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Introduction

This book began from my being intrigued by the way we seem to live in a ‘culture of feeling’ that is ill at ease with itself, and has indeed been intermittently but persistently in a state of denial, with *any* public show of feeling risking denunciation as ‘sentimental’ – and this in turn led me to wonder whether sentimentality is simply a derogatory term for feelings one ‘feels’ unhappy to acknowledge (and why is this?), or whether there is a distinctive ‘structure of feeling’ here that can be distinguished from other, perhaps more conventionally acceptable, patterns of sympathetic engagement with the plight of others, patterns that are implicitly gender-coded. So the aim here is to try to constitute such a matrix, a structure of feeling in a virtual state, realizable in different historical contexts and cultural configurations, and inherently allowing for, and even encouraging, the controversy that seems central to it. Whether ‘the sentimental’ is really distinguishable here, and what would follow from this, is a central theme of this book, but for now we can tentatively say that sentimentality involves an immediacy of emotional response, which can be embedded in powerful collective currents, whereas what will emerge as the other key term here, sympathy, is more nuanced, involving the feelings in a broad sense that is inclusive of elements of reflection, and assumes a degree of distance from the other even as it seeks to overcome it.

When one traces this back it does indeed seem that the problem of feeling is always linked to relations with others. A question of central importance raised by theoretical debates around sympathy is whether we sympathize most with those we most resemble. It is often assumed that we sympathize with people because we like them, and we like them because we are alike; and that, additionally – but overlapping with this – we are more likely to sympathize with those who are ‘closest’ to us. Sympathy can readily get elided here into notions of identification and identity, based on a spontaneous immediacy of affective contact. This whole book will involve taking a critical distance from this, as

an adequate account; for now, it will suffice to say that this orthodox view downplays the relation between emotion, imagination and judgement in our responses to the suffering of others, the way these involve a distinctive culture of the self as an imaginative construct that is both internal yet also manifest in those public dimensions of gesture and narrative that have come to constitute selfhood *as* a relation to the other in the modern world.

What is 'modern' about all this, then, seems to develop out of what we can identify as a 'spectacle of sympathy' in the eighteenth century, in which sympathy seems inherently to entail public forms of expression whereby being 'on show' is both a condition of the authenticity of such feelings *and* of their capacity to be masked and simulated. Hence a culture of theatrical display actually underlies and renders possible the interiority of the self as it comes to be recounted in the novel. One form of being 'on show' indeed involves narrative, whereby the sympathetic self narrates its 'sentimental' involvements with others, as an emotional being, thereby revealing also the distortions and misunderstandings that such apparent 'transparency' entails. Feelings seem to call for narration, for embodiment in stories through which they are revealed, intensified and explored. They can also be pictured, whether in the imagination or externalized in paintings. If we put more emphasis on the present day, another implication of this is significant. We are continually confronted, in the media, with assorted disasters, traumas and forms of suffering, both personal and collective, and these are always liable to engage our emotions, just as we may also try to defend ourselves and block off these responses. But we may also seek out a vicarious engagement with such experiences, as in film or the novel; and this has been apparent since the origins of the novel in the eighteenth century. Such vicarious involvement can raise the disturbing possibility that we could take pleasure in suffering – even, conceivably, our own – or that at any rate we could become inured to it.

In elaborating this, it would be useful to go back in time once again, to get some perspective. The concept of 'sensibility' was of central importance to eighteenth-century culture and its patterns of behaviour. Sensibility always faced both ways: towards the body, the realm of affect and sensation; and towards other people, thus displaying a public face, and an embeddedness in codes of civility. It was about physiology *and* ethics, individual psychology *and* social interaction. As such, one can say that an engagement with 'suffering' was basic to it, since suffering, particularly as pain, is both the most fundamental 'sensation' and also what most dramatically involves us when perceived in other people. Sensibility was, one might say, fundamentally 'aesthetic', in

the foundational sense of the term, encompassing our embodied, evaluative response to the world, a response that could be said to ground the moral, too, even though subsequently the two have been kept distinct: aesthetics, that is, as a response that was as much to do with everyday culture and behaviour as with what was already becoming the more specialized arena of art and its pleasures, which has, of course, since become the primary zone of application of 'aesthetics' in its narrower sense. Sensibility, then, incorporated a distinctively 'sensational' physiology and a 'sentimental' capacity to respond to the predicament of the other, an 'other' who would in principle be 'the same' only as the putative possessor of an equivalent capacity but could otherwise be very different (gender, race, culture).

Encounters with 'other cultures' would, of course, increasingly both stretch and challenge this perspective. Alongside this implicitly egalitarian capacity for 'feeling with' the other – central to the Enlightenment vision – was the possibility that this could turn out to be more imposition than dialogue, the emergent cultural emphasis on self-identity and forms of social exclusion risking either an identification with an other who was thereby drawn *too close*, too like oneself, or, if this failed, was expelled altogether from the purview of the sympathetic engagement that defined this affective universe. Here is the source of the criticism, still frequently encountered, that notions like 'sympathy', 'pity' or 'compassion' are inherently patronizing, too embedded in relations of inequality they do nothing to challenge – alleviating distress maybe, but implicitly only on the agent's terms, and quite possibly more to do with guilt than genuine concern.

Returning to the idea of 'spectacle' in the context of sensibility, we can see that the latter manifestly implies a semiotics, a way of treating the body as a sign system, to be 'read', just as sympathy involves reading the signs of distress in the sufferer. Such signs involve a staging of the body, with the body on display just as surely as if it were on the stage; and indeed theatricality provided a range of figures for self and body in their public acts, and society as essentially an arena for performance, just as all this naturally provoked controversy around issues of sincerity and manipulation, concerns central to the motivational patterns of market-oriented behaviour. Thus, in the cultural dynamic of sensibility in relation to the suffering other, we can reinforce our sense of a 'spectacle of sympathy' that has widespread ramifications, but carries with it built-in tensions.

This eighteenth-century world of 'spectacle' positions observer and observed, stage and audience, spectator and spectacle, as necessarily *separate*. This element

of distance, inherent in spectacle, poses various problems and possibilities for the sympathetic relation to the other, but it must necessarily pose a potential problem of voyeurism, of positioning the spectacle itself as object of fascination, and – potentially – enjoyment. The apparently paradoxical notion of ‘pleasure in (contemplating) suffering’ raises its head here, but so does the wider resonance of spectacle, the way it becomes implicated in popular culture, presupposed in the idea of ‘entertainment’ that emerges as central to the latter. All this is inseparable from the great innovations in the technologies of the visual that enable the late nineteenth century to transform the spectacle into the ever-more spectacular, converging with the increasingly sophisticated use of such technologies as capitalism enters the era of mass-market advertising. Photography and electricity – particularly used as lighting – ensure that by the early twentieth century the spectacular has become a new mode of spectacle, and the scene is set for what will duly become the new century’s central innovation in popular cultural forms: film. Spectacle – particularly as spectacular – therefore manifests what can appear to be a degree of autonomous cultural power. It is enthralling, seductive, not in any way inherently compatible with norms of rational action and response, just as its links to the mass media could be taken to imply that it is us, in our guise as ‘the masses’, that would be most subject to its influence, would be its essential ‘audience’.

At this point, it is important to point out that this book is one of a pair, published simultaneously, the other one being entitled *Sensational Subjects: The Dramatization of Experience in the Modern World*. While each stands on its own, and can be read independently, it will be apparent that there are significant links and overlaps. Indeed, they started off as one project, only gradually being separated as it became clear that two strands were being conflated, pointing to two distinct discourses and modes of embodiment that have been central to the relations between mind, body and culture (especially mediated culture) in the world of Western modernity. As key triggers, ‘sympathy’ and ‘sentiment’ seemed to point one way, and ‘sensation’, and a word that has become fashionable in recent years, ‘affect’, seemed to point the other. In effect, it is claimed that we can tentatively identify two distinctive cultural configurations here, referred to, in a shorthand way, as the spectacle of sympathy and the circuit of sensation. ‘Sensation’ suggests the more overtly physical side of feeling, and the links between this and the ‘sensational’, as it comes to feature in media ‘sensationalism’, are the central topic of the other volume. In effect, it is argued there that the two senses of the term ‘sensation’ – embodied feeling and dramatic media event – are interlinked from early on in the history of the modern.

Sensation involves quasi-physical circuits and breaks, shocks, and defences breached, a culture of nerves, stress and nervous energy, linked to desire and release. Sensations involve processes and cycles: within a cycle, sensations have a built-in tendency to inflation; one seeks 'newer' or 'better' sensations. The spectacle of sympathy is more passive, more visual (although by no means exclusively so), more about interpreting imagery and engaging the other through imagination, rather than responding to stimuli, in their immediacy. Where sensation threatens to flood the spectacle of sympathy, overwhelm it by obliterating distinctions between subject and object, sympathy separates them, hence maintaining a degree of distance, allowing for judgement to be brought into play. Sensation engages us primarily as organic and physical beings, through energy, force and flow; sympathy engages us as cultural beings, through the power of reflexive awareness, imaginative engagement with images and visions of self and other. These latter features remain crucially embodied, but in a way that emphasizes the cultural shaping and interpretation of the body, rather than the body as testifying directly to physical processes and powers that may well *appear* to work through culture but apparently do so in some immediate way, *without* cultural mediation. As disjunctive aspects of the modern world, they are both central to our constitution *as* moderns, subjects of modern experience.

In tracing the origins of the spectacle of sympathy in the eighteenth century, then, we also encounter the way 'sensibility' lies at the source of both of these strands, and an important theme of this book – particularly in the second half – is to consider the later history of the processes whereby they evolve as different, often in tension, yet also interrelated, so that analysing particular cultural materials, texts or pictures challenges us to tease out these strands as they exist in uneasy coexistence, even threatening the integrity of the object of analysis itself.

Pursuing this on into the nineteenth century, we can say that consciousness, as a condition of rational action in the world, is always potentially threatened by physiological responses, drives and desires, whether capricious or obsessive, and an interest in these 'unconscious' elements of mind and culture increasingly becomes a feature of science and cultural debate generally. With the cultural perception of time and change as it has developed over this period, this can be mapped onto the temporal dimension whereby selves and cultures can be said to have histories. 'Memory' thus becomes problematical: both an important source of identity and an inherently contestable resource, something that can indeed break down and fragment, all of which contributes powerfully to the cultural background, and content, of modernism in the arts and psychoanalysis.

Hence the characteristic pathologies of feeling, from hysteria to trauma, along with the cultural dynamics of late twentieth-century 'identity politics' in which trauma, in particular, has been embedded, and which pose further problems for the possibility of sympathetic engagement, and the terms in which this is debated.

It is worth developing this, because it can help tease out the often obscure ways in which sensation and sympathy could work their way through different cultural contexts and forms. However it may be theorized, the unconscious is not just a dynamic cauldron of energy; it is also a dramatic scenario in which self and other enact strange fantasies of disturbing difference, which can, in turn, be reflected in everyday behaviour. If the pathology of sensation is trauma, the pathology of sympathy is hysteria. Both involve over-identification, whether as traumatic repetition or hysterical mimesis: the other as insistent force, threatening the self in its relation to itself over time, the sense of self as self-development; or the other as inescapable image, of loss or plenitude, trapping the self in the delusions of identity, unable to constitute the difference and distance that makes relations of belonging and sympathetic engagement possible. Trauma recycles the eternal return of the traditional, in the modern age of shock and sensation; it collapses present into past, in the repetition of the past as crippling present, with the subject unable to 'move on'. Identity as identification – with persons and objects, the celebrities of the ordinary – threatens to subvert the frameworks and boundaries that can permit sympathetic engagement with the other, *and* the reflexive distancing from self that is a condition for this, while encouraging the immersion in sensationalism and sentimentalism that permits the intensity and excess of 'feeling' so central to modern hedonism.

In the light of this, we can return, one more time, to sympathy itself. The developments we have been referring to enable us to ask about the fate of the spectacle of sympathy in the contemporary world. Mass media accounts and presentations of scenes of suffering, frequently involving graphic images, can intensify the awareness of it, 'bring it home' in a way not possible before. But the corollary could be a lessening of *imaginative* engagement: too much work is done for us, too much is put in place for us. It is easy to assume that we can be more affected by the Haitian earthquake of 2010 than contemporaries were by the earthquake that destroyed most of Lisbon in 1755, but this is not necessarily the case. And just as the 'spectacular' aspect of spectacle could be said to heighten the impact, so it could also distract us all the more from the ostensible object of our gaze; the 'aestheticization' of suffering could take us away from

the possibility of response through feeling. But here, it will be important to interrogate not just the notion of spectacle but also the way aesthetics has been repositioned as autonomous, and separate from ethics to the point of running into conflict with it. When the spectacle of sympathy itself becomes spectacular, has aesthetics anaesthetized the moral sense, the capacity to engage with the other? Could it, conversely, be the case that the contemporary spectacle could indeed *engage* the spectator in ways that remind us of that earlier balance between distance and closeness, now 'simulated' in a postmodern era of new media developments?

We can recall here the case of the Asian tsunami of Christmas 2004. In this case, the initial impact – undeniably 'sensational' – was speedily followed by the sympathy response (record donations poured in to the aid agencies). There was a conspicuous lack of interest in possible perpetrators (very unlike 9/11). One might think that was hardly surprising: it appeared to be a textbook case of a 'natural' disaster, and no clever thesis about any possible distant human contribution (global warming?) could detract from that. This suggests a kind of emotional bedrock here, that the sympathy response is most likely where a basic dimension of human suffering comes into view, where no questions of blame can readily be raised: and this, again, is broadly continuous with the eighteenth century, as is the potential for 'blame' discourses to move us into more directly political responses (though doubtless still presupposing some notion of 'fellow-feeling'). Historically, the politics of modernity has crucially involved this latter dimension, where a prospective underlying sympathy produces a collective anger or resentment, which can be channelled into public debate, ideological commitment and mass political involvement. At the same time, the interpretations of 'sensation' and 'sympathy' developed here would indeed contribute to a critical perspective on the ways the capacity for sympathetic engagement opened up by aspects of modern experience and reflection can nonetheless be stymied and corrupted by other features of that same world, particularly those associated the self-interested motivational patterns associated with capitalist individualism – though never irretrievably so.

We can conclude that while the era of mass media sensationalism simultaneously brings suffering closer while subtly distancing us from it, the potential for sympathetic involvement is still there. 'Feeling', reconstructed as a kind of 'emotional intelligence', need not be antithetical to reason; and this may lead us to a sense in which 'sympathy' and the network of ideas around it (empathy, compassion, fellow-feeling) can point to aspects of the 'humble narratives' of modernity, and the patterns of everyday interaction, that are positive sources

of value in people's lives, that are often unnoticed, and that, when noticed, can easily be disparaged by critics and theorists. This can be distinguished from self-interested rationality on the one hand, and, more tentatively, from sentimentality on the other, though the latter remains an irreducible and essential aspect of the cultural politics of the modern. All this may appear to be in some tension with our awareness of the increased development of the spectacular in spectacle and the impact of the mass media generally, but any such tension should be *productive*. For example, it has already been suggested that there is a sense in which sympathy was, even in the eighteenth century, *already* implicated in spectacle; nor is the idea of 'belonging', implicit in the notion of sympathy developed here, incompatible with emergent notions of network communities, or indeed of 'community' as extending beyond the human. And all this reveals the importance of understanding modernity as the history of the contemporary and history *in* the contemporary: just as we are (also) living in the eighteenth century, so they were (already) living in the twenty-first ...

Overall, then, this is a multi-layered cultural history of modern feeling as it has been conceptualized and represented over the period since the eighteenth century, particularly through literature, art, the media and theoretical reflection. The book questions the tendency to assimilate modernity to 'the contemporary', attempting instead to reveal the patterns of repetition and reconfiguration in Western culture that can be seen to underlie the very real changes that have occurred over this period.

General approach and assumptions

How are we to write about 'modern culture' when we are inevitably positioned, at least partly, within it? This is a book about the experience of the modern that has to be in some sense situated both within and beyond it, in a reflexive move that straddles the boundaries: an uncomfortable place to be, but one in which we may all at times find ourselves. This in turn suggests that the modern is always liable to be also 'postmodern'; that perhaps the potential for this is found deep within the modern, always associated with it. This must also affect the status of the claims that can be made: bold but tentative, exploratory, conditional, situated; and this necessarily poses reflexivity as fundamental both as problem and as resource. There is inevitably a practice of world construction and reconstruction as one inhabits the world and reflects on it, a sense of the essential multiplicity of what we nonetheless – reasonably enough – think of as

one world, on which we have a range of viewpoints. Writing, then, affects the written-about, at least in the sense that it carries a complex message of its own involvement, its own contribution to the reflexivity of the world, implying both distance and embeddedness.

Modernity itself can anyway be taken to question the very idea of 'boundaries', with their implication of fixity; as an alternative, porousness and fluidity can be seen both to incorporate an awareness of the relativity of limits and categories, and to suggest ways of pursuing and presenting the substantive issues. The method of approach adopted here is *immersive*, as if donning a guise, appearing (dis)guised as whatever or whoever is being expounded, thereby both extending and interrogating that other position, questioning its boundaries, indeed showing that its implications are frequently 'other' than what it wants or purports to be. Hence, while 'style' is often treated as a feature of surface rather than substance, it is considered here as a way in which content is 'formed' in a way immanent to it. It carries dimensions that are immersive and reflexive, and also syncretic and centrifugal.

Syncretic links, centrifugal movements and the use of figures respond to the connectedness of the world; and so does throwing together several differing uses of a word, as an invitation to consider connections beyond the confusions that can possibly result. And this 'throwing together', in juxtaposition, is an *active* process, an intervention, reorganizing the world-as-understood. At the same time, it can be *responsive*, sensitive to the tensions and inadequacies of existing taken-for-granted assumptions and categories as they (fail to) fit experience. This is to say that concepts – and indeed images – can appropriately be *inclusive* rather than, or as much as, *exclusive*; they can break down their own boundaries, flow into adjoining regions, incorporate distinctions within themselves. This is important because while analytical distinctions are intended to resolve problems, they can characteristically bring their own problems with them: distinctions solidify into separations, fragmentation, a loss of connection; and also the implication that something has been solved when it may merely have been put out of view, or swept under the carpet. A strict and specialized division of labour can be as troublesome and counter-productive in language and thought as elsewhere in the world. (None of this should be taken to imply, *per contra*, a metaphysics of holism, replacing an empiricism of fragmentation with an idealism of totality.)

There may, in short, be good reasons for *not* making distinctions, just as there may be good reasons for making them *within* the range of application of a concept, and only tentatively: that should help ensure the concept's reflexive

inadequacy, its necessary (and desirable) *insufficiency* in grasping itself in its extensions and applications. To take an example central to this book, this could apply to the terms ‘sympathy’ and ‘empathy’. Today, it is often thought important to distinguish them, but this can lose a sense of their mutual imbrication, their shared history, indeed the fact that the latter term has only come into use relatively recently. It is not that it is necessarily wrong to distinguish them, but that it may also be right not to, depending on the context and the unfolding of the connections and implications of the discourse in which the term or terms are embedded. One danger in making the distinction is that we try to hive off what we see as the ‘bad’ aspects of the sympathy tradition, as suggested in the previous section, leaving empathy as the term to designate the ‘good’ side, which can lead to a complacent and uncritical use of the latter, just as insensitive to context and situation as the original frequently can be. Using sympathy as the inclusive term reminds us of the historical resonance here, as the word flits in and out of use, sometimes explicit, often implicit. Smooth temporality, the process of gradual change, is intersected by moments of reflexive upheaval, when criticism and explicit rethinking can shift the terrain in ways large or small.

Even on a cursory glance it will be apparent that ‘feeling’ and ‘thought’ are two further terms that play a central role here. Feeling is often bracketed with emotion, and thought with reason. The implicit or explicit dualism here has been central to the Western tradition since the eighteenth century, but has been widely refined and criticized; indeed, ‘sensibility’, as an originating moment of this tradition, can be seen as both asserting and refusing this distinction. In more contemporary terms, feelings and emotions can be said to be ‘intentional’ in a sense related to the phenomenological: they can give us an orientation, a sense of awareness, along with embeddedness in what we do not directly understand or control. Forgetting the latter risks making emotions *too* rational, assimilating them to cognition. Feeling can itself be seen as a bridging term, between the senses on the one hand, and emotion on the other. As for ‘thought’, however, when elided into ‘reason’, the problems become particularly acute when the latter is in turn given a rather narrow connotation: logical argument or following rules. This has serious effects when we consider ‘judgement’, a term which deviates greatly in its everyday use from its use in the Kantian philosophical tradition, where, again, subsumption under rules is taken as basic. In everyday life, judgement involves a balancing act between reason, feeling, experience, and – the joker in the modernity pack – the imagination.

It will be a central theme of this book that the imagination has indeed been central to modern thought and culture, from well *before* the Romantics got hold of it. In effect, there is a process of translation or transfiguration here, as the affective in feeling or emotion becomes imaginatively transposed into language and imagery, into the conceptual grasp of awareness. Indeed, in the case of emotion, the imagination enters into the very constitution and formulation of it. As they loom out of the hinterland, emotions are shaped, figured, by the imagination, and this 'hinterland' can be conceived as 'outside' or 'inside', and perhaps as 'unconscious'. In encountering the deep structure of modern selfhood, we thereby encounter an element of projection, of the theatrical, as if involving a stage, an actor and an audience – frequent sources of imagery in the eighteenth century and since. Inner space emerges as the theatre of the self and the play of others, with transfigured feelings, rather than reason, providing the dynamism. One assumption that governs this book is already apparent then: that there can be too great an emphasis on rationality, at the expense of judgement and imagination. And this is linked to a second: that it is the culture of everyday life itself that can often provide the resources needed to correct this bias. One does not have to take some highly abstract or philosophical road, deriving critique from an unaccountable 'elsewhere'; it is there, ingrained in the culture and experience of life as it is lived and reflected on both in everyday contexts *and* the more specialist areas of cultural practice and debate.

Actually, the whole realm of practical everyday moral choice and judgement can be subsumed under a broad sense of the term 'feeling', and often is. This is feeling as it is rooted in orientation, in our responses to the challenges posed by the world as we meet it in daily life. This is an aspect of, or perspective on, the arena of 'experience', of reaction to what are often the effects of the modern project of rational appropriation and manipulation of the world, but never exclusively so. When we remember that aesthetics caused problems for the contours and categories of Kant's system, that it operates both as a bridge between the first two *Critiques* and as a precarious summation, always liable to expand into subverting rather than confirming their autonomy, we can perhaps see how an aesthetically tinged conception of everyday life can take up some of this inheritance. This is particularly so when we incorporate the imagination, thought 'in excess' of reason, positioning it in the production of fantasy, fiction and imagery: the world as representation, both as and beyond mimesis. Modern culture reveals an 'interest' in the world that is not just pragmatic, self-interested or rational, but which is prior to these interests of an already-constituted subject, and has a basis in what can indeed be called 'aesthetics', related to

that originating eighteenth-century sense of the term, as embodied discourse, of thoughts imbricated with feelings, of an involvement in the world that is sensory as well as intellectual, 'aesthetic' in a way that grounds the moral and political rather than being auxiliary or derivative. First and foremost, aesthetics involves an *encounter*, a response to the difference of the 'other' (whether object, person or culture). This difference, whether as a sense of involvement with, or belonging in, is *felt*, registered as feeling and grasped *as relation*, as pattern, through imaginative figuration, in a process which 'expresses' the culture that is simultaneously constituted or reconstituted by such experiences and their framing. In this sense, this book is an essay in 'cultural aesthetics', a contribution to the elaboration of theoretical understanding in cultural studies. The term itself is given some elaboration in *Sensational Subjects*, but some of its further implications can be spelt out here, in the context of the central concerns of this volume.

Whether or not these ways of situating the unity or multiplicity of our experience of this world have any clear philosophical rationale, they do seem implicit in, or suggested by, such a world. (Doubtless for most philosophers, up to and including Deleuze, this whole way of putting it would seem topsyturvy, as if *doxa*, 'opinion', were being called on to interpret, even correct, the rational principles of philosophical argument; but, as will be seen in the book, philosophy does have a place, even if not quite the elevated position many of its practitioners claim for it.) Furthermore, the concepts we invoke here may or may not have any purchase beyond this world of modern experience – quite likely not – and one must, in principle, accept their complete historical contingency. The cultural imaginary of the modern West, then, encompasses this broad field of the humble narratives of everyday life, and the images through which they are reflexively figured as they are grasped, and also the more specialist (or speculative) narratives of science and politics, some of which conjoin to form the ideological grand narratives that give the civilization its distinctive 'flavour', just as their relation to the humble narratives of the everyday in which they are partially and problematically implicated is always one of tension and dissension, and frequently repudiation. Here we can return briefly to content, for it could be said that 'sensation' and 'sympathy' are aspects or transpositions of the two most fundamental dimensions of the humble narratives of the modern: the polarity between the everyday, experienced as banality and routine, and the world of shocks and sensations; and the significance of love and suffering in interpersonal relationships, in the light of the modern cult of individualism and individual feeling.

To 'inhabit culture' is also to belong to one or several cultures, however defined, and the cultural imaginary can be said to pose the questions and possibilities of what is involved in this, how to navigate these worlds. It maps the structure of relations between actual, virtual and possible that open up and frame the contours of experience, experience as it is lived and reflected on. In the modern world, the cultural imaginary draws on the full resources of the media-inflected narrative and imagery through which such experience is reflexively appropriated as discourse and figuration, embedded in cultural forms (specific media and art forms) and cultural practices.

To take this framework further, it might be useful to return briefly to an example that is central to this book, namely 'the sentimental'. As a genre, this can occur across different media and art products (novel, film, play), all of which retain their own distinctive cultural positions and histories but in this respect are all instances of 'the sentimental'. At the same time, the sentimental as genre points towards the experiential dimension. One can act, or feel, 'sentimental'; and one can live at a time when 'feeling sentimental' can be culturally validated or devalued and when, additionally, it can be more, or less, gender-coded. So it is here that one might perhaps encounter what we referred to above as a 'structure of feeling', a pattern or code of affective experience that colours the interactions between subjects in a range of contexts, and that thereby in turn partially constitutes and strongly influences the self as subject of experience, mediating between body and consciousness. In the case of the sentimental, this seems indeed to be a legacy of the dispersion of eighteenth-century 'sensibility', reconstructed as an 'excess' widely perceived as thereby available for critique and denunciation.

This, in turn, implies the possibility that this structure of feeling has intimate links to the cultural forms that both express and transmit it, and that in this sense modern experience does indeed become heavily 'mediated'. Indeed, if we regard the novel as media form, as well as art form, as we surely must, this 'mediated' quality becomes coterminous with modernity itself. Facing one way, one has a structure of feeling; facing the other, one has a 'cultural configuration', a distinctive fusion of cultural form and content, including the signifying practices of text-based and image-based representation, in turn taken up in reflexive discourse. Such cultural configurations embody the effects of the modern project, of representation and experience interacting in mediated form, the grounds out of which modern subjectivity is constructed. Of course, as indicated previously, none of this enables the world to be mapped into our categories in any straightforward way. 'The sentimental' can be treated as one

pole of sensibility, implicitly being contrasted with other possible applications of the latter term, all on the terrain of a 'structure of feeling'; but one of the problems with 'sensibility' is that the term can have a wider purchase, as a relation between feeling, civility, public spectacle, and reflexive thought, hence emerging as a cultural configuration, incorporating the sentimental as one of its modes – particularly likely given that we have no readily available adjective to accompany sensibility, so that 'sentimental' can be called on to play this wider role. Such 'terminological' problems are never *merely* such; they are content-laden, and have to be handled with a sensitivity to context.

The unfolding of the themes through the chapters

The book starts with contemporary 'sentimentality', examining its underlying structure and tracing it back in time to probe its origin in eighteenth-century 'sensibility' and the controversies over sympathy, which together reveal the sources of this pattern and the conflicts it engenders. After exploring the theoretical aspects of sympathy itself, the fifth chapter – which serves as the turning point, the hinge of the book – sets up a duality between two key theorists, Adam Smith and David Hume, enabling us to locate, more clearly and explicitly, a 'spectacle of sympathy', along with a cultural configuration that comes to exist in some tension with it, that of sensation and sensationalism, which we have called the 'circuit of sensation', both of which can now be seen as phenomena central to the evolution of the modern world in its codes of feeling and their expression and transformation through culture and the media. We conclude this chapter by suggesting that contemporary 'affect theory' is in effect a development of *one* of these, the circuit of sensation, and that this gives grounds for questioning its adequacy as an approach to these issues more broadly. The book then retraces a path back towards the contemporary world, via nineteenth-century culture, showing how the ramifications of these two strands work their way through the newer concerns with unconscious influences in – and on – mind and history, and the implications of this for the understanding of creative processes of art and memory, along with those key 'pathologies', hysteria and trauma. A concluding chapter revisits earlier themes through a consideration of the impact of the mass media and reinvigorated capitalism on debates about sympathy, sentiment, sensation, and alleged 'compassion fatigue'. Historically, then, the book unfolds as a series of episodes, from the origins of Western modernity in the eighteenth century, through to developments in the

contemporary world; but it does not unfold *as* history, as a historical narrative. The book uses history, but is not itself history. Rather, it moves strategically, to reveal the underlying patterns, the discontinuities as well as the continuities, out of which we construct what can often be rather rationalizing and simplifying historical narratives, and thereby accepts the reflexive paradox inherent in writing a history *of* the modern that is also a history *in* the modern.