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“Falling In Love with Becoming”: Remarks on
Nietzsche and Emerson

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Recently I overheard a conversation between two colleagues of mine about an upcoming conflict that made them wary, and one of them, a woman, said: “Dieter Thomä would never do that.” I went off to sleep that night thinking of those words [...]. Even though my colleague [...] could say what [Dieter Thomä] [...] would never do [...], [Dieter Thomä] [...] himself wasn’t sure *he* could. She could’ve said [...] anything about me and I would’ve had to give the possibility some thought [...]. But very little about me, I realized – except what I’d *already* done, said, eaten, etc. – seemed written in stone, and all of that meant almost nothing about what I *might* do. I had my history, okay, but not really much of a regular character, at least not an inner essence I or anyone could use as a predictor. And something, I felt, needed to be done about that. I needed to go out and find myself a recognizable and persuasive semblance of a character. I mean, isn’t that the most cherished [...] dream of all?”

So this is about me, or not quite. I have to confess that I just morphed into a story that actually belongs to Frank Bascombe and that what you have just heard was a slightly altered quote from the *The Lay of the Land*, the wonderful novel by Richard Ford, in which Bascombe, a real estate agent, goes on by saying: “Here, for a man with no calculable character, was a hunger of *necessity*, for something solid, the thing ‘character’ stands in for. [...] I set about deciding how I should put the next five to ten years to better use than the last five – progress being the ancients’ benchmark for character.” (Ford 2006, 52-54)

My referring to Richard Ford in the opening of this talk is not coincidental. I take it that Nietzsche’s thought very much circles around the line “Le style c’est l’homme même” (even though this formula does not appear in his writings) or, to take Nietzsche’s own wording, around the idea of giving “style to one’s character” (Nietzsche 1883/1974, 232; KSA¹ 3, 530). Thus Frank Bascombe’s struggle with identifying his character traits or the trajectory of his life circles around a Nietzschean problem.

Giving “style to one’s character” applies to the life-form of the individual and its identity. As soon as we talk about ‘form’ (like in ‘life-form’), we talk about the task of forming. And as soon as we do not assume that life-forms are something given and allow for our altering them, we are authorized to raise the question of what kind of ‘stylesheet’ applies to the task of forming.

There is a notorious problem linked to the idea of having style, which is widely discussed mainly under the label of aestheticism. If we 'have' style, we follow a certain choreography, we don't change, there is no lively, unexpected move anymore. In a certain respect, we resemble a person reacting to the order of a policeman: "Freeze!" We are immobilized. Form appears to be rigid, solid, lifeless. But that may be a prejudice. We have to ask the question of what kind of 'style,' if any, fits to living a life, to the process of living at all or what kind of style could apply to it.

If we turn to Nietzsche and try to find answers to these questions in his work, we see the concern about being immobilized mirrored in his idea of living as "overcoming" oneself. In order to illustrate that, Nietzsche picks up a phrase from Emerson that, by the way, is also quoted in Richard Ford's novels "The Lay of the Land" and "Independence Day." Emerson says: "The soul *becomes*." In Nietzsche, this phrase is transformed to the "soul [...] falling in love with becoming" (Emerson 1983, 271; KSA 10, 593; cf. Ford 2006, 200; Ford 1996, 377, 561).

It is a well-known fact that Emerson's influence on Nietzsche can barely be overrated. Direct and indirect quotes from Emerson's writings are to be found in many of Nietzsche's writings; his reading copy of Emerson's "Essays" is full of annotations. In my comparison between the American philosopher of romantic individualism and Nietzsche I do not intend to give a comprehensive account of this configuration (cf. Thomä 2007; Thomä 2009). I go back to Emerson just for the reason that he is the main inspiration for Nietzsche's considerations on "becoming," and I use Emerson's and Nietzsche's ideas in a systematic attempt to clarify how this notion of "becoming" can serve as a building block for our understanding of living a life or, to put it in a more Socratic manner, as an answer to the question of "how to live."

If "becoming" is mobilized against the crystallization of form, this does not mean that it is pitched at "style" altogether. We will later learn how this "becoming" coalesces with style in its own way. But let me first stay away from style altogether and scrutinize "becoming" in further detail in order to figure out how it relates to the notion of the individual. Nietzsche's comments on the transitory or transgressive character of the individual are directly inspired by or correspond to Emerson's views. Let me reassemble a couple of quotes from these two authors in order to demonstrate that.

When Emerson says: "Let me remind the reader that I am only an experimenter" (1983, 412), Nietzsche says: "We are experiments: let's be willing to be that" ("Wir sind Experimente: wollen wir es auch sein!" KSA 3, 274 [Morgenröthe § 453])

When Emerson talks of the "courage to be what we are," (Emerson 1983, 1096; cf. Cavell 1990, 16), Nietzsche suggests that you should finally "be who you are" (KSA 4, 297).

When Emerson says "The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves", Nietzsche muses about the link between forgetting and happiness (KSA 1, 250).

When Emerson talks about the "enthusiasm" of "abandonment" (1983, 414), Nietzsche cherishes "devotion" or "self-transcendence" (*Hingabe* or *Selbstrücktsein*).²

A reading of life that stresses transgression or overcoming affects our understanding of a person's interaction with others as well. It is in line with this

transgression that the other person whom I turn to must be evasive, ephemeral. Her 'becoming' runs against my insistence, in which I, for once, address or pinpoint the other. And if this other person seeks to grasp me, she'll get nothing but a piece of me. Let me quote a few lines from Emily Dickinson that fit in nicely here:

"To pity those that know her not
Is helped by the regret
That those who know her, know her less
The nearer her they get."³

Being familiar with somebody does not necessarily mean that you know the other in a way that could be called exhaustive. The very idea of "exhaustion" is suspicious if it comes to interaction, as a complete, exhaustive knowledge of the other may well lead to some kind of boredom, a lack of curiosity or a decrease of interest in the other, as he or she cannot come up with any surprises anymore. But according to Dickinson's poem, it is just not true that we really "know" the persons who are near to us in this manner. Their individuality still very much contains the promise of surprises, an open horizon of potentiality. A last pair of quotes from Emerson and Nietzsche may help establish a link between this notion of the individual and interaction.

Emerson says: "Dear to us are those who love us", but if this love is confined to supporting, encouraging, and recognizing what I am doing, it does not entail the reaching out into the unknown. This is why Emerson goes on by saying: "But dearer are those who reject us as unworthy, for they add another life [...] and urge us to new and unattempted performances." (Emerson 1983, 604) In line with what Emerson says is the following quote from Nietzsche: "Man [...] is not only supposed to love his enemies, but to hate his friends." (KSA 4, 101) I take it that Nietzsche's "hate" is a slightly altered version of Emerson's "reject[ion]" of the other. Nietzsche experiments with an inversion between friend and fiend. He does not talk about hating enemies, but about hating those we hold dear. This hate turns out to be a love of a kind, it is a virtue among friends or something that you would call *Freundschaftsdienst* in German, which rather drily translates as a 'friendly turn' or a 'good turn' in English. What exactly could it mean then that my friends owe me hate, or what exactly do they hate if they hate me?

They hate my presence, or my being nothing but presence, my being reduced to the status quo. So their friendship or their love consists in demolishing my identification with the present and in pushing for what Emerson calls "abandonment" and Nietzsche calls *Selbstenrückung* or *Hingabe*. My friends' hate actually turns out to be love: the love of my future. Nietzsche: "Do I advise you to neighbour-love? Rather do I advise you to neighbour flight and to furthest love! Higher than love to your neighbour is love to the furthest and future ones" (KSA 4, 77) I would re-read this advice in a way that allows me to see the 'furthest' and the 'nearest,' the 'future one' and the 'present one' not as two different people, but as aspects of the same person.

Friends of this kind do not push me to specific initiatives or seemingly promising 'investments,' their peculiar hate provokes me to forget myself and to move in new directions. (Think of Emerson's reading of "provocation" as opposed to "education" and

of the literal meaning of the Latin “pro-vocare.”) For once, we come across a kind of hate-love that is not necessarily self-defeating or neurotic; it can be, but it mustn’t.

My friends’ attitude is complemented by an attitude that I cultivate myself: the attitude that combines self-reliance with abandonment (according to Emerson) or self-affirmation and overcoming the self (according to Nietzsche). What I see emerging here is exactly the life-form of the soul that “becomes.” It is based on acknowledging what I am – and it entails the willingness or the courage to go through a process that transforms my personality. Both those attitudes aren’t solitary tasks, they are bolstered by the support of others. Being in love with becoming is encouraged by my friends’ particular hate-love: an attitude that I adopt when my being what I am encompasses the openness to what I will be. Stanley Cavell says: “we become ashamed in a particular way of ourselves, of our present stance, and [...], as a sign of consecration to the next self, [...] we hate ourselves [...] (bored with ourselves might be enough to say)” (Cavell 1990, 16) This is in line with what Nietzsche says in the “Genealogy of Morals,” where he asks how it could possibly “happen that we should ever *find* ourselves,” and claims that “we are necessarily strangers to ourselves”, that “each is furthest from himself” or “furtherest from himself” (KSA 5, 247; cf. Cavell 1987, 24-5; Cavell 2004, 392).

What does it mean to say that I am further away from myself than from anybody else? It should be noted that Nietzsche launches a full-fledged attack on a famous Latin proverb: “I myself am closest to myself” (*Jeder ist sich selbst der Nächste – Proximus sum egomet mihi*). Proximity is not an option, neither in self-reflection nor in interaction. Nietzsche turns against self-reflection or self-affirmation, against an intimate acquaintance with myself, which entails the idea of being comfortable with myself. This acquaintance is delusive because the object of my knowledge is on the move and in the making. The combination of self-acquaintance and self-transformation extends to a revised reading of interaction. Being “surprised out of my propriety,” to use a phrase from Emerson, has an impact on my relationship to others. Given that what I find in myself is strange to me (cf. Cavell 1979, 459: “what one finds in oneself is a discovery as well of others”), I grow to feel much more familiar with a stranger whom I meet in the outside world. Arthur Rimbaud’s exalted phrase “Je est un autre” – “I is an other” could be completed by the phrase “The other am I” or “The other is me.” We have a chiasm here between me becoming the other and the other becoming me.

Now you may say that this is a plain exaggeration or even aberration, but there is a grain of truth to that chiasm that comes to the fore when we do not take it as a lofty experience of rapture, but as a plausible description of how my living my own life entails the experience of becoming a stranger to myself and how my living with others entails familiarity.⁴ The identification with the other does not overcome the confines of my bodily existence, my spatio-temporal identity, but it applies to my self-image in the sense of qualitative identity. Stating that I am farther from myself than from anybody else actually makes good sense in this perspective, as I feel the remoteness of certain ‘great escapes’ of my mind much more vividly than those of other people.

Neither is my recognizing the other bound to the notion of a person that is a source of agency and has a set of rational faculties. *Nor* is it linked to the notion of a personality shaped by a tradition you belong to and share with members of your community. In opposition to these notions of sameness which *either* refer to us as unencumbered rational beings *or* to us as socially embedded beings, we find ourselves

and others entangled between sameness and otherness, self-affirmation and estrangement.

The experience of otherness-*within* corroborates what in Nietzsche is called “non-egotist ethics” (*unegoistische Ethik*; KSA 12, 226): an ethics that discovers the “multitude of persons [...] within one Ego” (KSA 11, 168) and is tired of this “damned ipseity” or “excessive obsession with myself” (the German is untranslatable: Nietzsche speaks of *verfluchte Ipsissimosität* (KSA 5, 134 [JGB 207]). Nietzsche says: “Thus one participates in the lives and beings of many, as one does not deal with oneself as a stable, consistent, identical individual” (KSA 2, 349 [MA I, 618]). Adorno once characterized Nietzsche’s philosophy as being “benevolent, tender, non-egoistic and forthcoming” (Adorno 1951, 172 [Aph. 60]).

This approach can be further explored by going back to the idea of “intellectual nomadism” introduced by Emerson⁵ and picked up by Nietzsche (*geistiges Nomadenthum*). Nietzsche employs this phrase in the second part of *Human All-too Human*. There he talks about freedom as the “strongest drive of our mind” and about the “ideal” of “intellectual nomadism,” which is opposed to a type of intellect which is “bounded” and deeply “entrenched” (KSA 2, 469). In the current debates Nietzsche’s “nomadism” is very much associated with French readers of Nietzsche’s, in particular with Deleuze, whose early book on Nietzsche actually culminates in a chapter on nomadic thinking. Yet not only shouldn’t we forget that Nietzsche refers to Emerson here, we should look up the original as it is particularly revealing in this occasion. In his German edition of the *Essays*, Nietzsche reads (I quote the English version): “Some men have so much of the Indian left, have constitutionally such habits of accommodation, that at sea, or in the forest, or in the snow, they sleep as warm, and dine with as good appetite, and associate as happily, as in their own house. And to push this old fact still one degree nearer, we may find it a representative of a permanent fact in human nature. The intellectual nomadism is the faculty of objectiveness or of eyes which everywhere feed themselves. Who hath such eyes, everywhere falls into easy relations with his fellow-men. Every man, every thing is a prize, a study, a property to him, and this love smooths his brow, joins him to men and makes him beautiful and beloved in their sight. His house is a wagon; he roams through all latitudes as easily as a cal muc.” (Emerson 1979, 272) I could not think of a better way for expressing the movement of the self and the openness to the ‘other.’

Yet there is something strange about the quote that I just gave you. If you wanted to look it up in Emerson’s *Essays*, you will not find it. To be sure, what I just quoted was exactly the passage read by Nietzsche in his own German copy of the book. But this translation was based on the first edition of Emerson’s “Essays” from 1841. When adopting “intellectual nomadism,” Nietzsche was not aware of the fact that Emerson revised his description of it when he went through his essay “History” for the 1847 edition.

What is the outcome of this revision? He still talks about “intellectual nomadism,” yet mitigates the idealization of movement. He discovers an “antagonism” between “the love of adventure” on the one hand, “the love of repose” on the other hand. Now it is said that “intellectual nomadism, in its excess, bankrupts the mind, through the dissipation of power on a miscellany of objects.” (Emerson 1983, 247; 1979, 272) The “home-keeping wit” is not dismissed altogether, but is said to have “its own perils of

monotony and deterioration, if not stimulated by foreign infusions.” (Emerson 1983, 247).

Digesting what Emerson has to say on nomadism in this final version of his argument is not easy. He seems to conduct a major retraction by revoking the unfettered celebration of movement (or “becoming”) and by stating that nomadism could hit bankruptcy. Before examining the details of these changes and amendments, let me first remind you of the fact that “nomadism” is not a philosophical fancy but a term with considerable historical ‘footing.’ With its many relatives, the vagrants and the “masterless” in the early modern age and today’s representatives of mobility and flexibility, the figure of the “nomad” represents one of the major role models for modern individuals; it also attracts all kinds of criticisms, e.g. from Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Oswald Spengler (the former complains about the lack of a true “home” in modern times, the latter complains about the “new nomad” being “irreligious, intelligent, not fertile” and regards him as a “futureless [...] form of human existence”; Fichte 1800/1979, 126; Spengler 1918/1991, 45-6).

But what about Emerson’s own wariness about the “nomad”? Could it be said that the Nietzschean career of “nomadic thinking” was careless or inconsiderate, as it did not take Emerson’s later concerns into account? Does this concept suffer from some kind of built-in onesidedness, a lack of balance? To some extent, this concern is justified, at least if we look at the ‘French’ readings of Nietzsche that lead from the nomad to the free-floating signifier. Deleuze talks about nomadism as a “permanent dislocation of intensities” (Deleuze 1979, 116). In line with Emerson’s early concerns, he wants to make us believe that there is an alternative between, on the one hand, a settlement organized bureaucratically and despotically, and, on the other hand, nomadic “adventures” (1979, 119). Yet eventually Emerson’s pre-Nietzschean nomadism is balanced with the “love for repose,” whereas Deleuze’s post-Nietzschean nomadism continues to be at odds with settlement or, linguistically speaking, with the idea of denomination or “codification” (1979, 121).

We could take that a step further and claim that the way to unfettered nomadism in this sense was paved by Nietzsche’s adaptation of the first version of Emerson’s *Essays* and by his *not* taking into account Emerson’s critical afterthoughts. But this would be stretching things a little, at least as far as Nietzsche is concerned. Without any knowledge of Emerson’s later amendments Nietzsche himself comes to similar conclusions like his predecessor. One of Nietzsche’s notes in his personal copy of Emerson’s *Essays* reads as follows: “traveling, in every sense,/ being a ‘fugitive and a vagabond’ – for a time./ From time to time finding repose with your experiences, digest them.” (“[...] reisen, in jedem Sinn/ ,Unstet und flüchtig’ – eine Zeit./ Von Zeit zu Zeit über seinen Erfahrungen ruhen, verdauen.” – KSA 9, 622; “fugitive” and “vagrant” – this is a quote from the Bible, Genesis 4, 12: “a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth”).

Nietzsche actually endorses the idea of a balance between ‘being on the way’ and ‘resting’ which is laid out in Emerson’s revised version of the *Essays*. Both thinkers take the same side, even though the editorial mishap hampered Nietzsche’s knowledge of Emerson’s *Essays*. This balance runs against Deleuze’s reading of nomadism, but it does not run against intellectual nomadism altogether. The change between movement and repose rather reflects actual nomadic behavior as described by ethnologists: Even

though nomads are vagrants, they very much rely on safe places where they take refuge. The knowledge of life-saving oases is precious.

This fact is rather blurred than explained by Emerson's and Nietzsche's contention that the nomad has the ability to be 'at home anywhere' or 'everywhere.' But with their comprehensive picture of the back and forth between movement and repose they are very much in line with a nomadism of this kind.

The being-at-home that comes into play here is not the sovereign attitude of the global player who takes the world to be a village that he knows like the back of his hand. My stance is much more fragile, I have to rely on favorable conditions which I cannot establish all by myself. I doubt that the soul that "becomes" can be fully grasped by the means provided by Nietzsche's theory of the "will" only.

The account of a splendid, adventurous nomadism needs to be complemented by an account of nomadism that comprises the experience of getting lost. Stanley Cavell identifies this critical situation as the experience of "exile" (1987, 36), and rediscovers modes of this exile whenever somebody does not know his way about, whenever somebody says, with Wittgenstein, "Ich kenne mich nicht aus" (*PhU*⁶ § 123). We can learn from him that this kind of exile is a rather common experience. An exiled person suffers from her own "unknowingness", from her "incapacity either to know or to be known" (Cavell 1979, 369). She experiences a loss of confidence. Exile is the 'other face,' as it were, of nomadism: A person is forced to be on the move, whereas a nomad's movement, even if affected by insecurity, is more voluntary, more powerful.

When in Emerson's and Nietzsche's balanced view nomadism comprises movement and repose, we find a similar, yet not identical complementary structure in Wittgenstein. In his twofold picture there is a back and forth between 'not knowing my way about' or exile on the one hand and situations marked by „blind“ understanding (*PhU* § 219) on the other hand. In these situations words have found what Wittgenstein calls their "Heimat" or their "original home" (*PhU* § 116). Everything 'clicks in.' Given that language games and life-forms coincide, such a *Heimat* or "home" should be accessible to words as well as to human beings. We should be well aware of the fact though that the counterpart to *Heimat* is not just blind chaos or a total loss of meaning. Like Emerson and Nietzsche, maybe in a slightly less ecstatic mood, Wittgenstein acknowledges the creative or liberating mode of nomadism as well. Instead of creating a tension between *Heimat* and exile, he suggests that we should "enjoy ourselves" while being exposed to "chaos" (*VB*⁷ 542 [1948]), and talks about the "inconceivably waving totality of our language" (Baker 2003, 66): "The infinite variations of life are essential for our life" (*VB* 553 [1948]). Wittgenstein's descriptions of being on the move and getting lost on the one hand, of being at "home" on the other hand are very much in line with Nietzsche's remarks on nomadism and the becoming of the soul.

What does all that have to do with style? A lot. It seems to me that when Nietzsche talks about style, he basically follows the very same pattern that he employs when talking about the becoming of the soul. Let's have a look at § 290 from *The Gay Science*, which bears the bleak title "One thing is needful". I quote: "To 'give style' to one's character – a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye." A

tremendous effort is needed to create such a plan, to turn yourself into a work of art: an effort that is out of reach for “weak characters without power over themselves.” They are said to “*hate* the constraint of style: they feel that if this bitter and evil constraint were imposed upon them they would be *demeaned* [...]”. Such spirits – and they may be of the first rank – are always out to shape and interpret their environment as *free* nature – wild, arbitrary, fantastic, disorderly, and surprising. And they are well advised because it is only in this way that they can give pleasure to themselves!” (Nietzsche 1887/1974, 232-3, KSA 3, 530-1)

Following Nietzsche, only the second of these two life-forms lives up to the requirements of “style” or “great style”, *großer Stil*. If Nietzsche, in the title of this aphorism says that something is “needful”, he does not mean to say though that “great style” is required. “Needful” is, as explained towards the end of this paragraph, “that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself.” This satisfaction should be attained “by means of this or that poetry and art.” This satisfaction is obviously not directed at the desires of the modern consumer, but linked to an ethical goal: A person obsessed with her own dissatisfaction tends to victimize others, whereas a person satisfied with herself abstains from “revenge” or is free from “ressentiment,” as Nietzsche would put it.

Let me suggest two revisions to this notion of style that hopefully make Nietzsche’s reading of “style” and its attribution to life-forms more compelling.

Let me one more time turn to the life-form that is attributed to “weak characters” by Nietzsche: a life-form that typically consists in “wild,” “surprising” moves: As Nietzsche himself concedes that it may contain some kind of “poetry and art” as well, we should go beyond his restrictive account of style which applies to the integral “artistic plan” of the strong character only. It seems to me that either of these life-forms qualify for the attribute of style.

Moreover I doubt that those two types distinguished by Nietzsche clearly split up into two different modes of living a life. It is not necessarily the case that you belong to one of these groups for good, without any chance to file an appeal or to cross boundaries.

In the light of these revisions I would like to scrutinize Nietzsche’s great “style” which fits “all the strengths and weaknesses [...] into an artistic plan” a little further and then come back to the wild “style” of a less orderly life one more time.

If we look out for an aesthetic model for the great style, we have to turn to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or to the total work of art, which seems to represent this “artistic plan” perfectly. As Nietzsche’s own account of this kind of artwork, that is, on Richard Wagner, is ambivalent, we can use the aesthetic realm as a proving ground for our considerations on more or less coherent or powerful life-forms.

Let me quote a famous passage from “The Case of Wagner”:

“What is it that characterizes every period of decadence in literature? It is that the *whole* is no longer imbued with life. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence; the sentence thrusts itself forward and obscures the meaning of the page; the page takes on a life independent of the whole – the whole no longer *is* whole [...]. But this is the simile of every style of *decadence*: every time, the anarchy of atoms,

disgregation of the will, 'freedom of the individual,' to use moral terms – expanded into a political theory, 'equal rights for all.' Life, *equal* vitality, the vibration and exuberance of life pushed back into the smallest forms; the rest, *poor* in life. Everywhere paralysis, arduousness, torpidity *or* hostility and chaos: both more and more obvious the higher one ascends in forms of organization. The whole, indeed, is no longer alive: it is simply a collection of parts, calculated, artificial." (KSA 6, 27; Nietzsche 1968, 626)

Nietzsche basically claims that Wagner himself does not live up to the organizational requirements of the "whole," he complains about his being unable to compose unity. Yet this criticism of Wagnerian "decadence" is ambivalent itself, it has a dirty little secret that hasn't gone unnoticed.

Even though the general tone of this description of decadence is rather dismissive, Nietzsche adds a confident, powerful twist to the anarchy or disgregation associated with decadence. It is well-known that Nietzsche's description of decadence which is based on a book by Paul Bourget, alters the original pattern. This alteration runs *in favor* of disgregation, or, to put it differently, in favour of the "wild" style of the second life-form characterized in *The Gay Science* no. 290.

In his *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* from 1883, Bourget complains about the decay or "dissolution" of higher unities that gives way to fragmentation. Numerous commentators have noted that Nietzsche reverses Bourget's description so that the individual is not released by the "whole," but takes the initiative. This marks a decisive shift as the individual grows into an active role and does not comply to a process of mere decline or decadence. (It is often overlooked though that even in Bourget we find a recognition of "the energy of individual cells".⁸)

Strictly speaking, the term *décadence* is no longer suitable for this proactive individual. A decline arising from the inner weakness of the whole is replaced by a newly detected potential. The "will" does not disappear altogether but rather individualizes itself through "disgregation." Please keep in mind that the term "disgregation" literally means the disintegration of a herd or a flock: it puts an end to the reign of the shepherd. In line with this reading of decadence as liberation is Nietzsche's attempt to think the "will to power" *in plural terms*, that is, to attribute it to a diversity of individuals assuming sovereignty.⁹

Nietzsche's considerations on the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and on "decadence" aptly reflect the two different styles or life-forms that we have distinguished earlier. It would be jumping to conclusions though if we thought of this difference as a parting of the ways that, aesthetically speaking, sees the *Gesamtkunstwerk* on one side and the idiosyncratic individual on the other side. If we go through Nietzsche's various comments on Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and if we also take into account Marcel Proust, Sergei Eisenstein and others, we come across a different, more conciliable pattern:¹⁰ Within the *Gesamtkunstwerk* they detect a bias for unity and cohesion, yet they also encounter moments of individual intensity, or epiphanies. These moments aren't just symptoms for the weakness of the organizing mind, but form a constitutive element of the aesthetics of the total work of art.

These findings from the aesthetics of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* lead back to the two different life-forms or life-styles that we have discussed based on *The Gay Science*, no. 290: to the strength of the artistic plan and the weakness of the adventurous mind.

Given that Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* reproduces and reunites the effects of aiming at unity and of creating centrifugality, we can now say that the two different styles actually depend on each other or, if I may say so, live on each other. (It may be said that they cannot live without each other.)

Possibly, these findings help us understand the relationship between philosophy and literature as well, as they may appear as different variants or complementary forms that enact the ambiguity or ambivalence of unity and momentaneity, centripetality and centrifugality.

This ambivalence is not just an aesthetic phenomenon, but resonates with the varieties of the individual life-form. The reappraisal of decadence, the reemergence of the individual within the totality of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* correspond to the 'comeback' of those "weak" characters that may not achieve in creating a "great style," but also succeed in what Nietzsche deems to be the "one thing" that is "needful," namely that you are satisfied or not at odds with yourself. Yet instead of positioning "weak" characters against the "great style" or the other way around, we should rather think of these alternatives as two sides of the same coin.

In the aesthetic realm, centrifugality appears in the fragmentation of unity, in the 'great escape,' if I may say so, of individual moments; in the realm of an ethics of the individual, it appears in the nomadic adventure. In both fields we know of movements that lead astray, that make you end up in the middle of nowhere or, as Hannah Arendt would put it, in a state of "worldlessness." If we turn the table and defend aesthetic or ethical unity against fragmentation, we encounter more suspicious claims of fullscale totality or rather more modest pleas for finding a "home" or a *Heimat*.

A more elaborate account of Nietzsche's idea of "falling in love with becoming" would have to identify procedures, devices, techniques that organize or shape this becoming. It seems to me that one term will assume a central role in such a setting, and this is the term "experiment." I have already mentioned in passing that the idea of living as experimenting is something Nietzsche directly adopts from Emerson. In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche says: "Everybody experiments with himself, improvises, makes new experiments, enjoys his experiments; and all nature ceases and becomes art." (cf. *KSA* 3, 595sq.; Nietzsche 1882/1974, § 356, 302-4) It is safe to say that the concept of "experimenting" including its German relatives *Versuch*, *Versucher*, etc. is almost omnipresent in Nietzsche's writings of all periods.

The word "experiment" suggests that Nietzsche shifts the debate to a quasi-scientific framework, but a more detailed analysis of the idea of experimentation shows that it is by no means limited to an "experimental philosophy" in the sense of Francis Bacon. A comprehensive history of experimentation would encompass Montaigne's *Essais* and also the "essayism" described in Robert Musil's novel *The Man Without Qualities*. I cannot expand upon that here, but it would be intriguing to compare the process of experimenting, with its moments of insecurity, expectation, anticipation, exhilaration, trial and error, evaluation and new beginnings – to compare this process to the forming of life as an ethical attitude, as the willingness to affirm the potentialities of a character, to encourage oneself and others to overcome their limits and also as an attempt to carefully assess and evaluate the liveability of these experiments. As Emerson puts it: "The only sin is limitation." (Emerson 1983, 406)

Let's hope that this conference also contributes to an overcoming of limits, be in the research on Nietzsche, be it between different languages or between different philosophical traditions and schools.

Notes

¹ Here and in the following KSA refers to Nietzsche 1988.

² Nietzsche heavily marked the passage on the “enthusiasm” of “abandonment” in his personal copy of the German translation of the “Essays;” a partial excerpt of it is to be found in his notebooks (KSA 10, 486).

³ Dickinson 1979, 971 (Poem Nr. 1400). Thanks to Christoph Henning for bringing this poem to my attention.

⁴ “I should think a sensible axiom of the knowledge of persons would be this: that one can see others only to the extent that one can take oneself as an other.” (Stanley Cavell 1979, 459)

⁵ “The antagonism of the two tendencies is not less active in individuals, as the love of adventure or the love of repose happens to predominate. A man of rude health and flowing spirits has the faculty of rapid domestication, lives in his wagon, and roams through all latitudes as easily as a Calmuc. At sea, or in the forest, or in the snow, he sleeps as warm, dines with as good appetite, and associates as happily, as beside his own chimneys. Or perhaps his facility is deeper seated, in the increased range of his faculties of observation, which yield him points of interest wherever fresh objects meet his eyes. The pastoral nations were needy and hungry to desperation; and this intellectual nomadism, in its excess, bankrupts the mind, through the dissipation of power on a miscellany of objects. The home-keeping wit, on the other hand, is that continence or content which finds all the elements of life in its own soil; and which has its own perils of monotony and deterioration, if not stimulated by foreign infusions.” (Emerson 1983, 247)

⁶ Here and in the following PhU refers to Wittgenstein 1953/1984.

⁷ Here and in the following VB refers to Wittgenstein 1977/1984.

⁸ The original reads: “Un style de décadence est celui où l’unité du livre se décompense pour laisser la place à l’indépendance de la page, où la page se décompense pour laisser à l’indépendance de la phrase, et la phrase pour laisser à l’indépendance du mot [...] l’énergie des cellules devient indépendante, [...] l’organisme [...] entre en décadence aussitôt que la vie individuelle s’est exagérée sous l’influence du bien-être acquis”; see Bourget 1883-85/1931-33, vol. 1, p. 20; cf. Nietzsche, KSA 14, 405.

⁹ See e. g. Wolfgang Müller-Lauter: Nietzsche: Seine Philosophie der Gegensätze und die Gegensätze seiner Philosophie. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1971; Günter Abel: Die Nietzsche. Die Dynamik der Willen zur Macht und die ewige Wiederkehr. Berlin/New York 1984. Nietzsche’s turn to plurality remains unrecognized in Heidegger’s metaphysical-technical interpretation of the “will.”

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of Proust’s and Eisenstein’s reading of Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, cf. Thomä 2006.

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