

The Stimulated Body and the Arts (Durham, 17-18 Feb 11)

James Kennaway

Call for Papers

The Stimulated Body and the Arts:

The Nervous System and Nervousness in the History of Aesthetics

International Interdisciplinary Conference

17-18 February 2011

Centre for the History of Medicine and Disease

Durham University, UK

Venue: Hatfield College, Durham, UK

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 31 July 2010

This conference will discuss the history of the relationship between aesthetics and medical understandings of the body. Today's vogue for neurological accounts of artistic emotions has a long pedigree. Since G.S. Rousseau's pioneering work underlined the importance of models of the nervous system in eighteenth-century aesthetics, the examination of physiological explanations in aesthetics has become a highly productive field of interdisciplinary research. Drawing on this background, the conference aims to illuminate the influence that different medical models of physiology and the nervous system have had on theories of aesthetic experience. How have aesthetic concepts (for instance, imagination or genius) be grounded medically? What effect did the shift from animal spirits to modern neurophysiology have on aesthetics?

The medical effects of culture were not always regarded as positive. The second focus of the conference will be the supposed ability of excessive reading, music and so on to 'over-stimulate' nerves and cause nervousness, mental and physical illness, homosexuality and even death. It will consider questions regarding the effects of various theories of neuropathology and psychopathology on the concept of pathological culture. What kinds of culture could lead to such over-stimulation? How was this medical critique of culture related to moral objections and changes in gender relations, politics and society? How was it linked to medical concern about lack of attention and willpower?

This interdisciplinary conference brings together scholars working in a wide range of fields, including not only the history of medicine but also in

subjects such as art history, languages and musicology. Abstracts for 20-minute papers (maximum 250 words) should be submitted electronically to the organisers by 31 July 2010 at the following address:

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Organisers

Dr James Kennaway

Professor Holger Maehle

Dr Lutz Sauerteig

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/chmd/>

Reference:

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