

Nerves, spirits and fibres - towards defining the origins of sensibility

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Sensibility

Cheyne considered this malady to be the result of over-taxed nerves. Now George Rousseau, an international authority on the relations of literature and medicine, demonstrates why a broader context is necessary.

Nervous Acts: Nerves, Politics, and Literary Culture

On the influence of Geertz on the new cultural history, see Ronald G. This brand of cultural history looks not at the content of thought, but at the forms in which that content is perceived, given, and expressed. The brain and nerves have usually been treated as narrow topics within the history of science and medicine.

Sensibility

But Hofstadter's analysis of the paranoid style was innovative in its search for a pattern of thought, perception, and feeling beneath the various expressions of right-wing movements. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Nerves, spirits and fibres (1976 edition)

Stearns, American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style New York, 1994 ; Karen Lystra, Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Lives in Nineteenth-Century America New York, 1989 ; Jan Lewis and Peter N. The concept of mentalité, first developed by the mid-twentieth-century Annales School of French historians as an alternative to intellectual history or the history of ideas, suggests another way to approach the problem. Haskell offered a powerful and sophisticated causal explanation linking capitalism to antislavery activism.

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But why is sensibility preferable to other concepts that historians have used and developed in the past half-century to describe the systematic and collectively held mental maps or dispositions of persons? But they shared a common notion that sensibility was a unitary, singular thing.

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A related criticism of the concept of a history of sensibilities, and its association with an older style of cultural history, is its propensity for use in a sweeping and over-generalizing fashion. This view often leads back to the analysis of social categories, identities, and objects such as race, class, and gender as at the core of culture, since these social categories express power relations most explicitly. And yet the two aspirins that relieved my headache on the airplane yesterday are not rhetorical, ideological, value-laden or polemical aspirins until I start talking about them.

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