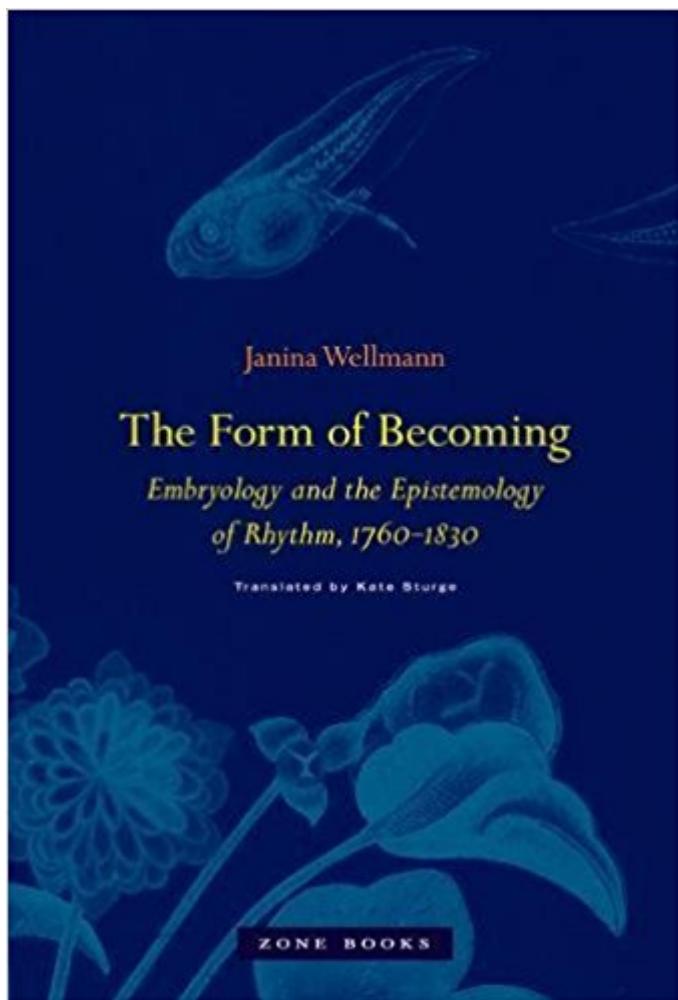


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# The Form Of Becoming: Embryology And The Epistemology Of Rhythm, 1760--1830



## Synopsis

In *The Form of Becoming* Janina Wellmann offers an innovative understanding of the emergence around 1800 of the science of embryology and a new notion of development, one based on the epistemology of rhythm. She argues that between 1760 and 1830, the concept of rhythm became crucial to many fields of knowledge, including the study of life and living processes. She juxtaposes the history of rhythm in music theory, literary theory, and philosophy with the concurrent turn in biology toward 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. With *The Form of Becoming*, Wellmann, a historian of science, has written the first systematic study of visualization in embryology. Embryological development circa 1800 was imagined through the pictorial technique of the series, still prevalent in the field today. Tracing the origins of the developmental series back to seventeenth-century instructional graphics for military maneuvers, dance, and craft work, *The Form of Becoming* reveals the constitutive role of rhythm and movement in the visualization of developing life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This beautifully written book is full of movement and insight. A daring and exquisite analysis of rhythm as episteme, it opens up new historical and philosophical fronts for accounts of time and change in art and science. Refusing today's tendency to separate 'art,' 'science,' and 'literature,' as detached from one another, Wellmann convincingly puts rhythm first, and traces development and

movement in science and culture without having to claim that one impacts or constructs the other, making it as pertinent to the contemporary moment as to the past it recounts. (Hannah Landecker, author of *Culturing Life: How Cells Became Technologies*) In a work of striking originality, historian Janina Wellmann rethinks the meaning of development circa 1800 in terms of rhythm. Casting her net wide, she draws on the aesthetics of verse and music, the sciences of botany and embryology, and the practices of fencing and dance to show how a new kind of natural law and a new kind of visualization in series captured the patterned flow of development of life forms, morphology in motion. (Lorraine Daston, author of *Objectivity*, cowritten with Peter Galison, *Things That Talk*, and *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750*, cowritten with Katharine Park) The Form of Becoming belongs somewhere on the bookshelf between Richard's *The Romantic Conception of Life* and Nyhardt's *Biology Takes Form*. In addition to providing new perspectives on the perception of time in embryonic development and in Enlightenment science, this fascinating volume should facilitate lively interdisciplinary seminars. (Scott Gilbert, author of *Developmental Biology*) In this remarkable volume, Janina Wellmann demonstrates that attention to rhythm was the vital bond connecting science and culture in the eighteenth century. This is history of science inflected by philosophy and literary and cultural series: science studies at its most intrepid. (Susan Merrill Squier, author of *Liminal Lives: Rethinking Biomedicine at the Boundaries of the Human*)

Janina Wellmann is a researcher at Leuphana Universität Lüneburg.

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