

De Gendt, Anne-Marie, and Alicia C. Montoya (éds). *La pensée sérielle, du Moyen Age aux Lumières* (2018)

Beverly J. Evans

Number 118, Spring 2021

Infox, Fake News et « Nouvelles fauses » : perspectives historiques
(XVe – XXe siècles)

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081096ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081096ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Department of French, Dalhousie University

ISSN

0711-8813 (print)

2562-8704 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Evans, B. (2021). Review of [De Gendt, Anne-Marie, and Alicia C. Montoya (éds). *La pensée sérielle, du Moyen Age aux Lumières* (2018)]. *Dalhousie French Studies*, (118), 207–211. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081096ar>

reproduites en annexe) ce livre fait revivre un moment curieux de l'histoire de France et permet de mieux comprendre l'état d'esprit qui a pu mener, une trentaine d'années plus tard, au retour au pouvoir d'un Napoléon de pacotille, exploitateur habile du souvenir de son (prétendu) grand ancêtre.

Vittorio Frigerio

Dalhousie University

De Gendt, Anne-Marie, and Alicia C. Montoya (éds). *La pensée sérielle, du Moyen Age aux Lumières*. Cahiers de recherche des instituts néerlandais de langue et de littérature françaises. Vol. 65. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018. 340 p.

Devoted to exploring the discursive phenomenon of the series, *La pensée sérielle* comprises brief notices about the authors, an introduction, and fourteen essays. The collection is divided into three parts, each of which reflects both a thematic approach and a chronological one. Although not mentioned in the introduction, the research in question would appear to be connected with a 2012 conference at the University of Groningen on "Serial Thinking, from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment" that the editors organized. Chapter 1, "Penser la sérialité, de l'antiquité aux XVIII^e siècle," stands on its own and provides a critical overview of the subject. All of the essays include detailed footnotes and a substantial bibliography. The objective of the volume is to elucidate what De Gendt describes as the desire to assign order to reality: "Pour donner l'ordre à l'univers, le Moyen Age développe une nette prédilection pour la pensée sérielle. Des catégories mentales telles que les quatre éléments, les cinq sens, les sept vices et vertus, sont organisées en séries ou listes finies [...]. Ces structures stables et closes permettent de structurer la pensée et d'organiser la réalité" (279). Given the time span from the Middle Ages through the Enlightenment, it is unlikely that most scholars would be intimately familiar with all of the works and related theories on which the contributors focus. Therefore, the goal of the present commentary will be to assist readers in identifying which chapters pertain significantly to their own interests.

At the beginning of Chapitre 1, Nuzzo states the purpose of his essay as follows: "Le présent essai aspire à contribuer à une clarification conceptuelle, ainsi qu'à une possible mise en perspective historiographique, de la pensée sérielle, ceci afin de rendre possible une définition succincte des problématiques essentielles de la sérialité historique et naturelle au XVIII^e siècle" (15). To this end, he presents a useful outline of the principal types of "sérialité"—forte et faible, platonico-pythagoricienne, historique et naturelle—that includes ample reference to pertinent philosophical and historical trends from antiquity to the Enlightenment. Nuzzo's commentary on the series according to Ancient Greek thought highlights the dynamism inherent in the concept: "Le terme de série' (*seirá*) révèle alors toute la singularité de sa signification." Quoting an article by Charles about Proclus, he continues, "Une série, en effet, n'est pas caractérisée par les termes, ou le statut ontologique des termes qu'elle englobe, mais par le *mouvement* grâce auquel une monade engendre une multiplicité qui trouve en elle son origine et sa fin" (28)². Thus, *mouvement*, or what is often referred to as "*mouvance*," accounts for the burgeoning of variations and diverse configurations of series.

Partie 1, "Pensée sérielle au Moyen Age, de la tradition chrétienne aux listes profanes," begins with Creation in Chapitre 2 ["L'Origine du monde l'épreuve de la série: variations sur l'hexamaëron (XII^e-XIII^e siècles)"], remains in the biblical realm in Chapitre 3 ("Les Recueils de distinctions bibliques et leur structure: quelques réflexions"), moves

2 Nuzzo quotes Annick Charles, "Analogie et Pensée sérielle chez Proclus," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 23 (1969), 86-87.

on to connect the biblical with the musical in Chapitres 4 and 5 (“Cithares à géométrie variable dans les exégèses médiévales des *Psaumes* ou comment une pensée sérielle crée un instrument de musique” and “*Musica et Natura* dans les manuscrits illuminés des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles”), and terminates with Chapter 6’s study of the Nine Worthies (“Les Neuf Preux: vie d’une liste à la fin du Moyen Age”). Commenting on the Hexameron, the six days enumerated in Genesis when God was creating the universe, Deschelle explains how medieval thought used this series as an intellectual and mystical means for man to access the conscience of the Cosmos: “La série des six jours a pour but de faire accéder l’homme à la conscience du Cosmos” (42). Nonetheless, this series took on a certain plasticity as theologians sought correlations between its six-day structure and other series, such as the Six Ages of the World (formulated by Augustine) and the four Classical elements. In the final analysis, the Hexameron does not lead to a complete understanding of the Cosmos, which transcends human faculties (66). Ventura, in Chapter 3, delves into the genre of *distinctiones biblicae*, alphabetical lists, or “dictionaries,” upon which preachers relied in writing sermons, much as they also consulted *summae*, *exempla*, and concordances. The author focuses on three 13th-century *Distinctiones*, by Nicolas de Gorran, Maurice de Provins, and Nicolas de Biard, presents a comparative grid of their entries for the letter “A,” and examines the order of entries, typologies, and content. Do their respective distinctions reflect a process of selection? A process of accumulation? “Enfin, cette étude [...] a évoqué la convergence progressive, voire l’osmose, entre les structures et les stratégies de structuration de la matière qui les caractérisent” (104).

Fritz begins Chapitre 4 by proposing that the interpretation whereby serial music represents “la négation de la composition et de l’invention” should be declared outdated or at least be modified (109). Given that references to the cithara and the psaltery in *Psalms* “constituent un ensemble discontinu, fragmenté dans le commentaire global,” there was plenty of room for exegetes to develop a proliferation of series based on their construal of the meaning behind numbers of strings and other properties (112). These interpretations will eventually intersect with allegory, for example, in Machaut’s 14th-century *Dit de la harpe*. In Chapitre 5, Clouzot observes that “*Musica et natura* ont des fondements cosmologiques basés sur le mouvement” (132). Furthermore, images of minstrels, jongleurs, madmen, animal musicians, songbirds, grotesques, flowers, monkeys, owls, etc., that are depicted in psalters and books of hours share, according to her interpretation, a “lien originel” with King David (129, 138-139). “Ainsi, les décors de la *musica* et de la *natura* émaneraient d’une ‘pensée sérielle’ et figurative à l’œuvre dans le contexte intellectuel des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles” (150).

Concluding Partie 1, Chapitre 6 by Salamon concentrates on the Nine Worthies, the group of historical, scriptural, and legendary male exemplars of chivalric ideals whom aspiring knights were expected to emulate. Originally consisting of three “pagans,” three Jews, and three Christians, the list, which was both “ouverte et close,” soon began to be expanded (165). With the passage of time, these figures associated with “prowess” approached the border of allegory, with Worthies assuming a hybrid function as the embodiment of Reason or Nature, for example³.

“Nouvelles organisations du savoir profane durant la première modernité,” the focus of Partie 2, contains four interesting essays on diverse topics, ranging from medieval listings of authors, to Noah’s Ark and the depiction of animals, to inventories of the streets of Madrid, to Leibniz and the Encyclopedists. In “Penser l’histoire au Moyen Age: les listes d’auteurs,” Chapitre 7, Jeay deals with early efforts to trace literary history through “l’effet de nomination,” first, from the 12th to 14th centuries in connection with the lyric repertory,

3 Salamon is referring to Richard Trachsler, *Disjointures-Conjointures. Etude sur l’interférence des matières narratives de la littérature française du Moyen Age*, Bâle, Tübingen, Francke, 2000, 333-334.

and second, from the late 15th century into the early 16th in connection with the Rhétoriciens and the Pléiade. The enumeration of names resulted in a canon of writers recognized for their authority in the realm of vernacular literature: “Enoncer le nom de ces figures prestigieuses suffit pour affirmer la puissance d’une poésie vernaculaire pleinement consciente de sa valeur” (190).

In Chapitre 8, “Art et science: Le Défilé des animaux dans *L’Arche de Noë sur le Mont Ararat, peinture de Simon De Myle*,” Smith analyses the “visual list” of animals that De Myle portrays and likens their parade down the gangplank of the Ark to a “textual list” because of its verticality. Inspired by the representation of animals in Gheeraerts’ illustrations for a Flemish edition of Aesopian fables and animals depicted in Gessner’s *Historia animalium* (or perhaps one of his other works), De Myle created a visual list that bespeaks “une réflexion multiple qui porte d’abord sur l’étonnante variété du monde des animaux, rassemblant espèces européennes et exotiques, domestiques et sauvages, réelles et fabuleuses” (212). This chapter contains images of De Myle’s painting and his sources of inspiration, as well as a list of all of the animals mentioned in the essay.

Mierau takes the reader to Golden Age Madrid in Chapitre 9, “Faire l’inventaire des rues, quartiers et types. Conceptions sérielles de la ville dans les représentations de Madrid à la fin du XVI^e siècle.” With the goal of shedding light on both literary and non-literary representations of the city, the author begins by describing the enumeration of streets and neighborhoods according to the *sala de alcaldes de casa y corte*, then moves on to consideration of literary representations of the type found in the *Guía y Avisos de forasteros que vienen a la corte*. He ends with the case of texts that revolve around the unpredictable peregrinations of a *pícaro* and thus seem to bespeak “anti-serial” thinking.

In the concluding chapter of Partie 2, “Pensée sérielle et pensée encyclopédique: l’esprit de combinaison et l’ordre naturel des idées selon Leibniz et les encyclopédistes,” Favergue explores how the Leibnizian hypothesis of a “natural order of ideas” was applied to the production of *L’Encyclopédie*. She pinpoints the challenge inherent in the process of compilation—“la réalisation d’une Encyclopédie sera toujours confrontée à l’état des connaissances à une époque donnée ainsi qu’à la difficulté matérielle d’en faire l’inventaire”—and explains how the organization devised by editors Diderot and d’Alembert is both serial, through alphabetization and classification, and combinatorial, through the use of cross-referencing (241).

Partie 3 consists of four essays that address “Continuités : Vices et Vertus et l’ordre du monde, du Moyen Age aux Lumières.” In the first, Chapitre 11, “Venez les bénis...venez les maudits’: Permanence des séries de vices et de leurs vertus contraires de la morale occidentale (Moyen Age—première modernité),” Newhauser seeks to underscore the importance of the parallel series of vices and virtues. Beginning with the 4th century, he describes Evagrius Ponticus’ *De vitiis*, which catalogues virtues and vices in order to assist monks in avoiding bad thoughts and achieving peaceful contemplation. Slightly later on, John Cassian will adapt Evagrian thought to include another parallel, that of “contrary virtues,” which will become the counterweight of the capital vices and, eventually, of the seven deadly sins. After additional commentary on the evolution of the series of virtues and vices during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the final section of Newhauser’s essay focuses on the 17th-century English broadsides, “Come ye blessed, &c., come ye cursed, &c.” and “The Nine Mortal Weapons,” which are reproduced in two figures (273-274). Although the content of these documents is far from what Evagrius proposed, they do show that the parallel series of sins and contrary virtues continue to serve as major tools in defining the moral universe.

De Gendt’s “Dame Vice ou Dame Sens? Correspondances sérielles au seuil de la Renaissance” brings up the interesting question of how humanist thought sought correspondences between the seven vices and the five senses. She uses the example of

engravings in the edition of the *Stultiferae Naves* by Badius Ascensius, a satirical work in the tradition of the *Ship of Fools* by Sebastian Brandt, to show that the animals chosen to illustrate the senses represent the seven deadly sins. Further probing into iconography connected with the anonymous *Etymachie*, Baemler's *Ein schoene materi*, and Bosch's *Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things* leads De Gendt to wonder "si les correspondances conceptuelles entre vices et sens pourraient avoir influencé la technique de représentation des cinq sens adoptée au XVI^e siècle. Tant si bien que l'un des modes de représentation des vices courants avant 1500, à savoir personnage allégorique avec attribut et animal, pourrait avoir engendrer l'adoption de la même technique dans les représentations ultérieures des sens" (297). Another intriguing development is that from the 15th century onward, the allegorical characters representing the senses shifted from being male to being female. De Gendt concludes that with Badius' *Naves*, the specific and systematic correspondences between the series of vices and the series of senses leaves the realm of the penitential and pastoral for that of literary text and image.

"La Pensée sérielle dans le théâtre de Calderón," Chapitre 13, finds Souiller taking issue with Curtius' reduction of the "schéma de la somme," in his analysis of *Life is a Dream*, to simply a rhetorical procedure, based on a mannerist or baroque model. He interprets Calderón's practice of presenting a series followed by recapitulation in the context of the hierarchical thinking characteristic of the Old Regime and related cosmology. Souiller's detailed commentary on the theological and political underpinnings of serial thinking in Calderón's work leads to the conclusion that the "schéma de la somme [...] a été utilisé par Calderón parce qu'il correspondait à une vision authentique et personnelle d'ordre philosophico-religieux. Il s'agit d'un des derniers témoignages poétiques de la représentation traditionnelle du cosmos, de l'ordre social et de l'anthropologie en un ensemble cohérent, qui va de pair avec la part considérable de l'œuvre calderonienne consacrée à cette forme dramatique médiévale qu'est l'*auto-sacramental*" (314).

The contribution by Montoya, "Multiplier les vices à l'époque des philosophes: 'nature' ou géométrie (Loquet, Sade)?," rounds out the volume as Chapitre 14. Her essay addresses the late 18th-century mystical writing of Marie-Françoise Loquet in the context of a new current of Christian "anti-philosophical" apologetics. Montoya approaches her study through a comparative reading of the author's four *romans d'apprentissage* that were published during her lifetime. She observes that while the contemporaneous works by Sade have been the subject of numerous studies, such has not been the case for those by Loquet. As concerns the "multiplication des vices," both authors show reliance on numbers as an organizing principle; however, Loquet limits the use of numbers to certain episodes of her texts, whereas Sade is obsessed with them. Be that as it may, "Les analyse (sic) des vices et des vertus que proposent Loquet et Sade comportent finalement aussi deux conceptions distinctes du politique et de l'organisation de la société" (333). Montoya reaches a convincing conclusion that ties together the diverse strands of serial thinking to which this entire collection of essays is devoted: "Dans l'œuvre [...] de Loquet, le lecteur trouve une combinaison à la fois de l'encyclopédisme typique de son époque [...] et du système médiéval et pour ainsi dire organique de la série des Vices et des Vertus. Dans celle de Sade [...] le comptage mathématique et l'esprit de géométrie sert à dénuer [...] les vices et vertus de tout contenu moral réel, les réduisant à autant de 'poses' dans son théâtre vicieux du monde. La série [...] s'avère ainsi être profondément significative et révélatrice des enjeux plus profonds des débats qui jouent dans ces dernières années de l'Ancien Régime, suspendues encore entre Moyen Age et modernité" (338).

In conclusion, *La Pensée sérielle* is impressive in terms of both its overall scope and the detail evident in the individual essays. The editors are to be highly commended for the consistent excellence of this collection from start to finish. This is definitely not a

collaborative work that presents just a few outstanding essays surrounded by others that seem more like filler. Those who research serial thinking might not be inclined to read the whole volume, as details can be difficult to follow if one is not extremely familiar with the topic of a given chapter. However, such is to be expected for any collective volume that covers the evolution of a particular phenomenon over hundreds of years. In the final analysis, De Gendt, Montoya, and the contributors have achieved considerable success in their effort to enrich our understanding of serial thinking and the attempt to organize reality from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment.

Beverly J. Evans

State University of New York at Geneseo

Markovits, Rahul. *Civiliser l'Europe : Politiques du théâtre français au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2014. 400 p.

Unlike the major cities of England or Spain, which had great national theatres of their own to draw upon, in the eighteenth century many capitals in central and eastern Europe especially invited troupes of French actors to perform the works of French dramatists. Beginning with La Dixmerie in 1765 and followed by such writers as Caraccioli (1777), Guizot (1828), Brunot (1917), Réau (1938), and more recently Fumaroli (*Quand l'Europe parlait français*, 2001), this has long been interpreted as evidence of the inherent superiority of French culture, its spontaneous appreciation proof of its intrinsic worth, its broad acceptance a sure sign of the progress of civilisation in Europe: « Être européen, être français, être du XVIII^e siècle, c'est tout un. [...] Cette équivalence à trois termes cristallise la signification du thème de « l'Europe française » où la francisation est l'équivalent du processus de civilisation » (13).

The author of this work, a professional historian, has chosen to focus on the theatre in its literary, social, and political dimensions because, for him, French plays appear to epitomise on their own everything able to make the “French way of life” appealing (19). While he does not, and indeed could not, dispute the presence of French players across the continent at this time, his objective in this study is to challenge the usual view of French cultural hegemony to which the ubiquity of actors from *l'hexagone* has so often been ascribed. After deep archival research into the documents concerning the performance of French plays abroad that still remain — the contracts, accountants' statements, repertory lists, playbills, relevant correspondence et al. — and the application of what he terms “une méthode contextuelle and pragmatique” (20), the author is able to concentrate on who requested French players in such capitals as Vienna, Parma, and Geneva and why, so to clarify the quite distinct reasons that led to their presence in these cities and the different ends to which they were put: in Vienna, for instance, under Kaunitz, they were introduced in part to facilitate the acquisition of *bon ton* and in this way to integrate the newer nobility (*Dienstadel*) into the highest social circles, while in Parma their presence can be linked to the attempt by its new Bourbon rulers to emulate the absolute rule of their French cousins. Together with Brussels and Hanover, the case of Geneva is considered in the second part of this monograph, where the author describes the movement from the soft power (*la puissance douce*) of French theatre abroad to its increasing use as an instrument of French foreign policy. In Geneva, the site of the quarrel over the theatre between Voltaire and the Calvinist consistory, d'Alembert and Rousseau, the admission of French actors — beginning only in 1782 — is viewed as evidence of French cultural imperialism. The last two chapters of the book discuss the changes in the mission of acculturation which took place during the French revolution and the empire, when the objective of such theatre was clearly to promote the social and linguistic integration of the French republic's many new subjects.