

Introduction: Ludic Seriality, Digital Seriality

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Seriality and the digital are key concepts for an understanding of many current forms, texts, and technologies of media, and they are implicated in much broader media-historical trajectories as well. Beyond the forms and functions of specific cultural artifacts, they are increasingly central to our contemporary global media ecology. Surprisingly, though, relatively few attempts have been made at thinking the digital and the serial together, as intimately connected perspectives on media.

This is precisely the task of the present issue of *Eludamos*. On the one hand, the papers collected here interrogate the serial conditions, forms, and effects of digital culture; on the other hand, they question the role of the digital as technocultural embodiment, determinant, or matrix for serialized media aesthetics and practices. The special issue thus brings together heretofore isolated perspectives and orientations, deriving from studies of new media culture on the one hand (cf. Manovich 2001, Jenkins 2006) and from the emerging scholarship on seriality on the other (cf. Kelleter 2012, Allen and van den Berg 2014). Through this encounter, we hope to shed light on some of the key developments germane to a cultural, media-theoretical, and media-historical (or media-archaeological) assessment of serialization and digitalization as processes central to our increasingly ludic media environments.

According to German media theorist Jens Schröter, the analog/digital divide is *the* “key media-historical and media-theoretical distinction of the second half of the twentieth century” (Schröter 2004, 9, *our translation*). And while this assessment is widely accepted as a relatively uncontroversial account of the most significant media transformation in recent history, the task of evaluating the distinction’s inherent epistemological problems is all the more fraught with difficulty (see Hagen 2002, Pias 2003, Schröter 2004). Be that as it may, since the 1990s at the latest, virtually any attempt to address the cultural and material specificity of contemporary media culture has inevitably entailed some sort of (implicit or explicit) evaluation of this key distinction’s historical significance, thus giving rise to characterizations of the analog/digital divide as caesura, upheaval, or even revolution (Glaubitz et al. 2011). Seen through the lens of such theoretical histories, the technical and especially visual media that shaped the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (photography, film, television) typically appear today as the *objects* of contemporary digitization processes, i.e. as visible manifestations (or remnants) of a historical transition from an analog (or industrial) to a digital era (Freyermuth and Gotto 2013). Conversely, despite its analog pre-history today’s digital computer has primarily been addressed as the *medium* of such digitization processes – or, in another famous account, as the end point of media history itself (Kittler 1986).

The case of digital games (as a software medium) is similar to that of the computer as a hardware medium: although the differences and similarities between digital games and older media were widely discussed in the context of the so-called

narratology-versus-ludology debate (Eskelinen 2001; Juul 2001; Murray 1997, 2004; Ryan 2006), only marginal attention was paid in these debates to the media-historical significance of the analog/digital distinction itself. Moreover, many game scholars have tended to ontologize the computer game to a certain extent and to treat it as a central form or expression of digital culture, rather than tracing its complex historical emergence and its role in brokering the transition from analog to digital (significant exceptions like Pias 2002 notwithstanding). Other media-historiographical approaches, like Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation (1999), allow us to situate the digital game within a more capacious history of popular-technical media, but such accounts relate primarily to the representational rather than the operative level of the game, so that the digital game's "ergodic" form (Aarseth 1999) remains largely unconsidered.

Against this background, we would like to suggest an alternative angle from which to situate and theorize the digital game as part of a larger media history (and a broader media ecology), an approach that attends to both the representational level of visible surfaces/interfaces and the operative level of code and algorithmic form: Our suggestion is to look at forms and processes of seriality/serialization as they manifest themselves in digital games and gaming cultures, and to focus on these phenomena as a means to understand both the continuities and the discontinuities that mark the transition from analog to digital media forms and our ludic engagements with them. Ultimately, we propose, the computer game simultaneously occupies a place in a long history of popular seriality (which stretches from pre-digital serial literature, film, radio, and television, to contemporary transmedia franchises) while it also instantiates novel forms of a *specifically digital type of seriality* (cf. Denson and Jahn-Sudmann 2013). By grappling with the formal commensurabilities and differences that characterize digital games' relations to pre-digital (and non-ludic) forms of medial seriality, we therefore hope to contribute to a more nuanced account of the historical process (rather than event) of the analog/digital divide's emergence.

Overall, as we argued in the last issue of *Eludamos*, seriality is a central and multifaceted but largely neglected dimension of popular computer and video games. Seriality is a factor not only in explicitly marked game series (with their sequels, prequels, remakes, and other types of continuation), but also within games themselves (e.g. in their formal-structural constitution as an iterative series of levels, worlds, or missions). Serial forms of variation and repetition also appear in the transmedial relations between games and other media (e.g. expansive serializations of narrative worlds across the media of comics, film, television, and games, etc.). Additionally, we can grasp the relevance of games as a paradigm example of digital seriality when we think of the ways in which the technical conditions of the digital challenge the temporal procedures and developmental logics of the analog era, e.g. because once successively appearing series installments are increasingly available for immediate, repeated, and non-linear forms of consumption. And while this media logic of the database (cf. Manovich 2001, p. 218) can be seen to transform all serial media forms in our current age of digitization and media convergence, a careful study of the interplay between real-time interaction and serialization in digital games promises to shed light on the larger media-aesthetic questions of the transition to a digital media environment. Finally, digital games are not only symptoms and expressions of this transition, but also agents in the larger networks through which it has been navigated and negotiated; serial forms, which inherently track the

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