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Seriality and scientific objects in the nineteenth century

- Recherches
- Histoire des études rythmiques
- XIXe siècle
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Nick Hopwood, Simon Schaffer and Jim Secord (ed.), "Seriality and scientific objects in the nineteenth century", *History of Science*, xlviii (2010).



Series represent much that was new and significant in the sciences between the French Revolution and the First World War. From periodical publication to the cinema, tabulation to industrialized screening, series feature in major innovations in scientific communication and the organization of laboratories, clinics, libraries, museums and field sites. Practitioners arranged embryos or electric sparks, fossils or flint weapons in terms of formal or functional resemblance, and related the resulting order to changes of state or of time. Progressive or evolutionary schemes commonly traced development from the primordial nebula to present society, via the formation of the Earth and the ages of life through human evolution and history. Behind the subtly graded and reliably calibrated sequences was often the sense that the world was serial in its basic structure, but series were also fiercely debated, as Maxwell's warning suggests. How can historians best approach their relations in nineteenth-century science ?

This special double issue of *History of science* is the first attempt to investigate series' manifold properties and relations across the sciences. This introduction sets out our questions and draws some interim conclusions. What significant connections were there between different kinds of series, and especially between serial modes of organization, production and communication and the serial contents of nature ? Beyond mere juxtaposition or the compilation of a list, some important extra meanings and powers are involved in the disposition of elements in series. How were these supplementary resources, which the term 'seriality' implies, developed and used to produce knowledge ?