which enables intensive focus on one's own thoughts. Tuan takes up the metaphor of "islands, each a world of its own" and Goethe's "billiard balls," which are "hard individuated objects that touch each other only at the surface,"⁴ to "suggest the qualities of boundedness and separation" (151). As if responding to the earlier comment of Tocqueville, he also quotes a passage from Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, where he describes how he had shut himself up in the library to write his autobiography: "It is not enough for a man to have sequestered himself from the concourse of people. . . . A man must also sever himself from the popular conditions that are in us. A man must sequester and recover himself from himself" (qtd. in Tuan 163). Tuan confirms this view of the self in the writings of Goethe and Montaigne, which deeply influenced Emerson's thought, while remaining conscious of the differences between the American and European cases.

Specifically, Tuan points out the elements that indicate a striking contrast between the nineteenth century American house and the Victorian house in Europe,

⁴ Emerson was fond of reading his texts in the original, and this metaphor from Goethe may remind us of the theme of "experience" discussed in the previous chapter.

further analyzing why the challenges faced by secular utopian communities, like settlements in New England and the “New Harmony” in the 1820s, were destined for failure. Unlike the European house, where each space is simultaneously divided and connected, and where the interior space is enclosed by numerous walls and doors, “this ambiguity and equivocation of the modern American house neatly mirrors the conflict between polarized American ideals: individualism and community, selfhood developed in the privacy of one’s own space and democratic togetherness” (186). This interpretation of the American house in the late nineteenth century seems to be equally applicable to houses in the antebellum period, during which Emerson wrote the texts that this chapter deals with. We can see the same factors that lead to the ambiguity that Tuan has discerned here in Emerson’s house as well, with its private rooms on the second floor and a number of connected rooms separated by doors on the ground floor.

In conjunction with this point, Milette Shamir has further examined these ambiguities in the American house. In her work, she focuses on the novel *Boarding Out: A Tale of Domestic Life*, written by Sarah Joseph Hale and published in 1846. Hale was the writer and editor of the most famous woman’s magazine in those days, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, for which Emerson had also wrote several times. This novel tells the story of a middle-class suburban family who moves into a big-city boarding house. They start a new life in the city, but soon must return to the suburbs again after their plans fail. Initially, the wife wants to sell their suburban house and move to an urban boarding house to reduce the burden of household chores and improve their social status. The husband, who secretly wants to discourage his wife’s plan, holds an auction to sell the family’s property, claiming it is for their moving expenses. By keeping the door to his study closed, he is able to keep his own books in his study and out of the auction. The family migrates to the city after all because the wife carries out her own will, but after

experiencing bankruptcy and the death of their children, she follows her husband's suggestion to return to the suburbs from which they came. The ideal of "harmony in marriage and the home," which was an underlying theme in the writings of Hale and others in antebellum America, was recovered through this return.

In other novels that follow the trends of the middle class at that time, or what historians have called "the cult of domesticity," the home itself is generally described in a more idealistic way than the outside world. The position of this work, however, is somewhat different. Shamir emphasizes the sharp contrast between two spaces in the home, the "study" and the "parlor," as prominent the elements in this novel. The former is represented as a place that enables the "isolation" of the "husband," and the latter as a place in which the "wife" can foster her "sociability" (20-22).⁵ This indication by Shamir is in line with what Tuan calls the "polarized ideal," referring to the separation of life into a gendered form of coexistence inside American houses at that time.

Taking into account these historical contexts of how space was perceived in the middle of the nineteenth century, it is time to review Emerson's representations of space as they appear specifically in his texts. First, it is important to note the motif of the door, which separates a space into two distinct areas and also functions as a point of contact between the two spaces. The door, when it is closed, creates a distinction between the interior and the exterior by dividing the space in two. As Tocqueville and Tuan have described, it works as a device for securing private space, which is distinguished from public space in its separation from its surroundings. For instance, as Emerson writes in "Self-Reliance," "I shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls

⁵ Shamir also points out the fact that Hale often printed plans with divided "study" and "parlor" spaces drawn by Andrew Jackson Downing and other prominent architects of the time in *Godey's Lady's Book*; a number of houses had been built using these plans as the model (22). This means that expressions of contemporaneous ideals were widely circulated at the time, even in the form of more specific configurations of living space, along with texts published through the same journal to which Emerson had also contributed.

me. I would write on the lintels of the door-post, *Whim*” (*CW* II 30; emphasis original). Emerson asserts that sometimes one has to move into an environment that is divided from others to give form to the inspiration and calling from one’s genius. He also states the following:

But *your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation*. At times the whole world seems to be in conspiracy to importune you with emphatic trifles. Friend, client, child, sickness, fear, want, charity, *all knock at once at thy closet door and say, — ‘Come out unto us.’ But keep thy state; come not into their confusion*. The power men possess to annoy me I give them by a weak curiosity. *No man can come near me but through my act*. ‘What we love that we have, but by desire we bereave ourselves of the love.’ (*CW* II 41; emphasis added)

Emerson, who shuts the door and does not respond to the “friend” and “child” knocking on it, does not simply withdraw, as the previous quote from Montaigne insists, but “must also sever himself from the popular conditions that are in us.” Through this “solitude,” he transforms “involuntary perceptions” into a new form of linguistic expression that he creates. Here, Emerson seems to voluntarily choose and try to achieve the active state of “solitude,” distinct from the “loneliness” one passively exposes.⁶ At the same time, however, it should be noted that the door that is recommended to be closed here is the same door that separates the private room or what Virginia Woolf calls “a room of one’s own,” like the “study” that Shamir mentions,

⁶ In *Modernizing Solitude*, Furui discusses the nature of “solitude” in nineteenth-century American literature as opposed to “loneliness.” According to Furui, the development of various media and communication methods that occurred simultaneously during the antebellum period, such as the railroads of the 1830s and the telegrams of the 1840s, fostered a new sense of “connection,” and at the same time provided an opportunity to rethink the idea of “solitude” in a positive light (1-5). Although he does not devote a separate chapter to Emerson, he also refers to Emerson as an example of one who exhibited the positive characteristic of “being alone” at the time.

from the other rooms. Closing this door is one of the pathways leading to the state of “self-reliance,” but similar to the case of the husband in Hale’s *Boarding Out*, it is the one who decides to open or close the door who is the master of a house. Thus, it can be said that the gender imbalance in the established power structure has surfaced here in the form of control over the door.

The importance of private space in Emerson’s life is one of the main reasons why he was not enthusiastic about joining his contemporary utopian communities, although he did develop communal friendship with several others through organizing the Transcendental Club and editing the magazine “The Dial.” In a letter rejecting George Ripley’s invitation to Brook Farm, Emerson claimed that he refused because he could not be “in solitude where they shall perplex none or very few beside myself,” and he continues that “[t]he ground of my decision is almost purely personal to myself,” and “I think that all I shall solidly do, I must do alone” (*Letters* 2 369-70; qtd. in Ryan 491). Relatedly, the following statement in the essay “Intellect” is also remarkable: “God enters by a private door into every individual” (*CW* II 194). “A private door” here is also closely related to the image of the door that allows for the division between the group and the individual. Emerson also emphasizes personal faith and one’s own relationship with God, rather than a more public form of faith based on identification with a group like the church. In these descriptions, his attempt to find a certain quality in private spaces that is not present in communities, such as Brook Farm and the church, can be observed.⁷

⁷ With reference to the opposition between Emerson’s personal faith and a more public form of faith, David Reynolds shrewdly points out that Emerson and Thoreau “had an early perception of the deep ambiguities of their reform climate and then refashioned reform to signify a new heady antinomianism and an almost existentialist self-renewal” (97). He continues: “Both extracted from their era’s fragmented, often contentious reform movements a cuttngly subversive spirit that was always directed toward discarding the old an affirming the new” (97). For more details of relation between Emerson’s faith and American puritanism, see also Introduction.

Thus, Emerson's view of the self was inseparable from the spatial aspect of submerging into himself by closing the door to his room, but at the same time, he welcomed visitors who often knocked on the front door of his house. Whether the door is opened or closed, its state cannot be a permanent or stable one. What Jeffrey Steele called "fundamental instability" (122), a characteristic of Emerson's theory of fraternity, can also be applicable to the space that has the doors that function as the border to the adjacent space. In the next section, let us evaluate Emerson's act of opening the door to welcome the strangers who visit his home as guests.

2. Opening the Door: "House" and "Mobility"

In a series of essays on the emotional ties between the self and others, Emerson assigns privileged importance to several spaces when describing scenes of encounters with others. For example, "the house" has special significance together with "the street" as places in which eye contact is possible in both "Love" and "Friendship."⁸ The house in Emerson's text is portrayed as an ambivalent space that is clearly separated from the street by walls, yet at times connected to it through the opening and closing of doors and windows, thereby creating a kind of intercourse between private and public spaces. This idea concerning the boundary of space overlaps with Emerson's ambivalent attitude toward a relationship between the self and others.

In "Friendship," Emerson describes "[a] commended stranger is expected and announced, and an uneasiness betwixt pleasure and pain invades all the hearts of a household. His arrival almost brings fear to the good hearts that would welcome him" (*CW* II 113). The character of "his arrival" obviously reflects the change in social condition. As shown in chapter 4, due to the growing mobility of society in American

⁸ For more details in connection with "the street" in Emerson's essays, see Chapter 4.

cities since 1830, “[t]he art of engineering all outward expressions of the self in order to impress others had become a central concern of antebellum popular self-improvement literature” (Halttunen 40). People in American cities became constantly frightened of an imaginary enemy because of what Halttunen termed “sentimental typology of conduct” (88). Emerson, who lived in suburban Concord, which was very different from large cities like New York and Boston, was also never immune to the fear of being exposed to such mobility.⁹ However, it can be said that he did not seek to completely eliminate mobility in the enclosed space of the house, but rather assumed a certain degree of fluidity and allowed himself to be passively changed in his relationships with others, with whom he met, conversed, and developed friendships. This attitude toward mobility seems to be consistently reflected in several spatial representations in the essay “Love,” and not only with strangers, but also with partners.

In “Love,” he demands, “At last they discover that all which at first drew them together, —those once sacred features, that magical play of charms, —was deciduous, had a prospective end, like the scaffolding by which the house was built” (*CW* II 109). The metaphor of “the scaffolding” used to build a house shows that if one cannot maintain an ideal relationship that brings about change through dialogue, such a relationship must be ended.¹⁰ He censoriously alludes to the situation in which “two persons, a man and a woman, so variously and correlatively gifted, are shut up in one house to spend in the nuptial society forty or fifty years” (*CW* II 109) as the essential characteristic of marital life. Further, by using one more spatial metaphor to show that

⁹ Jarvis claims that the demographics of Concord in the 1840 census are not reliable, but the population of this place, when tabulated from the results of the censuses in 1830 and 1850 alone, reached about 2,250 in 1850, an increase of about 700, or 45%, over a period of 20 years. In light of the fact that the population remained largely flat since the 1860s, the conclusion is that from 1830s to 1850s, Concord, after Emerson’s move, was also not disconnected from the increment of “mobility” (203-5).

¹⁰ For the comparison between Emerson’s metaphor of “the scaffolding” and Coleridge’s metaphor of “the arch” of a bridge, see Introduction.

“we are often made to feel that our affections are but tents of a night” (*CW* II 109), he depicts the dynamics of the situation as shifting, since, “[t]hough slowly and with pain, the objects of the affection change, as the objects of thought do” (*CW* II 109).

Emerson also refers to the life of indigenous peoples, who do not have houses divided into individual spaces, via a transnational perspective focusing on the contrast with the modern Western subject at the beginning of the essay “Manners” (1844). After the brief mention of the Fijian life, he cites the description of the Egyptian living space in a travel sketch by Giovanni Battista Belzoni, calling the space “[t]he house, namely, a tomb” (*CW* III 71), and continues: “No rain can pass through the roof, and there is no door, for there is no want of one, as there is nothing to lose” (*CW* III 71). Emerson saw Fiji, whose people adhered to the custom of cannibalism, and the Egyptian wilderness, where even the boundary between life and death was in flux, as sites exposed to far more fluidity than could be found in the streets of antebellum northern America.

By juxtaposing these tropes of space, the characteristics of Emerson’s attitude to “mobility” are revealed. For him, the house, as an enclosed space devoid of any traffic from the outside world, and the Egyptian wilderness, or “tents of a night,” having no distinct border to the outer realm and thus not being able to stifle fluidity, are both targets of criticism. The image of a house that is different from any of these spaces, with a wall that partially cuts off mobility while at the same time allowing for, communication between the “house” and the “street” through a door that opens and closes intermittently, is a representation of a space that parallels Emerson’s view of the self, which is incessantly transformed in a plastic way.

So what did Emerson write about life in these houses, and how and to what extent did he actually try to incorporate mobility into everyday life? Let us now consider the

issue of domesticity in Emerson's work, referring to his actual domestic life along with several essays and lectures on domesticity.

3. Emerson's Domestic Economy I: Emerson and the Beecher Sisters

In the United States during the Antebellum period, "the ideology of separate spheres" became popular with the spread of individualism associated with the "logic of exclusivity" (Davidson 444). It connected "binaric gender relation" (444) with the binaric thinking of space.¹¹ Cathy Davidson indicates that the phrases like the "cult of domesticity," the "cult of womanhood," and the "female world of love and ritual" "describe a constellation of nineteenth-century conditions resulting from women's separation from many of the public and official forms of power" (444). In addition, she summarizes that "the separate spheres metaphor can even make it seem as if women chose their world, as if white, middle-class American women preferred the female, domestic, sentimental, collective private space (basically, the world of home) to the male, individualistic, public sphere of commerce and politics" (444). These binary terms suggest "nineteenth-century America was neatly divided up according to an occupational, social, and affective geography of gender" (444). Emerson's actual

¹¹ Since Linda K. Kerber published "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History" (1988), studies deconstructing the ideology of separate spheres and of domesticity have flourished. In 1998, Davidson digests the preceding research history in her preface to the issue of "No More Separate Spheres!" in *American Literature*. In 2000, *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1830-1930*, the first anthology of this theme, is published. In 2002, Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher edit the anthology based on the issue of *American Literature* 1998, which also includes Kerber's classic paper, *No More Separate Spheres!: A Next Wave American Studies Reader*. For further argument of Lauren Berlant, who also contributes to *No More Separate Spheres!*, and explores the character of "the intimate public sphere," see also Conclusion.

experiments in his home perhaps can be interpreted as the challenge to this “geography of gender” and “the ideology of separate spheres.”¹²

It appears that when considering the problem of domesticity and administration in households in antebellum America, a consideration of the role of the wife as well as that of the servants is inevitable. As Fay Dadden notes, from the 1820s, and especially in the 1830s, there was an increasing tendency in the United States to hire more servants, particularly women, than ever before in the realm of the home (44). Emerson, who had moved to his new home in Concord in 1835, faced a servant problem that aligned well with these social developments. Barbara Ryan has analyzed Emerson’s attempts at “domestic and social experiments” in his relationships with the servants hired by the Emerson family, from his first servant to Henry David Thoreau, who served in Emerson’s house as if he were also one of the servants, by considering the period beginning with 1837, when he gave his first anti-slavery speech, to 1844, when he formally expressed his anti-slavery position. According to Ryan, in the last seven years before Emerson’s full transition to a money-mediated contractual relationship with his servants, many wage-payers who had never owned chattel servants like Emerson “would have been especially likely to believe that an extended and nonwaged ‘family’ was the best model yet devised for providing comfortable and mutually beneficial service relations” (487). However, when this model is mentioned, the relation between slaveholders and slaves in the South immediately springs to mind. Quite contrary to the attitude of some feminists who demanded wages for housework, Emerson initially

¹² In relation to the Emerson’s household, Monika M. Elbert criticizes Emerson’s voice being “traditionally patriarchal,” but, at the same time, she indicates that “Emerson’s [voice] suggested that women’s sphere was public, not exclusively private” (“Introduction” 8).

sought to find a democratic and equitable component in the nonwaged labor of wives and servants who were mainly women.¹³

To reconsider Emerson's relationship with his servants in terms of space, it is useful to compare his spatial model, represented by the ambivalent position of the house explored in this chapter, with Catharine Beecher's writings on the American house in the antebellum period. In 1841, the same year Emerson published *Essays: First Series*, Beecher printed *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, in which she discussed the importance of policing the threat of alien others, such as immigrant servants, who lived inside the boundaries of the house. In "Manifest Domesticity," Amy Kaplan draws attention to Beecher's description of apathetic and sickly mothers and their children in frontier families with fragile foundations, which Beecher sketched with quotes from Tocqueville's argument at the end of Chapter II of her book "Difficulties Peculiar to American Women": "The house, inhabited by these emigrants, has no internal partition or loft. In the one chamber of which it consists, the whole family is gathered for the night. The dwelling is itself a little world; an ark of civilization amid an ocean of foliage" (24; qtd. in Kaplan 33). This boundary between the home and the primeval forest here is reinforced up to a point by the image of the home as "an ark of civilization," and with the internal order of the ark protecting the occupants from "an ocean of foliage." According to Kaplan, "the undifferentiated inner space, which lacks 'internal partition,' replicates rather than defends against the boundlessness of the wilderness around it" (33). This incomplete division between the outside wilderness and the house is a factor that generated fear and ill health among mothers. As Kaplan also notes, Beecher saw

¹³ See also Emerson's comment in the lecture "Domestic Life": "I think it plain that this voice of communities and ages, 'Give us wealth, and the good household shall exist,' is vicious, and leaves the whole difficulty untouched. It is better, certainly, in this form, 'Give us your labor, and the household begins'" (*EL* III 59).

these problems plaguing not only frontier women but also middle-class women in the northeastern cities because of geographical and social mobility. According to Beecher's argument, the circumstances of urban mothers, who were exposed to the excessive mobility of servants in houses without an "internal partition," and who needed to accept and employ the alien presence of poverty-stricken exotic servants inside the home with an exodus of skilled servants, also contributed to their poor health.

The attempt to police and overcome the fear and infirmity derived from the images of houses associated with wilderness inevitably results in the paradox of what Kaplan calls "imperial domesticity." She states: "The representation of the home as an empire exists in tension with the notion of woman's sphere as a contracted space, because it is in the nature of empires to extend their rule over new domains while fortifying their borders against external invasion and internal insurrection" (29). Furthermore, she also terms "part of the imperial reach of the ideology of separate spheres," or "the expansionist logic of domesticity itself" as "Manifest Domesticity" (48). She designates that "interconnections between onward national expansion and inward divisiveness both informed and menaced the image of the nation as home" (48). Kaplan finds "Manifest Domesticity" characterized by this simultaneous emergence of fear and domination, expansion and reinforcement of boundaries, especially in the works of women writers of the time, such as Beecher and Hale.

In contrast, while Emerson shared with these women writers an awareness of mobility in society that triggered these fears and poor health, he responded in what could be described as an opposite way.¹⁴ He did not fear that servants, who in Beecher's case were associated with fluidity, would move around freely inside the house. Emerson

¹⁴ For more details of the relationship between Emerson and expansionism or Manifest Destiny, see also Chapter 1.

did not manage them, but instead welcomed them as if they were, to some extent, members of his family. He “was trying to make non-kin servants seem familial” (Ryan 495). In 1841, for example, contrary to the practice of the time of having servants and family members eat at different times, Emerson tried to invite the servants to share the same dining table, despite the resistance of his son Waldo, in order to establish a relationship with them that was mediated by emotion and friendship rather than wages. However, his proposal to reconcile this class difference between those who served and those who were served failed because of the rejection of the invitation on the part of the servants (Ryan 494-96). Emerson’s ambivalent attempts to view the servants as located midway on the class hierarchy between unpaid slaves and wage laborers ultimately led to a problematic relationship between the master Emerson and his servants over money, emotions, and hospitality.¹⁵ For Emerson, who sought to establish equal friendship with strangers, but who did not completely abandon the authority of his position, the domestic relationship with non-kin servants was also a situation where contradictions of race, gender, and class erupted. As Ryan notes, “he did not commit his energies to abolition until he had found, for himself, that servants could not be immobilized or made less disturbing simply by employers’ treating them as members of one united household” (491).

To be sure, unlike the house in Beecher’s work which has no “internal partition,” the space inside Emerson’s house, which is divided by partitions but also connected through doors, brings elements into the interior spaces of the house that Beecher feared, and that were connected to the mobility which originally belonged to the outside of the

¹⁵ For instance, Emerson also tried to provide Alexander McCaffrey, whom he hired in 1840, with an education while giving him “limited remuneration” for fear that he would be judged to have purchased him like a slave-owner (Ryan 493). His relationship with Thoreau, who would also later serve as a de facto servant, was also one that could be called a “mentor-mentee” relationship, which, by mutual consent, was fraught with inequality and involved almost no money exchange (498-99).

house. However, the reason Emerson was able to bring fluidity into the house in the first place is that he was able to retreat, if necessary, into his private and personal space, where he was able to re-establish the contours of an autonomous self that was not overwhelmed by mobility. At this point, it is necessary to recall Shamir's indication that the "study" and the "parlor" coexisted in explicitly gendered ways in antebellum American houses. In the United States at that time, only a patriarch of a certain class was able to maintain such "partitions" in their house and open or shut the "door" to his private room freely, on a "whim." Although Emerson did not subscribe to a "domestic ideology" that required wives to be subordinate to their husbands, it cannot be denied that he was not sufficiently aware of his own privilege. This contradiction existed in his actual relationship with his wife as well.

Glenna Matthews, for example, cites the fact that Emerson's wife Lydian kept herself busy with household chores as one of the causes of her long-lasting illness (38-39). Lydian expressed as much in an April 1836 letter to Emerson, lamenting, "God help me to have no aim in the future but to do his will in seeking the happiness of others—forgetting my own."¹⁶ Unlike Emerson, who was able to retreat to his private room and study for self-reflection whenever he pleased, her health, like that of the mothers in Beecher's account, was failing as she continued to engage in trivial household chores. As Ryan indicates, Lydian was particularly troubled by the aforementioned visits to her home by strangers. On those occasions of reception, which she ironically called "transcendental times," she and her servants were exhausted by the hospitality of her husband Emerson, who enjoyed conversing and interacting with his

¹⁶ Lydian Emerson to Ralph Waldo Emerson in April 1836, quoted in Newfield 142.

guests. Nancy Colesworthy, one of his servants, once even threatened to post a sign saying, “This House is not a Hotel” (Ellen 71-72; qtd. in Ryan 501).

While Emerson’s blindness to the contradictions of the domestic sphere is especially evident here, this perspective of comparing the house to the hotel is also noteworthy in that it reflects Emerson’s ambivalent attitude toward mobility. As Lori Mellish emphasizes (150), Harriet Beecher Stowe, a sister to Catherine Beecher, in the essay “What is a Home?” included in *Houses and Home Papers* that was published in 1865 under the pseudonym Christopher Crowfield, advised that a home should offer “something that doesn’t seem like a hotel, —some bit of real, genuine heart life . . . a little of your heart, a little home warmth and feeling” (Stowe 51), and saw the concept of home to be in conflict with that of hotel. Based on the idea of what Mellish calls “sentimental materialism” that stresses attachment to furniture, even if it is a little damaged, and the sentimental connection between the house and its inhabitants, Stowe advocated a thorough separation of public and private space, supporting the closed nature of home. In contrast, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, a guest at Emerson’s house, remembered, “It was indeed a model household,” and praised it further by stating, “Everything was fresh, clean, and well ordered” (Matthews 38). For Emerson, who valued openness to all visitors, including many women, his family’s house was at times almost indistinguishable from a hotel for guests.¹⁷

The status of his house, which was neither as open as “the wilderness” or “the tents of a night,” nor as isolated from the outside world as the Beecher sisters’ image of their home, seemed to be quite unique compared to the trend of his American

¹⁷ Invoking a novel by Henry James and an essay by Siegfried Kracauer, Mark Seltzer describes the hotel lobby as “a space of suspended action—a space of promiscuity, stranger intimacy, and violence held in abeyance.” Emerson’s hotel-like house may also be a typical example of what Seltzer calls a “hotel-world,” or “a world unto itself, but to the very extent that it is so, a world like the rest of a scalable world” (18-19).

contemporaries. As Christopher Newfield reveals, although his wife and the domestic workers in his house had a relatively equal and mutually beneficial relationship with Emerson at the time, they were, after all, partially submissive to the masculine power of their master Emerson. In other words, it is undeniable that Emerson had patriarchal authority in the household to some degree (Newfield 131-37, 148-50). Likewise, the fact that the establishment of this peculiar space was premised on the unconscious sacrifice of wives and servants should not be overlooked. However, despite these contradictions, the relationships Emerson formed with his diverse guests—the “strangers” who would eventually become his friends—in the space that emerged as hotel-like are not characterized by contemporaneous fear and skepticism; instead, such relationships seem to have been open to a more equal dialogue. In particular, among the friends who interacted with Emerson in the “parlor” and in various other settings, his interactions with Fuller, even more than with his wife Lydian, embodied the ideal relationship between men and women, as presented in the essay “Love.”

Finally, let us turn our attention to the lecture “Home,” emphasizing the influence of Fuller, and take up Emerson’s peculiar view of the “home” from a different angle once again.

4. Emerson’s Domestic Economy II: Emerson and Margaret Fuller

In “Home” (1838), the second lecture of the series “Human Life,” Emerson deals with issues of domestic economy and the household as what Ryan calls “domestic and social experiments” similar to his relationship with servants. First, this lecture displays Emerson’s attitude that not only regards the home as the place of “repose and relaxation,” but also fluidizes and renews relationships with the people in the house, the furniture,

and the living space itself, that is, every boundary regarding the household.¹⁸ As indicated at the beginning of the lecture, “A household is the school of power” (*EL* III 24), and this process of renewing one’s relationship with all parts of the surrounding environment in daily life is seen as an opportunity for learning. The attitude toward furniture in particular stands in marked contrast to that of Stowe. This unique sense of Emerson’s constantly shifting public/private boundaries, when compared with the process of growing up, is expressed as follows: “By and by, the boy finds the house is to be pulled down; the family removes. He is not related then to these primeval walls! He and they can part and he remain whole!” (*EL* III 26). The boundary between the living space and the surrounding environment is irreversibly dismantled by the demolition of the walls. In spite of this change, Emerson highlights that “he remain[sic] whole,” which shows that self-formation of “the child” (*EL* III 26) was not necessarily dependent on the wrecked house. Emerson goes on to assert the following:

Home is not one house, but any house where a few related persons are. By and by, these grow old; he goes to school; to college; to his trade. He finds new inmates of his expanding circle. The old ties are fading; the father, the mother have grown old, and are dead. (EL III 26; emphasis added)

Here, Emerson is more radically liberating the concept of the home from the fixed space of the house where one is born. By viewing “any house where a few related persons are” as a “home,” he tries to find the essential importance of constituting a “home” in the people who share a common space, rather than in the space itself. Going a step further, he states:

¹⁸ On this attitude, see also Branka Arsić. She summarizes the “three main beneficial uses of home” in Emerson’s work as (1) schooling and education, (2) repose and relaxation, and (3) handiwork and prudence, and remarks, “‘Home’ proposes ‘the flow of every day’ to be shaped artfully in order to elude routine and help us restore the world that is now lost for us in sickness” (240-41).

The warm affections, the ardent intellect of youth open, and together higher home than before, —*not in house walls, not in a fenced garden, not in town, but in souls* that give back a true image of his own; *and the dear friendships and loves of youth seem a sufficient asylum and hearth if all old places and old fences should perish.* (*EL III 26*; emphasis added)

“The dear friendships and loves” become “a sufficient asylum and hearth” “in souls” without the need for division from the outside world by “house walls” or “a fenced garden.” The site of the “home,” which has gradually expanded its scope from his parents’ home to “any house where a few related persons are,” is now completely liberated from the boundaries of “walls” and “fences” that divide the interior and outer realms, and the private and public spaces.

Additionally, this imaginative way of perceiving friendship and affection spatially echoes the metaphor of the “office” in the passage from “The Heart,” the lecture that also served in 1838 as the prototype of the essays “Friendship” and “Love.” As Emerson declares, “Analogous to the laws of society are those of conversation, which is the first office of friendship” (*EL II 292*). Emerson, who was extremely concerned about the role of dialogue in fostering ideal friendships and love, often extolled the capacity for dialogue as a feminine trait.¹⁹ He particularly admired Fuller as a friend with this ability. After the first visit to Emerson’s home in 1836, she frequently kept conversing with Emerson, and they cultivated a close friendship. As chapter 4 also showed, her words have had a profound influence on Emerson’s essays

¹⁹ On the one hand, Emerson’s interpretation of “dialogue” as feminine is an apparently conservative view of women, but on the other hand, his emphasis on and efforts to enhance the ability of dialogue can be evaluated positively as a feminine mode of thinking that does not take a fixed position, or what Arsić summarizes as “becoming woman.” She claims: “‘Feminine’ refers to the non-positioned thought of modes—a wandering thought—which Emerson too wants to practice; ‘becoming woman’ is, hence, the most profound orientation of his thinking” (312).

and lectures. Moreover, in a biography published in 1852, two years after Fuller's untimely death, Emerson noted that "Margaret [Fuller] always appeared to unexpected advantage in conversation with a large circle. She had more sanity than any other; whilst, in private, her vision was often through colored lenses" (*Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* I 216). While noting the possibility that "one might talk with her many times by the parlor fire" (216), he also recalled that "[h]er talents were so various, and her conversation so rich and entertaining" (216). Three years later, after the reprinting of Fuller's main book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, he was equally enthusiastic in his lecture of that same year, "Woman," in which he argued that "woman know, at first sight, the characters of those with whom they converse" (C XI 414), and praised "conversation" again as "better than painting, poetry, music, or architecture, —better than botany, geology, or any science; namely, Conversation," and as "the last flower of civilization" (W XI 408).

It is the dialogue that takes place in the hotel-like "parlor" and the "streets," which can never be achieved by retreating to the "study" or a "private room" for reflection and writing, that fosters friendship and love, eventually transcending the gendered opposition between the "study" and the "parlor" that Shamir argues for.²⁰ A clear

²⁰ As Kateb emphasizes, Emerson is clearly interested in the concept of "hermaphrodite" at intervals (122-28). For example, Emerson says in a journal of 1843: "The finest people marry the two sexes in their own person. Hermaphrodite is then the symbol of the finished soul. It was agreed that in every act should appear the married pair: the two elements should mix in every act" (*JMN* 8 380). In "Swedenborg; or the Mystic" (1850), he also states "in the spiritual world we change sexes every moment. . . . Meantime, I [Emerson] adore the greater worth in another, and so become his wife. He aspires to a higher worth in another spirit, and is wife or receiver of that influence" (*CW* IV 72-73). These tropes may be inspired by Fuller, in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, who "tries to break the binary code of male and female social roles through a discourse bordering on androgyny" (Elbert, "Introduction" 5). These metaphors like hermaphrodite and androgyny suits not to the separate spheres, but to the model of the intimate-public sphere. For more details of the perception of spaces or spheres, see also Conclusion and the concept of "heterotopia" in Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces."

contrast to this, what might be called the domestication of all spaces, can be found in the following passages of “Home”:

Now is he guest in Nature, a guest in his own house, a stranger to his wife and children, a stranger in his own body. He learns that he has lived in the outside of his world. A nearer intimacy has shown him how much stranger he is there. (EL III 23; emphasis added)

In this quote, the mobility that Beecher warned against is incorporated into the interior of the house to the maximum extent. As a result, Emerson, who is supposed to be a host of his friends, ultimately becomes a “guest,” or a “stranger” to his own family. Contrary to the aforementioned orientation of reading private intimacy into every space, here the private sphere assumes fluidity and opens up to the outside world, making the space inside the house appear as if it were taking on the characteristics of a street. It is this stance that enables Emerson to free from the fear and the anxiety that lead to what Kaplan calls “Manifest Domesticity.” When Emerson wrote that he “learns that he has lived in the outside of his world,” and when he eventually spoke to an audience, the words that emerged from the “parlor” that he repeatedly used with Fuller and others point to a very different image of the self than that established by retreating into the “study.”²¹ D.W. Winnicott suggests that “the basis of the capacity to be alone is a paradox; it is the being alone while someone else is present” (29). Emerson here absorbs the dialogic language of Fuller’s “parlor” and undergoes a passive transformation; he does not shut the door and retreat into the “study,” but instead remains in the “parlor”

²¹ Lucinda L. Damon-Bach pays attention to the negative connotation of Emerson’s phrase “parlor soldiers” in “Self-Reliance”: “Our housekeeping is mendicant, our arts, our occupations, our marriages, our religion we have not chosen, but society has chosen for us. We are parlor soldiers. We shun the rugged battle of fate, where strength is born” (*CW* II 43). She rereads Susan Warner’s fictions as an answer to Emerson; to be a self-reliant (wo)man, namely, “parlor soldier” in one’s home. In the meanwhile, by reading Emerson’s other texts, this chapter shows the possibility that man also can be a sort of “parlor soldier” in his home.

with family, friends, and the “strangers” as the guest, and yet still seems to have found the potential to be in “solitude.”²² Emerson could transcend the gender conflict, namely the binary of the parlor and the study, and of woman and man, through conversation not with his own family members or servants, but also in discussions with friends like Margaret Fuller, whom he repeatedly praised for her outstanding capacity for dialogue.

To be sure, Emerson’s experiments with introducing fluidity into the daily life of the home were supported by the sacrifices of the surrounding family and servants, and they were certainly also marked by his own limitations with respect to gender and other social issues. However, in the lecture “Home,” in addition to his relationships with others and the furniture in the dwelling space, the framework of the house itself, what kind of space is considered a home, and the elements of the movement to free all boundaries from their fixation and constantly renew them are used as an opportunity to reconnect the ideal relationship between people and objects. In fact, Emerson’s experimentation with domesticity was also a process of plastic change, as these radical imaginaries, who sought to fluidize gender and other boundaries, met with the various resistances of everyday life in reality. The images of open and closed doors and hotels in Emerson’s essays and lectures, and the more daring spatial tropes of the “home,” were a rhetoric that resonated with his experience of “lived” space, which was constantly changing and inspired by the others who shared the same space.

²² “The capacity to be alone,” as Winnicott states, seems to be a concept that accurately describes the character of “solitude” inherent in Emerson’s work, different from the one stipulated by relationships with contemporaneous media that Furui emphasizes. Shamir analyzes Winnicott’s psychic topographies that Winnicott “writes from the ‘private’ side of” the binary division between solitude and sociability. For her, Winnicott “is closely allied with the tradition of liberal individualism” (67). See also the key phrase of “Self-Reliance” discussed in Chapter 2: “the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude” (*CW* II 31).

Conclusion

Emerson's Plastic Americanism:

The Community of the Eccentric in "The American Scholar"

On August 31, 1837, Emerson delivered a speech entitled "The American Scholar" before an audience that included a number of accomplished writers, orators, and social thinkers at the Phi Beta Kappa Society on the grounds of Harvard University:

Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?

In the light of this hope I accept the topic which not only usage but the nature of our association seem to prescribe to this day, —the American Scholar. (*CWI* 52)

Once it gets started, this powerful declaration demonstrates how this lecture was, first and foremost, the precursor to the United States beginning to establish its own intellectual authority in breaking away from the influences of Europe, which Emerson refers to as "our long apprenticeship to the leaning of other lands." The lecture has been appreciated and read as a symbol of what Oliver Wendell Holmes, a member of the audience, called "America's intellectual Declaration of Independence." In early studies

of Emerson, Stephen Whicher stresses the dialectic of freedom and fate. In the 1970s, Sacvan Bercovitch discussed the relation between Emerson's individualism and Americanism, a "dualism" that "personal and national identity twined in the bipolar unity of auto-American-biography" (*The Puritan Origins of the American Self* 179). Both Whicher and Bercovitch analyzed the overlap between the individual and the state in Emerson's texts, but as Lawrence Buell points out in *Emerson* (2003), "The most striking qualities of Emerson's work often tend to get lost when we yield too quickly to the temptation of casting him as epitomizing the values of nation or regional tribe, instead of conceiving him in tension between such a role and a more cosmopolitan sense of how a writer-intellectual should think and be" (4). Since the 1990s, however, studies taking notice of this tension and placing Emerson in a more liberal and global context have emerged.

As a typical example of this tendency to read Emerson in tension between individualism and liberal democracy, this concluding chapter first examines Christopher Newfield's discussion of "Corporate Individualism" and Bercovitch's account of "dissent" developed in the 1990s. These studies focus on the tension at once, but ultimately conclude that Emerson's ideas moved toward the resolution of the tension. We then focus on Emerson's moral perfectionism discussed by Cavell and the position of "the eccentric," which Arsić draws attention to, instead of the perspective of submission to authority emphasized by Newfield's reading of Emerson. While heeding the critique of the lecture's elitist orientation, this conclusion aims to propose Emerson's plastic Americanism, positioned between American exceptionalism and globalism in tension,¹ by reassessing the Emersonian figure of the scholar, always "on the way" or

¹ Buell's "a more cosmopolitan sense" also seems to express a sense that cannot simply be attributed to globalism. In relation to the implications of his cosmopolitanism, in *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Gayatri Spivak "propose[s] the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization

“in-between” along the way, and centering on the theme of “nextness” in the process of “perfection” that is associated with aversion. The eccentric, who is neither an insider nor an outsider in the community and remains situated between society and solitude, or rigidity and flexibility, is the plastic figure Emerson names in “The American Scholar” as the “man as a sovereign state” that constitutes the “true union.”

1. Emerson’s Individualism and Liberal Democracy

In “Democratic Prophecy and Corporate Individualism,” Newfield first identifies “the expression of individuality through submission” (62) primarily in *Nature*. Pulling on the arguments developed by Tocqueville in the 1840s, he outlines the ambivalence between despotism and democracy: “Benevolent despotism . . . is not a corruption of democracy in America but is this democracy’s essential structure. The United States substitutes democracy for the despotism of the Old World only to make democracy despotic. United States liberty is conformity and its democracy is a liberal kind of authoritarianism” (63). This recognition of conformity leads him to modify and liberalize self-reliance as “more flexible,”² and thus he essentially identifies “the transcendentalist self” with “the conscientious liberal citizen” (64).

is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere” (72). While she also argues: “[t]he planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan” (72). Based on this opposition, she explicates a new concept of “planetarity” as overwriting globalism:

If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, . . . alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away. And thus to think of it is already to transgress, for, in spite of our forays into what we metaphorize, differently, as outer and inner space, what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us as it is not, indeed, specifically discontinuous. (73)

For further details of the connection between her concept and recent Emerson studies, see also note 11 of this chapter.

² See also Chapter 2 for a discussion of recent research that finds flexibility in Emerson’s view of the self.

Based on Bercovitch's discussion of dualism in the 1970s, Newfield sees in Emerson's "possessive *and* collective individualism" (65; emphasis original) an opportunity to transcend the alienation of the self, which is similar to Porter's discussion reviewed in the Introduction. Citing the highly influential thesis by Walter Benn Michaels that "personality is always corporate" (213; qtd. in Newfield 69), Newfield also paraphrases this "possessive-though flexible individualism" (67) of Emerson as a "corporate individualism" (69). Ultimately, Newfield argues that Emerson reaches his most radical moment in representing this "possessive and collective subjectivity as contradiction" (77). Newfield goes on to suggest that the self, with its extreme flexibility, becomes more powerful only when it abandons individualism: "The corporate form joins democracy and individuality by surpassing individualism. That is to say, by abandoning possessive individualism, the self becomes the model of individuality, and the self embraces democracy. Orphic freedom is democracy without individualism" (77). Despite the appeal of this interpretation, can we really assume that this model of individuality and democracy, as defined by submission, is the only way to resolve the tension between the self and the state in Emerson? In the first place, should this tension even be resolved?

In *The Rites of Assent*, Bercovitch notes the element of "dissent" in the utopian vision by developing the concept of the "jeremiad" he introduced in *American Jeremiad*. In the book, Bercovitch points out that Emerson's approach to dissent had undergone a decisive transformation in 1844, starting with his lectures "New England Reformer" and "The Young American," after turning his attention to two diaries written in 1842. According to Bercovitch, the position of "perfectionism" in the late Emerson's work gradually lost its bipolar volatility and tension and was "reconceived as the progress of 'a nation of individuals' from an 'almost ideal' bill of rights to a universal 'bill of human

duties” (341). Thereafter, Emerson’s individuality becomes increasingly consistent with *laissez faire* and industrial capitalism, the ideologies that defined the so-called Jacksonian democracy.³ Criticizing Emerson after 1842 from a perspective that coincides with Newfield’s argument, Bercovitch, meanwhile, praises “Emerson’s radical appropriation of individuality” (346), especially from 1836–41, for the abstractness of his utopian vision. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Emerson’s aesthetic dissent stresses the element of “negation and transition, its resistance on principle to institutional controls, its open-ended, *self*-enclosed tropism for reform and change” (346; emphasis original). Emerson’s dissent, characterized by its emphasis on negation and transition and its open-ended nature, develops in the gaps and blind spots within the principle of subjectivity, which is located between ideal and reality on the one hand, and selfhood and union on the other. Bercovitch, for example, finds in a diary entry written on Independence Day in 1839, which would later be drawn from for “Self-Reliance,” a cultural symbol of “America” designed to emphasize and conceal this gap between self and society. Unlike Newfield’s attempt to align Emerson’s self with the liberal subject, Bercovitch reveals that in Emerson’s early work, as symbolized by the rhetorical question “Are they my poor?” in “Self-Reliance,” his dissent is directed toward a liberal America, but at the same time, his vision is dependent on the very liberal structures he rebels against. On his early works, such as “Self-Reliance” and “The American Scholar,” Bercovitch argues that “the friction sustains the *movement between* actual individualism and perfect union” (349; emphasis original). Thus, Bercovitch recognizes the subversive value in Emerson’s dissent precisely in the

³ On a related note, drawing on Buell’s review of Emerson, Sakuma notes the drastic deletions Emerson made in his 1849 publication of the 1844 lecture, “Young American,” especially in its opening section. In this deletion, she sees Emerson’s repudiation of his former nationalism and his tendency to approach cosmopolitanism. See Sakuma, pp. 94–96.

friction to be found in the gap between the two poles. It can thus be said that in the 1990s, he found in Emerson's early work in particular a figure of Emerson that was not subject to "the bipolar unity of auto-American-biography" and the tendency to exclusion attributed to the justification of American exceptionalism that he once noted.

Likewise, Cavell seems to have conceived of Emerson's moral perfectionism, also discussed in the Introduction, by directing an aversion to liberalism. Like the aversion that Cavell found in Emerson's texts, his way of reinterpreting Emerson also seemed to be derived from his own aversion to John Rawls's perfectionism. The next section will discuss Cavell's views on democracy by briefly tracing how Cavell's own aversion to Rawls comes to fruition in Emerson's moral perfectionism.

2. Emerson's Moral Perfectionism Against Liberalism

Cavell begins his discussion in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (1990) with a single question: "Is Moral Perfectionism inherently elitist?" (1). This question can be interpreted as a display of his aversion to the arguments developed by Rawls in section 50 of *A Theory of Justice* (1971; revised edition in 1999). In this section, Rawls dismisses as elitist "the strong version of perfectionism" (4) that he found in Friedrich Nietzsche's text; Cavell sums up the reasons for his own disagreement with Rawls's argument, which represented American liberalism at the time: "My direct quarrel with *A Theory of Justice* concerns its implied dismissal of what I am calling Emersonian Moral Perfectionism as inherently undemocratic, or elitist, whereas I find Emerson's version of perfectionism to be essential to the criticism of democracy from within" (3). Cavell sees "a continuation of American philosophy's repeated dismissal" (4), or repression, of the thought of Emerson in the way Rawls rejects Nietzsche's account, which is substantially a rewriting of Emerson's statements. Cavell calls attention to the

fact that Rawls arbitrarily quotes from Nietzsche's "Schopenhauer as Educator" as an example of teleological perfectionism, in which "the maximization of excellence is the sole principle of institutions and obligation" (49),⁴ while directing a scathing aversion to the elitist ideas that would suggest the existence of "a separate class of great men" (49) derived from this quote. Cavell calls certain types of perfectionism, which are based on excellence and teleology, "false or debased perfectionism" (13) and finds a reason to continue using the term "perfectionism" in highlighting Cavellian perfectionism's mission to resist and fight against "false or debased" one (13). As noted in the Introduction, Cavell presents Emersonian moral perfectionism as an ideal that is not bound by teleology and remains capable of criticizing democracy from within. To begin with, Cavell characterizes his own idea of perfectionism as follows:

Perfectionism, as I think of it, is not a competing theory of the moral life, but something like a dimension or tradition of the moral life that spans the course of Western thought and concerns what used to be called the state of one's soul, a dimension that places tremendous burdens on personal relationships and on the possibility or necessity of the transforming of oneself and of one's society . . . (2)

Cavell here regards Emerson's perfectionism as an ethos that is "a dimension or tradition of the moral life" rather than a theory that puts emphasis on "personal relationships" and "the possibility or necessity of the transforming of oneself and of one's society," or in other words, the performative question of "How do we live?" (Saito 51). Cavell attempts to find this process of change in the dialogic relationship

⁴ Cavell quotes Nietzsche's lines as they appear in Rawls's book: "Mankind must work continually to produce individual great human beings—this and nothing else is the task. . . . For the question is this: how can your life, the individual life, retain the highest value, the deepest significance? . . . Only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable specimens" (Rawls 325, note 51; qtd. in Cavell 49).

between the self and “city of words,” which is composed of the preceding corpus of representative texts: “the reader’s participation roots the idea that the Utopian vision participating in this presented city of words is one I am—or I am invited to be—already, reading, participating in. This implies that I am already participating in that transformation of myself of which the transformed city, the good city, is the expression” (8). By reading, that is, responding to the call of the text and participating in what in Plato’s *Republic* is called the “city of words,” one transforms the self and, at the same time, transforms the “city of words,” or America. The mutual relationship between the self and the “city of words” is emphasized here. However, such a conception of the self does not result in a dualism with the state, as Bercovitch argued in the 1970s, nor does it coincide with the ideal of a liberal society, as Newfield argues. What Cavell underlines instead is the “nextness” between “city of words” that consists of such texts and the self.

Citing Thoreau’s *Walden*, Cavell states: “a grand world of laws is working itself out next to ours, as if ours is flush with it. Then it may be a feature of any perfectionist work that it sets up this relation to its reader’s world. What is next to me is, among other things, what I listen to, perhaps before me” (8). In Cavell’s view, the one who is claiming to be a path to one’s “unattained but attainable self” is “the next self” (9). He contrasts the implications of “nextness” by Thoreau to the idea of aiming for excellence and transcendence to “some other place”: “What is in Thoreauvean nextness to us is part of this world, a way of being in it, a curb of it we forever chafe against” (9). The nextness here is reminiscent of the metaphor of nettles from Emerson’s essay “Friendship” that was discussed in Chapter 4. Texts that belong to the “city of words” are very close to one, but they never coincide with that same individual. By paying attention to this notion, Cavell rereads Emerson’s text as situating the self and the state

in a friendly, dialogic, and aimless relationship between nationalism (Bercovitch in the 1970s) and liberalism (Newfield and Rawls).

In this context, Cavell specifically discusses the significance of conversation and friendship in Emerson. He emphasizes the recognition of “my accomplished completion (or following)” always requires “the recognition of the other—the recognition of the relationship”: “Emerson’s turn is to make my partiality itself the sign and incentive of my siding with the next or further self, which means siding against my attained perfection (or conformity), sidings which require the recognition of an other—the acknowledgment of a relationship—in which this sign is manifest” (31). This reading of Cavell, which emphasizes the presence of friends and others, develops in a way that does not surrender to the idea of Emerson as an individualist, as the following quote shows:

The point of contesting the Kantian task is presumably to be taken in the face of its present failure, or parody, its reduction to conformity. In picking up its standard—and transfiguring it—Emerson finds the intelligible world, the realm of ends, closed to us as a standpoint from which to view ourselves individually (our relation to the law no longer has *this* power for us). But at the same time he shows the intelligible world to be entered into whenever another represents for us our rejected self, our beyond; causes that aversion to ourselves in our conformity that will constitute our becoming, as it were, ashamed of our shame. (58; emphasis original)

The friend invites us to “our beyond” by evoking a sense of shame,⁵ an “aversion to ourselves in our conformity.” Friendship is a relationship characterized by

⁵ This sense of shame is expressed, for example, in Emerson’s call to “Man Thinking” in “The American Scholar,” in relation to their antipathy to the corrupt state of American society at the time. Contrary to scholars who interpret Emerson's stance as a critique of the corruption

enlightenment and awakening, and for Cavell and Emerson, the perfection of the self always requires the presence of friends and a process of education that is closely tied to them, as Cavell also states: “As representatives we are educators for one another” (31). Through the mutual education of friends, Emerson critiques a society that tends to “conform,” while at the same time opening up his ideas to a small-scale society composed of friends. Moreover, it is crucial to note here that Cavell seems to emphasize the element of “transfiguring,” in opposition to Bercovitch, who adopts the model of figure-fulfillment that discussed in Introduction. In contrast to Bercovitch’s method via Auerbach and Rawls’s perfectionism with its emphasis on excellence, which moves toward the social *telos* and the fulfillment of an ideal figure in a high place, Cavell’s Emerson does not have any fixed purpose but instead transfigures and transforms the purpose and self. Along with the friends who accompany him, Emerson continues to find, moment by moment, a provisional completion of an “unattained but attainable self.”

This willingness to stay in the present with friends along with a sense of shame does not result in a liberal image of the subject, as Newfield and Rawls argue. What, then, is the shape of the democratic process of mutual education and dialogue for Emerson, which specifically consists of a series of these tentative moments of completion? Cavell describes the relationship between these Emersonian attitudes and democracy in the following way: “I understand the training and character and friendship Emerson requires for democracy as preparation to withstand not its rigors but its failures, character to keep the democratic hope alive in the face of disappointment with it” (56). Far from optimism as a stereotypical view of Emerson, Cavell finds “the democratic

of the present and an optimistic celebration of the future, Cavell remains in the present rather than the future, a state of democracy's downfall, a situation Emerson detested in what he called “conformity.”

hope” in a process inextricably linked to the sense of shame that is always antithetical to conformity but never fully freed from it. Relatedly, Cavell also organizes the ambivalent nature of the democratic aspiration linked to the hope here as the double turn in Emerson, who, quite contrary to the antisocial individualist, does not abandon aversion and still seeks to relate to friends and society:

. . . if Emerson is right, his aversion provides for the democratic aspiration the only internal measure of its truth to itself—a voice only this aspiration could have inspired, and, if it is lucky, must inspire. Since his aversion is a *continual turning away* from society, it is thereby a continual turning *toward* it. Toward and away; it is a motion of seduction—such as philosophy will contain. It is in response to this seduction from our seductions (conformities, heteronomies) that the friend (discovered or constructed) represents the standpoint of perfectionism. (59; emphasis original).

For Cavell, the friend is representative of this ambivalent way of facing democracy, from a position of perfection, through a double response to seduction, through aversion, and then turning again to society.

Further, Cavell quotes from “The American Scholar” as saying, “For this self-trust, the reason is deeper than can be fathomed—darker than can be enlightened” (*CW* I 65). In these lines, he finds a dark recognition linked to this sense of shame that is also closely related to the way of facing skepticism for Cavell (34), which is also described in Chapter 3. The next section will reconsider the idea of moral perfectionism, characterized by Emerson’s aversion or dissent, by following the details of “The American Scholar” and paying particular attention to the topic of “nextness.”

3. The American Scholar as Man Thinking

The address “The American Scholar,” Emerson’s call to “Man Thinking,” also deals with a coherent theme that runs parallel to that taken up in the essays and lectures discussed in this dissertation. This text can be roughly divided into an introduction and four parts. First, Emerson follows his opening declaration at the beginning of the lecture with his thoughts on “Man Thinking”:

In this distribution of functions the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state he is, *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men’s thinking.

In this view of him, as Man Thinking, the whole theory of his office is contained. Him Nature solicits with all her placid, all her monitory pictures.

Him the past instructs. Him the future invites. (*CWI* 53; emphasis original)

Here, in contrast to those who cannot escape from “conformity,” namely those who become “a mere thinker” or “the parrot” who repeats the thoughts of others, “Man Thinking” is presented as the ideal scholarly figure. In the three sections that follow, Emerson goes on to more specifically examine the various influences received by the spirit of this ideal “American scholar,” which Cavell reads as a being in pursuit of an unattained but attainable self.

The first part of the address covers “nature.” Emerson’s description of the scholar as drawn to the spectacle of “[e]veryday, men and women, conversing, beholding and beholden” (*CWI* 54) in nature demonstrates the importance that friends and dialogue, already emphasized by Cavell, have for the “American scholar.” In the subsequent description, Emerson encapsulates the place of nature in the spirit of the scholar:

What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find, —so entire, so boundless. Far too as her splendors shine, system on system shooting like rays, upward, downward, without center, without circumference, —in the mass and in the particle, Nature hastens to render account of herself to the mind. (*CW* I 54)

Similar to his own soul, which finds neither beginning nor end, this nature, which appears as something utterly complete and infinite, is described as a “system on system shooting like rays, upward, downward, without center, without circumference.” This view of nature seems to overlap with the metaphor of journeying and walking with no fixed purpose, a metaphor generated by Cavell’s reading of the opening lines in the essay “Experience,” which Chapter 3 examined, or with the image of constantly enlarging circles in the essay “Circles,” as cited in the Introduction.

The second part considers the influence from books, which is the best example of “the mind of the Past” (*CW* I 55). At the start, Emerson states the following:

In proportion to the completeness of the distillation, so will the purity and imperishableness of the product be. But none is quite perfect. As no air-pump can by any means make a perfect vacuum, so neither can any artist entirely exclude the conventional, the local, the perishable from his book, or write a book of pure thought, that shall be as efficient, in all respects, to a remote posterity, as to contemporaries, or rather to the second age. Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this. (*CW* I 55-56)

For Emerson, a newly written book will never be perfect. In each era, each writer must write their own book for the next generation that follows. In this recognition, a seemingly linear view of time appears, but Emerson's point of emphasis is to present a view that perfection is always unattainable, as Cavell also repeatedly asserts. On a related note, Emerson uses the metaphor of "the bookworm" (*CW* I 56) to show the image of the passive reader, who is unable to produce new words and can only follow and imitate the contents of previously read books. In contrast, he praises "the active soul" as "every man is entitled to," "everyman contains within him," and "as yet unborn" (*CW* I 56). From a democratic rather than elitist perspective, Emerson equates the action of this soul with "genius,"⁶ unlike the "talent" possessed by outstanding individuals: "The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man" (*CW* I 56–57).

In addition, Emerson highlights the value of anachronic temporality, unconstrained by the linear flow of time in reading, by noting that much of the pleasure gained from reading a great book is caused by "the abstraction of all *time*" (*CW* I 57; emphasis original), citing the example of insects who "lay up food before death for the young grub they shall never see" (*CW* I 58). In interacting with the book, Emerson does not adopt a "foundationalism," which emphasizes the accumulation of systematic

⁶ Cavell also stresses the democratic implication represented by the concept of "genius" which tends to be connected with excellence. Referring to the phrase "the conversion of the world" (*CW* I 69) in the last paragraph of "The American Scholar," he states that there is, before finding "the conversion of the world," nothing to be maximized, and the good of the culture to be found is already universally distributed, or else it is nothing (49). In addition, he argues that we might call genius "the capacity for self-criticism, the capacity to consecrate the attained to the unattained self, on the basis of the axiom that each is a moral person" (49). Moreover, he also asserts that "genius—call it, in Emerson's retransfiguration of the idea, the capacity for self-reliance—is universally distributed, as universally, at any rate, as the capacity to think" (26). Thus, Cavell repeatedly argues that genius is a capacity equally and democratically distributed among all humans.

knowledge and the course of history like “the bookworm,” but it is in “the abstraction” that Bercovitch also emphasizes that the possibility of unexpected encounters that cannot be anticipated in advance can be realized. As this dissertation has already pointed out repeatedly, Emerson describes these attitudes associated with the active soul as “creative reading” and “creative writing” (*CW* I 58). This cycle of reading double meanings into every book and writing as a response to the insights gained from the reading will henceforth be discussed by Emerson in a way that expands from the book to more general acts.

The third part elaborates on the nature of “action” in general in relation to the concept of genius. In echoing “Self-Reliance,” Emerson underscores the performative nature of genius in action.⁷ It is important to note that reading and writing, the activities associated with language, are also considered in terms of a performance, just like other physical acts. Contrary to the criticism of Jenine Abboushi Dallal that points to the elements of “disembodiment” reviewed in Chapter 1, Emerson argues that it is possible to “illustrate and embody our perception” (*CW* I 61) through a language. He then describes the process of conversation as an embodied education: “I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar” (*CW* I 61). The speaker and the listener each learn a vivid language through the act of dialogue. For Emerson, grammar is also a direct consequence of these phases of embodied action. Emerson highlights the nature of this act of dialogue by juxtaposing “character” and “living” against “thinking”:

⁷ See also the analysis of Poirier and Lysaker in Chapter 2.

Character is higher than intellect. Thinking is the function. Living is functionary. . . . A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think. Does he lack organ or medium to impart his truths? He can still fall back on this elemental force of living them. This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act. Let the grandeur of justice shine in his affairs. Let the beauty of affection cheer his lowly roof. Those “far from fame,” who dwell and act with him, will feel the force of his constitution in the doings and passages of the day better than it can be measured by any public and designed display. (CW I 61)

Interestingly, Cavell maintains that the line “Thinking is a partial act” is one that “proposes nothing *more*—say something total—for thinking to be; it declares that living is total, and if the living is strong it shows its ground, which is not to say that it is *more* than thinking, as if thinking might leave it out. Thinking *is*—at its most complete, as it was—a partial act” (42; emphasis original). While cautioning that neither thinking nor living is an act of higher value, he interprets the wholeness of the act of living as it relates to the act of writing and “character” as well. This point is another variation of the argument that accents “nextness” and “everydayness.”

By being affected by these three points, a scholar becomes a Man Thinking. Finally, Emerson mentions the “duties” required of these American scholars. He states that “[t]he office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances” (CW I 62). However, the attention given to response and dialogue does not always position scholars in the public sphere. It should be kept in mind that here Emerson, as in his other essays and lectures, simultaneously stresses the importance of solitude:

The poet, in utter solitude remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded that which men in crowded cities find true for them also. The orator distrusts at first the fitness of his frank confessions, his want of knowledge of the persons he addresses, until he finds that he is the complement of his hearers; —that they drink his words because he fulfils for them their own nature; the deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true. The people delight in it; the better part of every man feels, This is my music; this is myself. (*CWI* 63)

The speaker appears here as a complement to the audience. Among other things, the statement that “the speaker dives into the deepest recesses of his own private emotions, which are then reversed into the most public ones” is crucial. Cavell juxtaposes this statement with a similarly thematic passage from “Self-Reliance,” in which “[t]he contrast to the superficially private, which the *most* private can reach, Emerson characterizes sometimes as necessary, sometimes as universal” (44; emphasis original), and then praises the completely unexceptional and representative nature of illustrious thinking here in a way that shows it to be different from excellence.

This reversal of the private and the public is the spatial superimposition Emerson has developed in such spaces as the landscape in *Nature*, the streets and nettles in “Friendship,” and the home and the outdoors or the study and the parlor in the lecture “Home,” which is an error of spatial perception that can be likened to an anachronism in time, or a plastic, rather than an expanding, analocism.⁸ Exactly as the speech itself

⁸ In *New Americanism* (1995), in the context of discussing the critique of Americanism by non-WASP subjects in Maryse Condé’s *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* (1986), Tatsumi proposes “analocism” as a new concept that applies the idea of an anachronism, a concept that represents the illusion of time, to space (275). Further, in the Introduction to *The Planet of Modernism* (2013), Tatsumi re-positions his concept in the literary intellectual history as resonant with Spivak’s concept of “planetarity” (2–23).

was, Emerson also receives from his friend words that are “most acceptable, most public, and universally true” that are taken out of the most private sphere:

Yes, we are the cowed, —we the trustless. It is a mischievous notion that we are come late into nature; that the world was finished a long time ago. *As the world was plastic and fluid in the hands of God, so it is ever to so much of his attributes as we bring to it.* To ignorance and sin, it is flint. They adapt themselves to it as they may; but in proportion as a man has any thing in him divine, the firmament flows before him and takes his signet and form. *Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind.* (CW I 64; emphasis added)

As this dissertation has consistently stressed, it is important to note here that Emerson is referring to the plasticity of the world. Then, in the line, “Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind,” Emerson’s perspective seems to shift from the plasticity of the world to the plasticity of the self. Such a transformation, or turn, is made through dialogue. Therefore, the value of the words of the speaker, the audience, and the friends who engage in dialogue are all measured in this way. What kind of person, then, would change the nature of Emerson’s mind? As this chapter and Cavell have suggested up to this point, his argument in this lecture is in no way related to elitism:

Instead of the sublime and beautiful, *the near, the low, the common*, was explored and poetized. That which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a

great stride. It is a sign—is it not? —of new vigor when the extremities are made active, when currents of warm life run into the hands and the feet. I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art, or Provençal minstrelsy; *I embrace the common. I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into today, and you may have the antique and future worlds.* (CW I 67; emphasis added)

Instead of the sublime and beautiful that are often associated with transcendentalist ideas,⁹ Emerson here celebrates “the near, the low, the common”¹⁰ in a way that also recalls Timothy Morton’s “poetics of ambient” discussed in Chapter 1. In retrospect, this dissertation has consistently emphasized Emerson’s interest in these near and common subjects in an exaggerated manner. Chapter 1 highlighted Emerson’s concern with “the literature of the poor” through “the animal eye,” “the feeling of the child” was addressed in Chapter 3, “the philosophy of the street” in Chapter 4, and “the meaning of household life” in Chapter 5. Together with the second half of the above quotation, which relates the near and the ordinary to the time of the “present,” the everydayness

⁹ Contrary to Cavell’s assertions, several recent studies have acknowledged elements of everydayness and nextness in Emerson’s thought that function as telos and foundations. Greenham, for instance, traces the changes that Emerson’s interpretation of the miracle suffered throughout the 1830s. According to his recapitulation, in 1830, Emerson criticized Hume in a way that was grounded in faith after struggling with Hume’s theory of miracles, and in 1835, he came to realize that “it is nature itself that is miraculous” (59). By 1837, Emerson thought “everyday experience itself is a miracle,” and “the everyday is itself inexplicable; its very naturalness is supernatural” (59). This can be paraphrased as indicating that Emerson in the thirties assumed that faith, nature, and the everyday were the foundations, in turn, while constantly changing. In his article arguing for the importance of Emerson’s “moral sentiment,” which Cavell had ignored, Joseph Urbas argues that, contrary to Cavell who thinks of nextness as a task, “Cavellian Perfectionism sees as requiring work that which requires, in reality, a form of obedience or passiveness” (47), and problematizes the attitude of “piety” (47) in Emerson’s texts and Emersonian and Cavellian perfectionism. Similar to Newfield’s third step mentioned in the introduction, here Urbas seems to perceive an attitude of seeing everydayness and nextness in Emerson, with “the near, the low, the common” as having transcendental values.

¹⁰ Cavell reads Emerson’s attention to the common in this account in the context of Emerson’s engagement with ordinary language philosophy, such as the late Wittgenstein (34).

of the “here and now” as opposed to the transcendent and the sublime is celebrated in Emerson’s work in terms of “the common” and “the familiar.”

Emerson explains the connection between these low and common things by using the metaphor of the state:

Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement, is the new importance given to the single person. Every thing that tends to insulate the individual, —to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and *man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state, —tends to true union as well as greatness.* (*CW* I 68; emphasis added)

People treating each other as if they were together an independent nation leads to a “true union.” This conception of Emerson is incompatible with the tendency exhibited in post-1944 Emerson, criticized by Bercovitch, for his view of the self to overlap with the self-portrait of national America, namely “the bipolar unity of auto-American-biography.” Rather, the relation between the self and the nation here would imply that the more the individual is isolated, the more one’s private feeling or affect is inverted into a public one at some point, thereby causing an inversion similar to that described in the lecture “Home” in Chapter 5.

For Emerson, a utopia such as “this new yet unapproachable America” or “[a] nation of men will for the first time exist” (*CW* I 70) only when all “the near, the low, the common” treat each other “as a sovereign state.” Indeed, Emerson declares that “our opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south” is a “chief disgrace in the world” (*CW* I 69). At the same time, however, he seems to have repeatedly expressed, consciously or not, that his abstract utopian vision was also an idea that could only have emerged from his very specific, common relationships with his New England neighbors,

which is linked to Cavell's emphasis on nextness. Deconstructing oppositions between American exceptionalism and globalism, nationalism and liberalism, and rigidity and flexibility, these tropes in "The American Scholar" express Emerson's ideas of creative anachronism and analocism regarding the plasticity of time and space, which are abstract and yet always linked to a very concrete affect or mood in everyday life.¹¹

Coda. The Community of the Eccentric

As Emerson and Cavell have repeatedly claimed, the process of perfection is never completed. "This new yet unapproachable America" does not exist yet. One might ask at this point if there is any room for criticism in the rhetoric of Emerson and Cavell, who praise "the near, the low, the common" and nextness. How can one treat the neighboring other "as a sovereign state" in the first place and find a way toward "true union and greatness"? In closing, this section considers these concerns in a little more detail.

As also noted in Chapter 5, Emerson was not entirely free from the gender, class, and race-related prejudices of his time. Regardless of Emerson's intentions, it is true

¹¹ Similarly, in recent years, a growing number of studies of Emerson have concentrated on the transnational perspective and the hemispheric imagination as inspired by Spivak's notion of "planetarity." They have also revealed intercultural interactions based on the concepts of creative anachronism and analocism that cannot be attributed to globalism. In "Emerson, Longfellow, and the Longue Durée" (2011), for example, Paul Giles offers a close reading of Emerson's 1835 lecture on Chaucer, arguing that Chaucer was not only the product of a deniable past that belongs to the old world, but he was also a kind of precursor to Emerson. In "World Religions: Emerson, Hafiz, Christianity, Islam" (2006), Wai Chee Dimock also explores, in terms of what she calls "deep time," the influence Emerson received from The Vedas, the Bhagvat Geeta of the Hindoos, the books of Confucius and Mencius, and especially the Qur'an and the Islamic imagination in the Sufism of Hafiz. In addition, in the 2010s, as discussed in the Introduction, Grennham's *Emerson's Transatlantic Romanticism* (2012) and Harvey's *Transatlantic Transcendentalism* (2013) reinterpret Emerson's transatlantic interaction with the UK and Germany. For the details of the transpacific influence, see Takashi, *Emerson and Neo-Confucianism* (2014). See also *A Power to Translate the World* (2013), a recent collection of papers that reread Emerson from a transnational perspective (both Western and Eastern).

that his rhetoric of “the near, the low, the common” was envisioned in white male-dominated intellectual communities in mid-nineteenth-century North America, such as Harvard University in Boston and the Transcendental Club in Concord. As Newfield asserts, it is also difficult to deny the possibility that Emerson’s metaphors partly functioned as some kind of power or authority that demanded submission from those around him. For example, as Kenneth S. Sacks makes clear in detail, “The American Scholar” was also produced within the complex web of power woven by the men of Harvard University and the church at the time. Moreover, Bercovitch, Buell, Rawls, and Cavell, all of whom were scholars, worked at Harvard University, where Emerson gave this lecture. In order to reread “The American Scholar” in a more plastic and creative way, and as less of an elitist and more of a democratic text than Cavell contended it to be, it is necessary to reexamine the structures of feeling that Emerson and some of the Harvard scholars of more recent times might share within the so-called genteel tradition.

Of course, it can be pointed out that Emerson was never intentionally elitist, and he also did not uncritically conform to the spirit of the time, even if he was not completely liberated from the intellectual climate. This tendency, symbolized in “Divinity School Address,” which criticized the church system, along with his refusal to participate in Brook Farm discussed in Chapter 5 are emblematic of Emerson’s ambivalence toward the internal and external realm of the community. Relatedly, Arsić looks to “the eccentric” not as a symbol of the dualism of the intimate and public spheres, but as a plastic figure that deconstructs both separated spheres. In his 1841 “Lecture on the Times,” Emerson writes of an “eccentric person”:

In the hair-splitting conscientiousness of some eccentric person, who has found some new scruple to embarrass himself and his neighbors withal; is

to be found that which shall constitute the times to come, more than in the now organized and accredited oracles. (*CW* I 170)

Here, Emerson seems to applaud “some eccentric person” as one who “shall constitute the times to come.” Arsić paraphrases what Emerson calls an “eccentric person” as “an outsider residing inside the communal as a difference or marginal strangeness in the heart of the domestic” (43), and interprets that this notion “explicitly points to the spatial distributions governed by the political; it refers to a body positioned outside the center, occupying the periphery” (43). It is important to note here that just as Cavell has appreciated Emerson's critique of democracy and skepticism from within, “the eccentric” is a critique of the institutions and attitudes of the community, including the genteel tradition, from within. She then continues: “Even if he is marginal, the eccentric is still an insider. In order to enact the difference he gives voice to, he lives within the majority; not ‘like us,’ he is ‘among us’” (43). It is “the eccentric” that is neither an insider nor an outsider, but rather the plastic being that Emerson named in “The American Scholar” as the man “as a sovereign state” that constitutes the “true union.”

In addition, referring to the description of the great man “who in the midst of the crowd keeps with the perfect sweetness the independence of solitude” (*CW* II 31) from “Self-Reliance” that was highlighted in Chapter 2, she describes the difficulty of the eccentric, as the interior outsider, in withstanding the pressures from the majority and yet remaining within the community without falling into conformity. Arsić supports this by quoting one more passage from “Self-Reliance”: “For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure” (*CW* II 32). While enduring embodied suffering, analogous to whipping, the eccentrics still do not abandon community altogether. Although Arsić consistently uses the third person “he” to refer to the eccentric in the context of Emerson’s lecture, her opposition of the more direct and physical “sense of

pain” to the “sense of shame” emphasized by Cavell is reminiscent of the situation of women in Concord at the time, who had to tolerate the “sense of pain” beyond the “sense of shame” more than men. When Emerson declared that “man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state” and wrote of “[a] nation of men” as a kind of utopia, he was, of course, trying to describe human beings in general with the word “man.” Nevertheless, if reading strongly Emerson’s unawareness of his own privileged circumstances, it is necessary to extend Arsić’s argument further to consider the possibility of “a nation of women” or “a nation of all humans” existing.

For instance, the first image that comes to mind as a peripheral female figure linked to “the eccentric” in nineteenth century America, who was forced to confront the “sense of pain” as well as the “sense of shame,” is Hester Prynne, who is the protagonist of the novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, a contemporary of Emerson in Concord. Lauren Berlant began her study in *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* (1991) by focusing on the ambivalence of the space in *The Scarlet Letter*, particularly in the preface “Custom House.” Since *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997), she has described diverse situations of “intimate public spheres” that she raises against the separate spheres, which in the context of this dissertation could be called a more plastic concept of the spheres.¹² Beginning in the nineteenth century and moving forward in time toward the modern era, her research has consistently problematized the difficulties around citizenship that women and various minorities have had to face differently than the male sovereign subjects. In her most recent monograph, *Cruel Optimism* (2011), her research expands its scope beyond the United States to include contemporary European culture. What seems significant in the

¹² For the details of the concept “intimate public spheres,” see “Introduction: The Intimate Public Sphere,” pp. 1-24 and “Introduction: Intimacy, Publicity, and Femininity” in *The Female Complaint* (2008), pp. 1-32.

context of this study is the fact that her research has always been inspired by Cavell's "creative reading" of Emerson's texts as well.¹³ In the opening of the book, she defines the idea she calls "Cruel Optimism" as perhaps partly inspired by the idea of perfectionism that Cavell drew from Emerson:

A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially. (1)

Instead of adopting Cavell's and Emerson's emphasis on the acknowledgement of a reciprocal relationship and the transformation through the relation with the other, she instead stresses how cruelty functions like an incentive to keep the relation unchanged:

. . . optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming. (2)

From a different angle than Cavell's sense of shame and aversion, Berlant here emphasizes the various ways of resistance to transformations as forms of cruelty that

¹³ For example, see *The Female Complaint* (2008), p. 189, 204, *Cruel Optimism* (2011), p. 9, and *Sex, or The Unbearable* (2014), p. 13, 89.

are inseparably linked to optimism. As examined in the comparisons with Poe in Chapter 4 and with the Beecher sisters in Chapter 5, it can be argued that Emerson, who enjoyed a certain privilege that allowed him to be less often confronted by the “situation of profound threat” that Berlant describes here like Arsić’s “whipping,” was less resistant to change than other writers of his time.

However, as we confirmed in chapter 3, Emerson, who suffered the tragic loss of his young son, was not immune to the affects and moods associated with “cruelty” and “sense of pain.” On his journey of writing “Experience,” Emerson was confronted with a variety of “profound threats” and “whipping,” but he was also able to transform himself plastically, turning “grief” into “practical power.” If Emerson’s authority in nineteenth-century Concord unconsciously associated the metaphors of “the common” and “the near” with a certain kind of power, or if his other prejudices were somehow manifest in the text, then future readers who have received the affect or mood of pain and suffering from Emerson’s texts will have to reexamine those premises again and again. This is what Berlant calls “the unfinished business of sentimentality,”¹⁴ and it is the responsibility of “the eccentrics” of the present to continue to reconsider democracy and America from within.

In “The American Scholar,” Emerson asserts that, “Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding” (*CWI* 56), and Cavell similarly continues to argue that Emerson’s perfectionism has always been open to revision. Just as Emerson established “a poetics of distance” through his dialogue

¹⁴ For more details, see *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (2008). This book mainly analyzes the business imposed on women, but, for example, Dana Nelson, borrowing from Berlant’s phrase, discusses “the unfinished business of male sentimentalism.” Thus, these responsibilities are imposed on all those living in the present, if the specific situation varied. See also Nelson, “Representative/Democracy: Presidents, Democratic Management, and the Unfinished Business of Male Sentimentalism” (2002).

with his friends, this dissertation has tried to reinterpret Emerson's texts more plastically through a dialogue with the texts advanced by several scholars. Having traced the diverse relations of self and other in Emerson, beginning with our relationship with nature, then the self, friends, home, and the state, and gradually expanding the scope of the discussion with each passing chapter, this dissertation has arrived at a tentative conclusion regarding Emerson's vision of a plastic utopia. "The community of the eccentric"¹⁵ will for the first time exist only when diverse eccentrics who not only cross gender, racial, class and other boundaries, but also endure embodied suffering and still reside inside the communal as the interior outsiders, treat each other as friends like "a sovereign state." This cruel utopian vision, Emerson's plastic Americanism, which also reexamines the unconsciously biased perspectives of "the near" and "the common" in mid-nineteenth-century America, is one of the latest forms of response to the voice of Emerson's texts.

¹⁵ For more details on utopian communities oriented toward liberation from homogeneity, see also Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (1994), and Tazaki, *The Community of the Incompetents* (2007).

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