

How things will become ever more "artistic" in Europe — Even today, in our time of transition when so many factors cease to compel men, the care to make a living still compels almost all male Europeans to adopt a particular *role*, their so-called occupation. A few retain the freedom, a merely apparent freedom, to choose this role for themselves; for most men it is chosen. The result is rather strange. As they attain a more advanced age, almost all Europeans confound themselves with their role; they become the victims of their own "good performance"; they themselves have forgotten how much accidents, moods, and caprice disposed of them when the question of their "vocation" was decided—and how many other roles they might perhaps have been *able* to play; for now it is too late. Considered more deeply, the role has actually *become* character; and art, nature

There have been ages when men believed with rigid confidence, even with piety, in their predestination for precisely this occupation, precisely this way of earning a living, and simply refused to acknowledge the element of accident, role, and caprice. With the help of this faith, classes, guilds, and hereditary trade privileges managed to erect those monsters of social pyramids that distinguish the Middle Ages and to whose credit one can adduce at least one thing: durability (and duration is a first-rate value on earth). But there are opposite ages, really democratic, where people give up this faith, and a certain cocky faith and opposite point of view advance more and more into the foreground—the Athenian faith that first becomes noticeable

⁵⁹ While Nietzsche agrees with Hegel that familiarity does not imply knowledge in the strong sense which we might call "comprehension," Hegel thought that such comprehension was possible and constituted the task of philosophy: "To comprehend *what is*, is the task of philosophy" (in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*) Nietzsche argues above that such "comprehension" involves self-deception

in the Periclean age, the faith of the Americans today that is more and more becoming the European faith as well: The individual becomes convinced that he can do just about everything and *can manage almost any role*, and everybody experiments with himself, improvises, makes new experiments, enjoys his experiments; and all nature ceases and becomes art.

After accepting this *role faith*—an artist's faith, if you will—the Greeks, as is well known, went step for step through a rather odd metamorphosis that does not merit imitation in all respects: *They really became actors*. As such they enchanted and overcame all the world and finally even “the power that had overcome the world” (for the *Graeculus histrio*⁶⁰ vanquished Rome, and *not*, as innocents usually say, Greek culture). But what I fear, what is so palpable that today one could grasp it with one's hands, if one felt like grasping it, is that we modern men are even now pretty far along on the same road; and whenever a human being begins to discover how he is playing a role and how he *can* be an actor, he *becomes* an actor.

With this a new human flora and fauna emerge that could never have grown in more solid and limited ages; or at least they would be left there “below” under the ban and suspicion of lacking honor. It is thus that the maddest and most interesting ages of history always emerge, when the “actors,” *all* kinds of actors, become the real masters. As this happens, another human type is disadvantaged more and more and finally made impossible; above all, the great “architects”: The strength to build becomes paralyzed; the courage to make plans that encompass the distant future is discouraged; those with a genius for organization become scarce: who would still dare to undertake projects that would require thousands of years for their completion? For what is dying out is the fundamental faith that would enable us to calculate, to promise, to anticipate the future in plans of such scope, and to sacrifice the future to them—namely, the faith that man has value and meaning only insofar as he is *a stone in a great edifice*; and to that end he must be *solid* first of all, a “stone”—and above all not an actor!

⁶⁰ the little Greek actor *Graeculus* was a term used ironically by the Romans

To say it briefly (for a long time people will still keep silent about it): What will not be built any more henceforth, and *cannot* be built any more, is—a society⁶¹ in the old sense of that word; to build that, everything is lacking, above all the material. *All of us are no longer material for a society*; this is a truth for which the time has come. It is a matter of indifference to me that at present the most myopic, perhaps most honest, but at any rate noisiest human type that we have today, our good socialists, believe, hope, dream, and above all shout and write almost the opposite. Even now one reads their slogan for the future “free society” on all tables and walls.⁶² Free society? Yes, yes! But surely you know, gentlemen, what is required for building that? Wooden iron! The well-known wooden iron.⁶³ And it must not even be wooden.