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The Form Of Becoming: Embryology And The Epistemology Of Rhythm, 1760--1830



Synopsis

The epoch around 1800 is considered by cultural historians as a decisive point in time -- the transition to modernity -- when the perception of living things changed in a fundamental way. Nature and all its creations were no longer seen within the framework of a rigid and timeless order, but from the perspective of coming into being, being continually reorganised and undergoing new developments. The Form of Becoming offers an innovative understanding, from the perspective of the history of culture and science, of the emergence around 1800 of the science of embryology and a new notion of development based on the epistemology of rhythm. The book juxtaposes the establishment between 1760 and 1830 of rhythm as a central epistemological category in music theory, literary theory, and philosophy with the concurrent turn in biology to understanding the living world in terms of rhythmic patterns, rhythmic movement, and rhythmic representations. Common to all these fields was their view of rhythm as a means of organizing time -- and of ordering the development of organisms. Wellmann also shows that the growing importance of rhythm in the living world was related not only to the theory but also to the visual representation of movement, and how this was adopted in the scientific portrayal of living processes. The Form of Becoming offers the first systematic study of visualization in embryology. Embryological development circa 1800 was thought of in and through the visual technique of the pictorial series, still prevalent in the field today. The origins of the developmental series are traced back to seventeenth-century instructional graphics for military maneuvers, dance, and craft work and reveal the constitutive role of rhythm and movement in the visualization of development.

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