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“A Zigzag Line of a Hundred Tacks”　: Emerson's Plastic Self in　“Self-Reliance”

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ジグザグの航路

―“Self-Reliance”における Emerson の可塑的自己―

“A Zigzag Line of a Hundred Tacks”

Emerson’s Plastic Self in “Self-Reliance”

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This paper centers around Emerson’s plastic self which “in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.” 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. As Emerson suggests “the voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks,” this voyage of the self makes not a straight line from one point to another without contradiction, but instead contains many deviations. This paper attempts to reinterpret his rhetoric of the rose by referring to a later work—“Quotation and Originality,” which seems at first glance to be in conflict with descriptions in “Self-Reliance.”

In the end, this thesis sheds light on the combination of “the permanence and mobility of form” in Emerson’s plastic self. Emerson’s self/ship is not operated by himself alone, nor does it sink beneath the surrounding water. Emerson’s continually turning and zigzag lines demand to always keep sailing in order to live through critical moments in daily life without being dissociated. (182 words)

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 paper 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

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solitude” (*CW* II 31), and makes “a zigzag lines of a hundred tacks.”

By detouring later text “Quotation and Originality” (1876), this thesis 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 Greene 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 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 feature 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 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 (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 reconciders 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 (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 paper 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). 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 filiopietism, 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 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, I 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" (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.[3] 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; quoted 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 including Hanlon, 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 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 here perhaps gives an alternative to critique these opposite narratives. 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.[4] 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). 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 considering how new and original ideas and selves can emerge through quotations and learnings.[5]

This paper 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 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.[6]

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.[7] As this paper 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.

Notes

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."

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).

3) 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.

4) 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).

5) Unlike this creative concept of plasticity, in *Ontology of the Accident*, 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 conception of aging; one is gradual process of decline like Gullette'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). However, this paper insists that Emerson's memory loss exemplifies both destructive and creative plasticity thanks to the "power of coordinating" by Cabot and Ellen.

6) 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."

7) 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 paper, 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.”

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Abbreviation

The following abbreviation 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.