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»To be continued...«:

Seriality and Serialization in Interdisciplinary Perspective

- **What Happens Next: The Mechanics of Serialization. Graduate Conference at the University of Amsterdam, March 25–26, 2011.**

1. Seriality Studies: The Emergence of a Field

Seriality and serialization are increasingly central topics in the theoretical and historical study of literature and other media. Part of the reason, no doubt, is the widespread impression that serially produced and consumed forms of entertainment have in recent years become more ›sophisticated‹, more ›complex‹, or (in some other, more or less vaguely defined sense) just plain ›better‹ than the cheap, mass-produced wares from which they emerged. Narratively complex ›Quality TV‹ and the newly prestigious ›graphic novel‹, to take two prominent examples, are commonly perceived as significant artistic and intellectual advances over trashy soaps and pulpy comic books. Of course, the latter had entered the purview of academic interest in the wake of cultural studies, thus reversing long-standing and stubborn prejudices against such ›low‹ cultural forms (as enshrined in the so-called ›culture and civilization‹ tradition of Matthew Arnold and Leavisism, as well as the Frankfurt School's suspicion of the ›culture industry‹). On the whole, however, cultural studies was less interested in the *seriality of popular forms* than in the *popularity of serial forms*; that is, the largely formal matter of seriality was treated as more or less incidental, while the focus of research was characteristically directed towards understanding what kinds of (typically innovative, unforeseen, and subversive) things audiences were doing with mass-produced series (which themselves, due to the capitalist conditions of their production, continued to be regarded with suspicion for the most part).

Today, the perspective of cultural studies remains an influential means of approaching series and serial forms, but its basically oppositional outlook is increasingly challenged by other perspectives emerging in a wide array of disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts – perspectives, importantly, that focus *centrally* (and not just peripherally or incidentally) on forms of seriality and processes of serialization. If the perception, mentioned above, that series are somehow getting ›better‹ have contributed to this interest, and specifically to the feeling that serial entertainments don't have to be ›subverted‹ in order to be both enjoyed and taken seriously, the currently emerging studies of seriality are nevertheless not uncritically enamored of all things serial. Indeed, if the recent changes in serial forms and their media have attracted attention to seriality per se, the result has been an increased awareness of the crucial role played by serialized products, production processes, and consumption patterns in defining the categories of distinction (culture/civilization, high/low, commercial/popular) that structure elitist and populist approaches to culture alike. Accordingly, studies of seriality and serialization find themselves looking beyond the most recent developments in television, print, and digital media, for example, and instead asking much larger questions: for example, questions about the discursive construction and sociocultural negotiation of value in, through, and around serial forms; about the historical ties between modern popular serial entertainment and the serialized production forms that more generally characterize industrial and post-industrial arts and technologies; and about the specific roles of various medial (and inter- and/or trans-medial) configurations in shaping the narrative and aesthetic characteristics of serial enter-

tainments in particular and, more generally, the modern lifeworld that informs and is informed by them. At the same time, the opening of seriality studies onto this broad terrain of emphatically big questions allows for a reflexive refocusing of specific case studies, e.g. a re-thinking of the relation between the serialized novels and bound books of the nineteenth century, which may or may not anticipate the contemporary phenomena of collecting serial products into DVD box sets and graphic novels. The study of seriality and serialization today oscillates between small and grand, concrete and abstract; at its best, this new research is conducted in interdisciplinary settings, where exchanges amongst various perspectives and paradigms are facilitated by the fact that the shared object of study – not just series but *forms* of seriality and serialization – itself calls for methods that are inherently comparative and that alternate between the ›close-up‹ view of empirical and formal analyses on the one hand and ›wide-angle‹ theorizations of cultural, historical, and media-technical developments on the other.

2. Several Episodes in an Ongoing Series

As one index of these trends, or as evidence of the emergence of something like an interdisciplinary research field of seriality studies, we can point to a number of recent conferences devoted specifically to various aspects of seriality and serialization. One such conference, entitled »World Building: Seriality and History« (University of Florida, March 3–4, 2007), took comics as its main object while encouraging crossovers with the games and digital media-oriented sister conference »World Building: Space and Community« (University of Florida, March 1–2, 2007); accordingly, and apposite with influential views put forward by Henry Jenkins, seriality was approached as an integral component of transmedial constructions, the study of which is a necessarily interdisciplinary affair. More recently, a conference at the University of Zurich, »Serielle Formen/Serial Forms« (June 4–6, 2009),¹ approached the topic through the lens of film and television, but again aspired to more general theorizations of serial forms; the publication that emerged from the conference, *Serielle Formen: Von den frühen Film-Serials zu aktuellen Quality-TV- und Online-Serien* (edited by Robert Blanchet, Kristina Köhler, Tereza Smid, and Julia Zutavern), constitutes an important point of reference in the growing field of seriality studies. Finally, the DFG Research Unit »Ästhetik und Praxis populärer Serialität/Popular Seriality – Aesthetics and Practice« (headed by Frank Kelleter at the University of Göttingen) represents the most concerted effort, to date, to coordinate various disciplines' particular areas of expertise and combine cross-medial perspectives and comparisons into a coherent field of research. The research group, which includes scholars from American studies, German philology, cultural anthropology/European ethnology, empirical cultural studies, and media studies, recently held their inaugural conference (University of Göttingen, April 6–8, 2011), and a first publication is in the works.² Clearly, the interdisciplinary study of serial forms and processes is taking on a definite – though (in accordance with the unfinished nature of series) hardly final – form. This is research that is inherently ›to be continued...‹.

3. What Happens Next...

Picking up on this ongoing process by which seriality and serialization are coming to the fore of interdisciplinary efforts as a genuine field of research, the graduate conference »What Happens Next: The Mechanics of Serialization«, held March 25–26, 2011 at the University of Amsterdam, brought together a number of young researchers from a variety of fields and from universities across Europe and North America to discuss ongoing projects at various levels of completion. The presentations and discussions that followed, though diverse in their academic

orientations, theoretical outlooks, and motivations for studying seriality and serialization, collectively produced a remarkably coherent event, one that managed to constitute its object of study in such a way as to bridge the differences of historical and medial particulars without sacrificing a faithfulness to the concrete case. True to the potential of seriality studies as a genuinely interdisciplinary field of inquiry, the conference as a whole facilitated dialogue across disciplinary and methodological borders while maintaining a very high level of theoretical rigor and sophistication, constantly finding common points of reference without thereby simplifying or reducing to a least common denominator. Seriality and serialization, in other words, emerged as the focus of intellectual interactions that arrayed themselves in the manner of a network rather than a grid or system, where each node in the network, representing various disciplinary interests and approaches, maintained its specific difference from the others while undergoing modification through the gentle pressure of the network as a (fractured) whole. Seriality and serialization, as a result of these dynamics, revealed themselves in a special light: neither singular and univocally applicable across historical, cultural, and medial divides – in which case the suspicion of empty generalization would seem justified – nor so mired in specificity as to be wholly recalcitrant to generalization – and on that basis, dialogue – serial forms revealed themselves as something worth talking about precisely *because* they challenge disciplinary compartmentalization and transdisciplinary homogenization alike. At the general level of discursive dynamics, therefore, the conference proved that a true interdisciplinarity, which speaks across but does not eliminate perspectival differences, is both the necessary basis and the ultimate reward of any future seriality studies.

Demonstrating this is a great achievement in its own right, but it is worth looking closer at the particular topics of discussion at the two-day conference, which was expertly organized by **Rob Allen** and **Thijs van den Berg** (both of whom are currently completing doctoral work at the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Amsterdam), because, or so I conjecture, we may see here an intimation of the shape of things to come in the field. The conference title, »What Happens Next«, is in this respect doubly appropriate; though referring proximally to serial forms' structural creation, frustration, deferral, and eventual fulfillment of anticipation in readers, viewers, or other media users, we may read the title in a self-reflexive manner as well: as a forum for young researchers to present scholarship that is taking shape simultaneously with, and as a part of, the emergence of the field of seriality and serialization studies, this conference may very well have been an indication of ›what happens next‹ – i.e. an indication of the shape and direction that the still germinal field might take in the coming years.

4. Day One: The Historical Bracket of Inquiry and its Unruly Object

Mark W. Turner, Professor of Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Literature at King's College, London, set the stage with his keynote, »The Everyday Life of the Serial«, and deftly defined the broad historical (and plurimedial) scope of the conference by provocatively reframing the pervasive nineteenth-century »culture of seriality« (as Turner put it) in light of the large-scale digitization projects (such as Google's) that are currently underway. Through a coalition of commercial and academic interests, these projects promise to capture virtually the whole of print culture – including serialized stories and ephemera of bygone days – and to put it at our fingertips, making it readily searchable. Recognizing the benefits for researchers, who in many cases could experience an exhilarating liberation from their enslavement in the archives, Turner also pointed to a real and unprecedented sort of challenge here, especially for literary scholars and historians concerned with the explosion of serial forms in the nineteenth century. Taking up a thought experiment formulated by Umberto Eco, who once asked what

the cultural historians of the year 3000 A.D. would make of a single episode of *Columbo* if that were the only surviving piece of serial television left from our era, Turner ingeniously reversed the question and asked: what will *we*, who are increasingly in a position to survey an overwhelming sea of digitized text, be able to make of the single episode or installment of a series when we have not only the whole series but nearly the entire textual production of a culture before us? Eco's point was, of course, that an episode of a series does not make sense in isolation, but Turner has discovered a new problem: »What if, instead of focusing on how to ›read‹ the single object in the absence of the whole, we faced the newly glaring problem of how to read the vastness of the whole, without quite sacrificing the singular object?«

More than just a methodological problem, Turner's question recalls also the give and take between the abstract and the concrete, or the general and the particular, that conditions the interdisciplinary field of seriality studies as a whole, while linking it specifically to the historical moment – our historical moment – in which the field of study emerges. The simultaneity of digital contents, in contrast to the sequential production and consumption of serialized print, marks a real change in the constitution of serial forms themselves, and as a media-historical change, this transformation challenges us to confront a difficult set of epistemological and ontological questions: how do the media through which we access history relate to the phenomena that we take as our objects of study? Is it the current media-induced revision of seriality itself that has caused us to ›discover‹ seriality as an important topos of interdisciplinary study? Whatever we may decide about these questions, media changes and transformations would seem, on the one hand, to stimulate serial production (as well as reflection on it), due to serial forms' ability to bridge transitional moments by repeating the familiar and varying it with the novel or the innovative; on the other hand, however, media transitions simultaneously transform these bridging devices, significantly revising the functional constitutions of serial forms (and our ideas about them), which are hardly immune to change. In the present case, digitization promises to change our views of the nineteenth century's ›culture of seriality‹ by bringing to our attention the predominance of serially published encyclopedias, national histories, Bibles, Shakespeare editions, cookbooks and instructional manuals, and a slew of non-fiction productions that are at odds with our associations of seriality with narrative fiction. On the basis of this mass of serialized material increasingly coming to light, Turner concluded his talk with the observation that serial forms are often much »messier«, more »unruly«, than they appear in hindsight, as the unfiltered results of indiscriminant digitization reveal. Linking past and present, this implies, or so I suggest, a special challenge for our own culture of seriality: having forgotten how to filter, discriminate, or simply forget, how will we cope with a persistent messiness that cannot be swept under the rug? Is this perhaps the basic problem to which contemporary studies of seriality respond? Whatever the case may be, the various panels that followed Turner's keynote were certainly attuned to the variety, non-uniformity, and »messiness« of serialized forms underlying any attempt to generalize about them.

4.1. The Nineteenth Century and Beyond

The first panel, on »Victorian Serialization«, was devoted to the earlier part of the broad historical bracket opened up by Turner's talk, commencing with a paper by **Maria Damkjaer** (PhD student at King's College), titled »Domestic Time: Victorian Serialisation and the Home«. Focusing on *Beeton's Book of Household Management*, a twenty-four issue publication (1859–1861) later bound as a book (1861) and then re-released in a twelve issue version, Damkjaer followed Turner's plea for an expanded view of seriality extending beyond the realm of fictional narrative; her talk concentrated on the interplay between a serialized instructional publication and the serial structures that it instituted in Victorian homes. Especially

intriguing, in this regard, was Damkjaer's elucidation of the way that Mrs. Beeton's many recipes (themselves often cut mid-sentence between serialized installments of the *Book*) instituted a system of repetition and variation – the basic stuff of seriality itself – through their dependency on a set of standard stocks and broths, to be prepared beforehand and garnished and embellished as needed; accordingly, Damkjaer astutely observed, everything was made to revolve around a delicate network of varying preparation and decay times, or variable and overlapping periodicities, thus instituting a complex and ongoing serial temporality in the well-managed Victorian home.

The next presentation in the panel, »Shifting Gears, Shifting Places: Mobility and Sense of Place in Margaret Oliphant's *Salem Chapel*« by **Julie Bizzotto** (PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London), turned from temporal to spatial categories and returned to the world of fiction. Bizzotto argued that Oliphant's serialized novel unsettles the distinction between realism and sensationalism, which she related to the liminal position of the central female character, who occupies the threshold between spatially and socially circumscribed categories of (moral, class, and other sorts of) distinction. Indeed, Bizzotto's observations might be related more generally to certain topoi that seem to preoccupy serial forms: from Rodolphe in Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, to the master detective in Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes tales, the ape-man of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan novels (and the films they inspired), up to the figures that populate superhero comic books and their cinematic re-imaginings – liminal or hybrid as well as double or secret identities broker traffic between otherwise separated, disparate times and spaces (between the nobility and working-class society, between a criminal underground and the world of law-abiding citizens, between human civilization and an untamed, bestial, technological or otherwise nonhuman realm). Crucially, the serial forms of narration that employ such go-betweens are themselves also caught up in a structurally similar form of traffic: serial forms are (medially) mobile forms, discretely packaged and consumed in a variety of times and spaces (at home, on the subway, etc.), out of which episodic contacts with readers are constructed overarching spatiotemporal continuities or diegetic universes (which, however, regularly defer completion and resist coherence). As in the case of Mrs. Beeton's recipes, Mrs. Oliphant's *Salem Chapel* therefore also points the way to a potential bridge that would connect the textuality of serialized forms with the material-experiential realm of their consumption.

Finally, a means of transferring these matters from the networks of text-and-consumption to those of text-and-production was indicated by the panel's last presentation, »Serials as Individuals-in-Relation: Revising the Author Function in Nineteenth-Century Novel Studies«, by **Erin Beard** (PhD candidate at Michigan State University). Beard's was a plea for recognizing the differences between serialized fictions, in this case serialized novels from the nineteenth century, and the bound volumes into which they were subsequently collected. Arguing that the imputation of a coherent authorial instance both distorts the serialized product's relation to its producer (where an imagined teleological bond smoothes over real discontinuities) and therefore masks the once open and unsettled relations between serial parts and wholes, Beard's argument recalled Turner's thought experiment, in which individual parts become virtually invisible in a sea of digitized text, as well as opening more local questions about the effects of collecting series into DVD box sets and graphic novels, for example.

4.2. Serial Structures

The second panel, »The Mechanics of Serialization«, was, as its title suggests, organized according to a structural rather than historical logic. That is, the panel's two papers focused not on a single moment or era but sought to uncover, through comparison and contrast, various

›mechanics‹ of serialization. My own paper (**Shane Denson**, »Rethinking the Serial-Queen Melodrama: Serial Narration and Medial Self-Reflexivity in Transitional-Era Cinema«) focused on film serials of the 1910s, taking *The Perils of Pauline* as its prime example, and argued that seriality was crucial to navigating the uncertain transition from the early, spectacle-based ›cinema of attractions‹ (as Tom Gunning has famously termed it) to the narrative-centered cinema of classical Hollywood. Extrapolating from the transitional-era film serial's quasi-didactic function, whereby serialized repetition was used as a means of demonstrating filmic narration (and thus both narrating a story and *showing off* the medium's narrative capacities at once), I argued for the existence of a more general ›nexus‹ between seriality and mediality, by virtue of which serial forms track media transformations and thus fulfill a media-historical function.

The second paper, »I'll know more later: *CSI*, the Police Procedural, and Post-9/11 Society«, delivered by **Mareike Jenner** (PhD candidate at the University of Aberystwyth), leaped forward by a century and switched from cinema to the medium of television to reflect from a very different perspective on the significance of serial forms. At stake in this case was the return, in the early twenty-first century, to a more or less classical and episodically closed procedural narrative structure in shows like *CSI*, which has taken place alongside, and in a certain tension with, the much-celebrated rise of narratively complex ›Quality TV‹ and the demands it makes on viewers with its ongoing serial structures. In contrast to the latter, the new police procedurals are reassuring in their formulaic structures, repeated week after week and requiring little specific knowledge of previous episodes. Jenner suggested a link between the reassurance of the procedural's closure and the uncertainties and fears felt by many in the post-9/11 world, which are soothed by the familiar display of a highly professional and reliable team investigation, always leading to truth and justice. As another perspective, which would link Jenner's argument with my own about the nexus of seriality and mediality, proceduralism might be seen also as a revival of the »operational aesthetic« that Gunning sees at work in the cinema of attractions (and which, in a slightly different mode, television scholar Jason Mittell sees at work in narratively complex shows like *Lost*). That is, the forensic science put on display in shows like *CSI*, *Bones*, or *Crossing Jordan* is, apart from being a means to truth and justice (and narrative closure), also an opportunity for the display of technical operations, linked at once to the televisual medium (which is undergoing change in the wake of digital animation techniques and the larger shifts in the media landscape, and thus itself in need of reassurance at a time of transition), as well as to the broader explosion of technologies in our quotidian lifeworlds (where the sheer operation of touchscreens, 3D technologies, and other innovative gadgets and techniques fascinate us at least as much as these technologies' telic functionalities). From either perspective – the ideological or the ›mediological‹ – serial forms, which alternate unceasingly between the continuous and the discontinuous, can be clearly linked to the negotiation of change and the uncertainties of transition.

4.3. Making it Graphic

In the third panel, »Graphic Novels«, attention was devoted specifically to this young medium while, again, connections were sought with broader issues of seriality and serialization. First up was **Dan Hasseler-Forest**, who recently completed his PhD on superheroes in post-9/11 popular culture at the University of Amsterdam, where he teaches media studies and English literature. His presentation, »Lacanian Zombies: Patriarchal Discourse in *The Walking Dead*« offered an intriguing look at seriality through the lens of a comparative perspective that was at once cross-medial (comparing a graphic novel series with its televisual adaptation, and set against the larger background of zombie films), ideology-critical (drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis and its applications in film theory, while probing its relevance to other media),

and aware of the sociocultural constructions of distinction that take place specifically around practices of serialization (e.g. in the artistic prestige accorded to graphic novels as compared with comic books, recalling again the discussions of nineteenth-century serialized versus bound-volume novels).

Erin la Cour (PhD candidate at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam) followed up on this last point especially in her paper, »Queering the Medium: The Graphic Novel's Refusal in Arts Discourse«, which offered a sophisticated argument linking the aesthetic valorization of the graphic novel with recent media-theoretical and philosophical reflections on self-reflexivity as a site of struggle over distinctions between art and commercial ›kitsch‹ (with particular reference to Rosalind Krauss). According to la Cour, popular serial forms in a variety of media, from Victorian serialized novels to comic books, display a high degree of medial self-reflexivity and paradoxically fulfill related requirements for inclusion in the category ›art‹, while graphic novels, which are assimilable neither to ›comics‹ nor to ›literature‹, offer a deconstruction of sorts – a fundamental sort of ›queering‹ – of these medial discourses. Together, Hasseler-Forest's and la Cour's approaches invite reflection on the graphic novel as a representative of the inherent ›queerness‹ or ›messiness‹ of serial forms, which oscillate between and unsettle social, axiological, medial, and epistemological frames and boundaries alike.

5. Day Two: Proliferating Perspectives

Kicking off the second day of the conference, **Joyce Goggin**, current Acting Chair of English Literature at the University of Amsterdam and former Head of Studies for the Humanities at Amsterdam University College, delivered a keynote titled »»Is it true blonds have more fun?«: Serialization, *Mad Men*, and Feminist Humour«. Taking the highly acclaimed TV series *Mad Men* as her focal point of reference, Goggin raised difficult questions about the formal properties of contemporary series, their means of communication and the identity of their messages, their target audiences, and the frameworks of their reception. Goggin's point of entry was the observation that *Mad Men* offers, or so it would seem, a relentless critique of mainstream misogyny, so that it is natural to attribute to the show a certain feminist sensibility (and perhaps a feminist politics as well); on the other hand, however, the series is popular also amongst viewers who have little sympathy for feminism (and who may or may not relate to the chauvinism displayed in the show). Such phenomena are, of course, familiar from discussions of ›postmodern‹ television, where shows such as *The Simpsons* manage to speak in several tongues at once, addressing a variety of disparate audiences with messages, allusions, and references that speak to their various interests and areas of knowledge. In the case of *Mad Men*, as Goggin demonstrated, this plurality is tied to the show's own form of seriality, which involves a serialized reminiscence of a nostalgically recalled past, a past that audiences know, whether first hand or not, through the mediations of the serialized television entertainments of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the advertisements that ›interrupted‹ them. Focusing on the men responsible for these ads, and for the construction of popular images of the time, *Mad Men* creates its atmosphere of ›authenticity‹ by drawing together serial television's ›inside‹ (1950s and 1960s fictional television programs) and its ›outside‹ (the commercial breaks), thus employing two instances or means of the (clearly ideological) construction of reality as the very basis for the show's claim to a sort of realism. Through these contortions, serial television observes and comments on serial television, opening up loops exploited and carried further in the discourses of bloggers and online communities (who collectively expose the show's anachronisms and other ›inauthentic‹ minutiae), thereby offering a wide spectrum of docking points for viewers: various ideological, nostalgic, debunking, media-reflexive, and

other perspectives for viewing. Again, the ›messiness‹ of serial forms exceeds even the complexity praised in recent television, as it accommodates not only the critical and progressive sensibilities that we, as academics interested in popular culture, would often like to see reflected in our favorite series but allows for minglings and chance encounters with ways of looking that both titillate and embarrass, questioning the sincerity (or »authenticity«) of political correctness and indicting narcissisms that we seek to reinforce – serially, week after week, through our investments in serial forms.

5.1. Keep Reading!

The first panel of the day, on the topic of »Reading Practices«, opened with a presentation by **Ernst van den Hemel** (who is in the final stages of completing his PhD at the University of Amsterdam): »The Man of Steel and *Homo Robustus*: Reformation Figures of Serialized Reading and the Superhero«. Van den Hemel's wonderfully iconoclastic talk applied insights from Umberto Eco's reflections on seriality, formulated with an eye to *Superman* comics, to sixteenth century reformation theology and the serialized reading practices it aimed to institute. In particular, van den Hemel elaborated on the links between the writings of Calvin and other reformists (which typically began as brief accounts of dogma but grew cumulatively over the course of years through a series of embellishments, explanations, and repetitions) and the concomitant diffusion of print across early-modern culture, which unhinged textuality from the certainty of scriptural truth. In connection with the theological conviction that human mediators had no place in the relations between God and the individual, who either is or is not a member of the elect, and about which matter one can do little but must nevertheless cultivate the »firm and sure knowledge« of faith, reading and (serially) re-reading becomes a means – or an ordeal – for ›steeling‹ oneself and transcending the fallen temporality of the secular, quotidian world: for becoming, in other words, something like ›the man of steel‹, Superman, who saves the world in each new issue, and who transcends his secular, anonymous identity (Clark Kent), thereby offering hope for us but forever deferring its fulfillment. The world, or our faith, will always be threatened anew, to which both Calvin and Superman alike advise: Don't give up! Above all, keep reading!

Similarly, though for very different reasons, Scheherazade was compelled to keep telling stories, night after night, and her tales have kept generations of readers reading them. In her presentation, »Serialising the Arabian Nights in Nineteenth-Century Britain«, **Melissa Dickson** (PhD student at King's College, London) turned to the proliferation of the tales in a variety of media, especially magazines and other cheap print media, in early nineteenth-century Britain. Dickson argued, quite rightly, that more attention is needed to the time of reading itself, which at this historical juncture became a serialized process in its own right – a regular setting aside of duties, mirrored in the tale's own famous framing story – through which personal and public spaces were mediated, the boundaries between them negotiated, and transformations of them worked out. In all, the panel brought home the need for more reflection on the material settings, embodied practices, and social motivations for the serialized reading practices implied by serial texts.

5.2. Of Serial Numbers, IDs, and Such

The following panel, »Serialization and Identity«, problematized the relations between seriality and a variety of forms of identity and identification. First, **Hanneke Stuit** (PhD student at the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam) presented »The Ubuntu Strategy: Seriality and Intersubjective Relations«, in which she took up Benedict Anderson's notions of ›bound‹ and ›unbound seriality‹, which Anderson relates to the con-

struction of ›imagined communities‹ through media such as census-taking (leading to bounded territories and exclusive ethnic identities alike) and the more democratic, iterable media of newspapers and photography (producing basically open, inclusive groupings such as the nation). Taking into account Partha Chatterjee's critique, according to which bound and unbound serialities are not separable but come always as a sort of package deal (so that nationalism, the virtues of which Anderson praises, and ethnic politics, the vices of which he rejects, are inextricably tied together), Stuit discussed the concept of ›Ubuntu‹, an African philosophical concept according to which identity is formed through intersubjective relations or, as it has been expressed, ›a person is a person through other persons‹ – thus a concept that aligns quite well with Anderson's unbound seriality and the iterability of identity and relation upon which it is based, but takes it beyond the level of the nation to that of humanity itself. However, as Stuit demonstrated with reference to a series of South African television commercials leading up to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, even the radically inclusive, unbound seriality of Ubuntu is susceptible to appropriations that ›bind‹ it to a closed group identity through representations linking it with exclusive groupings (inflected by vectors of ethnicity, class, and gender) and their ›Others‹.

Next, **Rob Allen** (co-organizer of the conference and PhD student at the University of Amsterdam) looked at a very different issue of identity in his paper, ›Boz vs. Dickens: Serialization, Pseudonyms, and Authorial Identity‹. Against the background of the common assumption that serialized forms of fiction have always been valued less than the high-cultural form of the self-contained novel, and that pseudonyms allowed writers to make a living with more or less ephemeral popular fiction while the author's real name was reserved for ›Literature‹ as contained in books rather than story papers, Allen made the important historical argument that the situation was far more complicated, as demonstrated by the relation of Charles Dickens to his pseudonym Boz. As Allen pointed out, Dickens's identity was revealed as early as 1837, while the name Boz continued to be used until 1844; no longer ›fooling‹ anyone or hiding the author's identity, the mask of the pseudonym must have served a different function. According to Allen, the name Boz indeed came to invoke incompleteness, a quicker pace or periodicity, while Dickens brought closure and connection with the tradition of English literature, which moves at a much slower (and more ›serious‹, more conservative) pace; but when Dickens began putting his own name on serial fiction, he implicitly claimed a place for it in that tradition, anticipating the postmodernists, one might say, by a century and a half.

Finally, **Nur Özgenalp** (PhD candidate at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam) rounded out the panel with her paper, ›The Lightness of Being Somebody Else‹, which returned to Lacanian theory and its application to film theory (e.g. in the work of Christian Metz), this time asking whether the seriality of television (and new media) was able to strengthen the bonds of ›suture‹ that tie spectators to diegetic worlds. Looking at American and Turkish television series, Özgenalp considered a range of theories, including Linda Mulvey's famous interventions and Carol Clover's identification of horror films' ›final girl‹ figures, and set them in relation to empirical surveys of spectator identifications. Overall, the panel outlined the range of identities/identifications – personal as well as social, authorial and readerly, subjectively chosen or imposed from without – that are collectively and simultaneously at stake in engagements with serialized representations.

5.3. Digital Series

Lastly, the conference's final panel, ›Computer Games and Serialization‹, brought the discussion up to the present day and to the cutting edge of medial technologies, thus finally closing the historical bracket opened by Mark Turner in his talk the previous morning – or, alter-

natively, setting the stage for more to come. **Erinc Salor** (PhD candidate at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam) presented his paper, »That's not how it happened in my story!<: Immersion and Expansion in the Multi-Media Serial of *Mass Effect*«, which looked at the complex activity of ›world-building‹ carried out across a variety of media (in this case, a series of video games, a series of novels, and a series of comics), set in relation to concepts of immersion (Ernest Adams's three types), interactivity (Eric Zimmerman's four modes), narrative (Marie-Laure Ryan's narratological interventions), and transmediality (Henry Jenkins's notion of transmedia storytelling). Salor outlined a variety of complications that arise in the overlapping serialities of *Mass Effect*'s plurimedial articulation, including the emergence, resolution, and deferral of conflicts between back-story continuities and the discontinuity introduced through interactive play.

Taking a different, more industry-oriented perspective, **David B. Nieborg** (PhD student at the University of Amsterdam) explored serialization in relation to the production and marketing of big-budget video games (so-called AAA games) in his paper, »The Inevitable Sequel: The Anatomy of the Next-Gen Console Game«. In this context, seriality or serialization emerges between what Nieborg referred to as the »techno-economic logic« of cyclically upgraded console hardware and the »unfinished commodity« structure of AAA software, which due to high production costs leads to the phenomenon of »formatting« or standardization along the lines of previously successful games and past investments, as well as the franchising of intellectual properties and a »branched serialization« unique to video games. The latter is based on the modularity of the underlying game engines, which can be outfitted with a variety of contents, and are patchable, upgradeable, and updateable. Branched serialization, according to Nieborg, is expressed in expansion packs and map packs that bring new levels or other content into an existing game, resulting in a serialized logic of »flow publishing« according to which a variety of minor expansions are released between major releases, thus combining and layering linear and non-linear or piggybacking forms of serialization. Together, Salor's and Nieborg's excellent talks outline just a few of the possible interfaces between the young field of game studies and the still germinal one of seriality studies.

6. Conclusion, or: Just Getting Started...

The last sentence should give us pause. In what sense can game studies be related to seriality studies? And in what relation does seriality studies stand to film studies, media studies, or cultural studies? Throughout this text, I have referred to ›seriality studies‹ as if it exists, whereas this is in fact debatable. Moreover, even if it does exist – and in part my use of the term has been an attempt, performatively, to *make* it exist – seriality studies' mode of existence must be judged very different from any of those other ›studies‹ listed above. What, then, should seriality studies aim to be?

Consider cultural studies, with its achievement (an uncomfortable achievement, for some) of quasi-disciplinary status; certainly this cannot be a model for seriality studies, for seriality and serialization are at once too specialized – indeed, certain aspects are rightly subsumed under cultural studies – and, at the same time, too diverse, too ›messy‹, to be treated from a single (quasi-)disciplinary perspective. Or take again game studies, which wavers at present between interdisciplinary cooperations (and conflicts) and a model of disciplinary autonomy (more or less according to the example of film studies). The fact that (some) games scholars can aspire to disciplinary independence in the first place is only possible on the basis of the specific differences that games as a medium have in relation to literature, film, comics, television, and so on. But seriality studies, which I have proposed here as an inherently interdisciplinary, com-

parative, and plurimedial field of study, has no such determinate media object: serial forms exist in all media, and understanding them therefore requires the expertise of literary scholars, film scholars, and game scholars alike, to name just a few; moreover, as I have argued, discussions of seriality genuinely profit from the differences of methodology and theoretical outlook that these scholars' disciplines bring to the table.

Ultimately, though, comparison with game studies might still be helpful in thinking the future of seriality studies. How did game studies become thinkable (if not universally recognized as a legitimate field of study)? Apart from the rise of computer games as a major social, cultural, and economic force, a conceptual change had to take place as well. The game had to be discovered as a medium. Similarly, perhaps we need to learn to see *the series as a medium in its own right* – not, of course, in the apparatusic sense in which radio, television, and film are media, but in the sense that series (in a broad sense) enable *otherwise impossible mediations between* those media, between social and cultural formations, discourses, and practices, between spatial and temporal distances in and between both diegetic and non-diegetic realms, and, as the conference »What Happens Next« amply demonstrated, between and among a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. Seriality studies should not, then, seek disciplinary autonomy, and in this regard it is fortunate that it would have little chance of success. For the promise of seriality studies, above all, lies in the constitution of non-homogeneous networks, arrayed amongst non-identical participants and perspectives engaged in non-univocal dialogues that, despite their multivalence or precisely because of it, have an incredible power to generate further dialogue, thus instituting a self-serializing logic or an *Eigendynamik* of seriality. Seriality and serialization, in this possible future, constitute media in a double sense: they are the (inherently plurimedial) media objects of analysis and dialogue, and they are the very medium or milieu in and through which dialogue takes place. Constituting itself in this medium *as* a serial undertaking, the future of seriality studies remains open-ended and undecided. As the fascinating set of papers delivered by the diverse group of young scholars assembled in Amsterdam suggests, however, we are right to regard this question of the serial future(s) of seriality studies with suspense and excitement, as we wait to see ›what happens next...‹.

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Notes

¹ See Alexander Starre's conference report in the online edition of the *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft*: <<http://www.zfmedienwissenschaft.de/?TID=9>>.

² It should be noted that I am a member of the Göttinger research group, in which context I am working on the project »Serielle Figuren im Medienwechsel/Serial Figures and Media Change« (with Ruth Mayer).

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