

Physiognomy in Science and Art: Judging by the Appearance of the Properties of a Natural Body

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The paper will present the historical roots and development of physiognomy. It discusses physiognomy as a method to judge by the appearance of the main parts, the so-called “signs”, of several natural objects including human beings, in order to recognize their essential properties. Based on scientific texts and several kinds of pictures as sources produced by philosophical and medical authors as well as by the fine arts and the art of sculpture, we can trace this method from the classical Antiquity until Modern Times. Analyzing this long and rich tradition and its development – in science as well as in art – by some characteristic examples, we state changes of the role of the application of physiognomy as a method to detect, identify and transmit “a silent or mute obscure knowledge” to becoming aware and perceivable for a scholar analyzing a natural body and a human viewing an artistic work. Some reasons of the changes of the application of physiognomy in both fields of cultural performance, science and art, are to find in the development of a special methodology and moreover, on the level of the general worldview.

References

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Brigitte Hoppe obtained her state diploma in pharmaceutical and biological sciences from the University of Freiburg im Breisgau, her degree of Dr. phil. nat. from the University of Frankfurt am Main (1964), finished the habilitation in History of Science at the University of München (1972) and became Associate Professor of the Ludwig-Maximilians-University of München in 1980, where she developed a working group in the history of life sciences and chemistry. B. Hoppe published 7 books and more than 200 papers on the history of sciences. She was a member of the editorial board of *History and Philosophy of Life Sciences* for 10 years and is now a member of the editorial board of *Archives Internationales d’Histoire des Sciences*. She is an Effective Member of the *International Academy for History of Science* and member of several national and international Societies for History of Sciences.