



*Sentiments and the Rise of  
Modern Textual Culture*  
in the British Long Eighteenth Century

情感美学与近代文本文化的兴起  
英国漫长的18世纪文学文化研究

姜文涛◎著



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To my family, who are now living in four places of  
two continents, and to Lu Liu, my sunshine.

## Preface

This book investigates a history of representation of emotions in the British long eighteenth century and in the context of a rising textual culture. It does so by tracing the trope of sympathy, which is pervasive in the British eighteenth-century writings such as aesthetic treatises, moral philosophy, and Romantic poetry. Sympathy builds sociality through the communication of feelings and is enacted in the practices of reading, writing and representation, all of which are changing drastically as everyday life is increasingly saturated with textual media. In the process, individual emotions have to be “flattened” (Adam Smith’s word) so as to be communicable, while at the same time, literary culture constructs the deep interiority of an emotional self. These developments enable the rise of political economy and psychoanalysis in the nineteenth century. As a historical project, this book is largely organized chronologically. Chapter I outlines a brief etymological history of the inward turn of emotions and sentimentality in the eighteenth-century Britain. Chapter II examines Edmund Burke’s aesthetic theory of the sublime. Burke emphasizes the acoustic dimension of words in communicating aesthetic feelings of sympathy. Chapter III analyzes David Hume’s moral philosophy of passions. It argues that Hume, by establishing himself as a “man of feeling,” attempts to domesticate as individualistic feelings that had been

understood as impersonal and contagious. Chapter IV presents the phenomenon of what is called “poetic mediality” in the work of William Wordsworth. Here the oral and acoustic performance of feelings gendered as feminine is poeticized so that scopical desire is generated through the act of reading presented as anthropological speculation. Chapter V explores Adam Smith’s moral philosophy of sympathetic sentiment. Smith’s definition of a theatrical impartial spectator in a representational economy (in his writings on moral sentiments) makes self analogous to an exchangeable commodity (in his political economy writing) and anticipates the deep (sub)consciousness of interiority in psychoanalytic writings of the late nineteenth century. As an extended comparison and contrast with this Western history, the final chapter turns to examine late imperial Chinese pictorial culture in its imbrication with a “print modern” Chinese Enlightenment discourse of the New Culture Movement, where it argues that the representation of crowds’ activities of absorption and theatricality present an emergent form of subjectivity. By traversing divergent genres of writing and different cultural media, this book delineates a genealogy of the emotional self shaped by the material practice of a rising textual culture. It challenges existing versions of more abstract histories of emotion as well as sociological approaches to media studies, both of which present clear and clean histories at the expense of specific and concrete historical practices. Throughout, this book works (1) to explore the rise of visuality through a modern literary medium and how it co-evolves with orality and aurality in representing self; (2) to historicize and thus radicalize the work of writing in the fabrication of interiority; (3) to contribute a comparative approach to historical studies of media and modern literatures.

## Acknowledgements

This book comes from my dissertation work conducted at the Department of Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, with portions of it considerably revised. It would not have been possible without the loving support from Professor Ira Livingston (now at Pratt) and Professor Iona Man-Cheong. To me, they are exemplars of what it means to be an intellectual. They are truly the models for me to follow in my intellectual life, and to them, I owe my deepest gratitude. I have benefited enormously from conversations—back then and till now—with Ling Hon Lam (now at Berkeley), which taught me many things on emotion, theatricality and media. My heartfelt thanks also go to Milind Wakankar (now at the Indian Institute of Technology at Delhi), who taught me to read Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer from standpoints other than the Western, and to Robert Harvey as well, whose meticulous concern and professional spirit are heartily remembered.

My gratitude extends to Clifford Siskin and Mary Poovey, with whom I took two seminars at the English Department of the New York University, and they were germinal for my intellectual thinking upon the British long eighteenth century. So were many things I learned from Kathleen Wilson in the Department of History. Without them, this project would have been much more historically insufficient.

Travels to the University of Glasgow and the Academia Sinica were

great helps to my writing. I thank the organizers of the two occasions.

I also thank Don Ihde, Linda Ihde and late Mark Ihde for the time spent in East Setauket.

This book is devoted to my family, now living in four places—Chengdu, Liupanshui, Hangzhou and Madison—of China and the United States. They are the veins of my life. In the last phase of this writing, Lu Liu came into my life, and she has been my sunshine ever since. In the mid-1980s, my uncle Wang Jianfeng—a peasant worker in Beijing and Chengdu for almost three decades now—bought me novels by George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and Standhal from one of the Xinhua Bookstores in Beijing. The literary literacy—one of the themes of this book—that his kindness helped to foster in me is recognized in various venues of my life, intellectual and otherwise.

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# Chapter I

## Sentiment and Its Inward Turn around the 1740s

### I.i. Terminology of Emotion, and Writing as Medium in the Formation of a Metaphysical Selfhood

This current writing takes words like “emotion,” “passion,” “feeling,” “affect,” “sensibility,” “sympathy,” and “sentiment” as interchangeable with each other. This is done intentionally. Historically speaking, “the many names for emotion travel as freely as the emotions themselves” (Pinch 16) and these terms are almost interchangeable in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing. For a perceptual history of the modern selfhood, which is the purpose of this writing, that these terms have in common is much more significant than what differentiates them from each other. Rei Terada in *Feeling in Theory* writes:

Emotion ... is entangled in the mysteries of consciousness, its history locked inside the classical histories of mind and will ... [and] appears inseparable from expression and subjectivity in the first place, however, its capacity to criticize subjectivity is highly revealing. (Terada 6)<sup>1</sup>

This subtle distinction of “emotion” from other words is significant for this writing, in which emotion and sentiment are more about the

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<sup>1</sup> For a useful brief discussion on the distinction between “emotion,” “feeling,” “passion,” and “pathos,” see Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory*, pp. 4-5.

configuration of subjectivity in a history of writing as a technology. What remains at stake in this project is more about configuring sensibility in relation to a new mode of inwardness than the difference between different sentiments themselves. In other words, it is about a political economy of emotions in what Clifford Siskin and William Warner recently captures as “a history of mediation” (Siskin and Warner 5) in Western Enlightenment, specifically in the eighteenth century’s investment in paper as the medium of circulation and sociality. Marshall McLuhan defines media as “extensions of man” and mediation as “the historically changing sensory and perceptual ‘ratios’ of human experience” (qtd. in Mitchell and Hansen xii). Following this metaphysical approach to studies of media and mediation, W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen recently calls a “techno-anthropological universal sense of media that allow us to range across divides (characteristically triangulated) that are normally left unbroached in media studies: society-technology-aesthetics, empirical-formal-constitutive, social-historical-experiential” (Mitchell and Hansen ix). The contribution of this current writing is to make an investigation upon the inward making of sentimental selfhood in the emergence of textual culture. Issues of sensibility, sentiment, emotion, feeling and affect are examined in their specific relations to a modern print media—what Raymond Williams shorthand as “writing,” which, as one of the technological media, is “an ontological condition of humanization—the constitutive operation of exteriorization and invention” (xiii). It is in this historical and theoretical sense that this current writing takes notice of the differences between these terms but do not emphasize them unless it comes under necessary conditions<sup>1</sup>.

In what Michel Foucault calls the “Classical age,” he defines “natural history” as “nothing more than the nomination of the visible,” and during that historical period,

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<sup>1</sup> This is a stance similar to that of Rei Terada: “I try to steer a middle course between imposing a single vocabulary on all discussions of texts and giving up on terminological distinctions altogether” (Terada 4).

what came surreptitiously into being between the age of the theatre [of the Renaissance] and that of the catalogue [of the nineteenth century] was not the desire for knowledge, but a new way of connecting things both to the eye and to discourse. (Foucault 1970: 131-132)

The eighteenth century begins to have a specifically emergent modality of the human body, which “serves as a sort of reservoir for models of visibility, and acts as a spontaneous link between what one can see and what one can say” (135). The knowledge of the human body and psyche is composed in a whole domain of empiricity, at the same time describable and orderable in a totality of representations. In such a historical period, the naturalist Linnaeus defines natural plants as being “a product of number, of form, of proportion, of situation” (qtd. in Foucault 1970: 134). Naming and categorization of natural plants in this way is analogous to the abstract, serialized subject of the market place. In the same epistemological vein, human being also begins to assume a dimension of what Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer calls “impersonal personal” in Kant’s aesthetics<sup>1</sup>, which is emotively and performatively articulated. This current writing identifies an inward, sensualized, individuated subjectivity coming to a kind of *sensus communis* in the emergence of modern aesthetics<sup>2</sup>. This historical process could be examined in the theoretical light of what Samuel Weber sees in the theatrical “double, or dual, movement” in Martin Heidegger’s seminal essay “The Age of the World Picture”: “[T]hat of setting things *out in front of oneself* and at the same time bringing things *toward oneself*” (Weber 1996: 78). For Heidegger, “what distinguishes the essence of modernity” (Heidegger 1977: 68) is not merely a priority given to the sense of vision. Instead, it is an “interweaving” of two processes: “[T]hat the world becomes picture and man the subject—which is decisive for the essence of modernity” and that “illuminates the founding process of modern history, a process that, at first sight, seems

<sup>1</sup> Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer, Introduction to *Essays in Kant’s Aesthetics*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this is very Kantian. See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, chapter 3.

almost nonsensical” (70). It is a process as follows:

Whereby the more completely and comprehensively the world, as conquered, stands at man's disposal, and the more objectively the object appears, all the more subjectively (i. e. peremptorily) does the *subiectum* rise up, and all the more inexorably, too, do observations and teachings about the world transform themselves into a doctrine of man, into an anthropology. No wonder that humanism first arises where the world becomes picture. (70)

The increasing grid of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, sensual, affective and epistemological as well in this “humanism,” comes through the eighteenth century with the proliferation of a textual media culture. The technology of modern writing implements an inward as well as outward theatrical turn, a turn influencing what Foucault calls “technologies of self” when modern self co-evolves with commerce, aesthetics and nationalism. This chapter gives a historical context of the discourse of sentiment in the eighteenth century and how it complicates matters like (in)visibility, intelligibility, and forms of exchangeability in “the growing fluidity of social relations<sup>1</sup>” of the century.

Sentimentality is often entangled with the emergence of a modern psychological self. In channeling a circulation of feelings among subjects and objects, brotherhood and otherhood<sup>2</sup>, sentiment helps to clarify the liquidity and promiscuity of what is acknowledged as human subjects endowed with increasing inward interiority in the eighteenth century. In that century, sentiments are not yet always lodged within the private, inner lives of individual persons<sup>3</sup>. Rather, they often circulate among persons as somewhat autonomous substances, more as impersonal forces,

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase is taken from Jean-Christophe Agnew's *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought, 1550—1750*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> A conceptual dichotomy used more in its historical sense by Benjamin Nelson in his *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood*.

<sup>3</sup> Adela Pinch historicizes this inward turn of emotions in the century, which is inspiring for this current writing. See Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion*.

sometimes contagious, and other times beneficial<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that eighteenth-century accounts of subjectivity, for the concept of which emotion and sentiment occupy an integral part, take subjective events as particularized and observable as phenomenal events. This empirical emphasis upon observation is among what Richard Rorty describes as the rise of epistemology in the seventeenth century. For Rorty, John Locke finds that an analogue of Newton's particle mechanics for "inner space" would somehow be "of great advantage in directing our Thoughts in the search of other Things" and would somehow let us "see, what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with<sup>2</sup>." Regarding this epistemological shift, Mary Poovey observes "that the moral philosopher assumed he could conduct 'experiments' on subjectivity and that the results would simultaneously describe particular events and contribute to systematic knowledge" (Poovey 148) of universal human nature and a philosophy of government<sup>3</sup>. Arguing out of this affective and epistemological reference, this current writing situates an economy of sympathy moving from "(real or supposed) affinity between certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence each other (esp. in some occult way), or attract or tend toward each other" to that of being more on "relation between two bodily organs or parts such that disorder, or any condition, of the one induces a corresponding condition in the other<sup>4</sup>" in the middle of the eighteenth century. This genealogy of the emotional "technologies of self" is eventually to be individuated and inscribed upon an inward

<sup>1</sup> Also see Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I, i, 1, and "Epistle to the Reader." For this epistemological turn in the history of modern philosophy as a discipline, see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> This reminds of what Fredric Jameson argues for a "waning of affect" in our time. See Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 10. Especially on pages 15 through 16, when Jameson expresses willingness not "to say that the cultural products of the Postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings—which it may be better and more accurate, following J.-F. Lyotard, to call 'intensities'—are now free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria."

<sup>4</sup> See *OED* online, under the entry of "sympathy."

“psychosis<sup>1</sup>” in the end of the century. That economy of emotionality and interiority, in turn, pre-mediates the rise of psychoanalysis as a rigorous human science in the end of the nineteenth century as if out of historical necessity<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, like two sides of the same coin, this highly emotionalized individuality requires an exchangeable political economy to maintain a new form of sociality, which includes “the nature of social identity, intentionality, accountability, transparency and reciprocity—the who, what, when, where, and why of exchange” (Agnew 9-10), as historian Jean-Christophe Agnew puts it<sup>3</sup>. This current writing historicizes how *writing* as a communicative technology occupies a very significant position in this shift of interiorizing emotionalism and increasing exchangeability<sup>4</sup>. Whereas voice, as part of the oral culture, makes the members of the audience into a unity, silent reading—as consequential to a proliferating print media culture—makes each reader enter his or her own private inner world. As a result, it shatters the unity of the audience<sup>5</sup>. Modern print media helps to textualize perceptions more into a visual sub-class of representations. Heidegger, Foucault, Hacking and Wellbery take representation as a fundamental category of thought in the eighteenth century<sup>6</sup>. Following this critical literature, this current writing historicizes a new form of self, performance, and subjectivity in mediation as an emergent notion and a

<sup>1</sup> Similar to what David E. Wellbery discusses the concept of “soul” in relation to “representations” in the German aesthetic theory by Christian Wolff (1679—1754). See David E. Wellbery, *Lessing's "Laocoon,"* pp. 9-42.

<sup>2</sup> Also see Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> For the argument that the medieval notion of “the individual” is distinct from the modern notion of the “individual subject,” see Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism*, chapter 2; see, generally, chapter 1, on the passage from pre-modern “patterning” to a modern discourse of “analytico-referentiality.”

<sup>4</sup> For how writing effects a radically dramatized self in our modern society, see Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society*, pp. 1-10.

<sup>5</sup> See Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> See Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture;” Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 46-124; Ian Hacking, *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?*, pp. 15-53, 163-170; David E. Wellbery, *Lessing's "Laocoon,"* pp. 9-17. The rise of representation could also be seen as part of the epistemological shift from the seventeenth century, see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, chapter 3.