

# Social Reproduction and Political Change in *The Wire*

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## Abstract

This paper examines a core tension in the political television serial *The Wire* (2002-2008). While several critics have argued that this show is both “bleak” and “systemic” in its portrayal of contemporary society, this paper argues that it is useful to understand these textual elements as building blocks in *The Wire*’s attempt to create a coherent and consistent political argument. The paper argues that had *The Wire* been structured as a more uplifting and redeeming story, the systemic nature of its societal criticism would be undercut and the show would not embrace the logical consequence of the politics it espouses.

**Keywords** *The Wire*, David Simon, political television serials, systemic analysis

## Introduction

In an oft-quoted turn of phrase, David Simon, showrunner of HBO’s *The Wire* (2002-2008), lists the major governing forces that shape

and restrain the lives of the characters that inhabit *The Wire*'s fictionalized rendition of Baltimore, Maryland:

But instead of the old gods, *The Wire* is a Greek tragedy in which the postmodern institutions are the Olympian forces. It's the police department, or the drug economy, or the political structures, or the school administration, or the macroeconomic forces that are throwing the lightning bolts and hitting people in the ass for no decent reason (Simon in Hornby 2007, NP).

Simon's mention of "the old gods" reveals how he sees *The Wire* as being indebted to ancient Greek drama which, to him, is a proper frame of reference in terms of understanding and underscoring how the characters of *The Wire* are at the mercy of structural and institutional forces that are beyond their control. Noting on this central aspect, Jason Mittell argues that on *The Wire* "characters' agency is rarely able to make a difference in broader institution systems" (Mittell 2015, 222) and the show's characters are surely overmatched when facing the force of institutional and socio-economic structures. Indeed, it has been argued that *The Wire*'s portrayal of Baltimore politics is one that leaves very little hope for positive change. Peter Dreier and John Atlas criticize *The Wire* for failing "to offer viewers any understanding that the problems facing cities and the urban poor are *solvable*" (Dreier & Atlas 2009, 332, italics in the original). Similarly, Baltimore poet Ta-Nehisi Coates labels it a nihilist show (Coates 2008, NP). Certainly, conceptualizing institutions as "Olympian forces" suggests how the characters of *The Wire* are all but powerless in their attempts to solve crimes, change the dominant political culture or alleviate the social ills that affect this Baltimore. For these reasons, Marsha Kinder (2012) argues, in one of the early academic analyses of *The Wire*, that the show presents a *systemic* characterization of the contemporary American metropolis. This article examines these networked institutional forces and subsequently considers what this conceptualization entails for the politics that *The Wire* espouses. For if a show focuses on the dysfunctional aspects of a society, it – at least implicitly – calls for change. However, *The Wire*'s portrayal of institutional networks seems to preclude any notion of individuals or groups having the needed

power to change their circumstances. What, then, does this conundrum mean for the way that *The Wire* is a political television serial? That is the interpretative question that is at the heart of this article.

In Jason Mittell's view, the central formal element of today's innovative strand of television is its "complexity", which, however, takes on many forms. He argues that *The Wire* is characterized by a distinct "centrifugal complexity" that relates a "complex web of interconnectivity forged across the social system rather than in the depth of any one individual's role in the narrative or psychological layers" (Mittell 2015, 222).<sup>1</sup> Thus, the narrative complexity of *The Wire* is a formal feature that facilitates a portrayal of social complexity. Erlend Lavik notes that whereas several contemporary television serials are marked by, in Mittell's terminology, their "narrative special effects" (Mittell 2015, 45), *The Wire's* appeal lies more in its content. Lavik writes that "if narratively complex TV-series invite us to assume the role of amateur narratologists, we could say that *The Wire* invites us to assume the role of amateur sociologists" (Lavik 2014, 133).<sup>2</sup> This sociological gaze is to see all social phenomena in relation to one another.

In the fifth season, journalist Gus Haynes is in a heated debate in the editorial office of *The Baltimore Sun*. He argues that "I think you need a lot of context to seriously examine anything", (5.2) which can be seen as a method statement for the politics of the entire series. In this sense, the formal complexity of how the narrative is told reflects the social complexity of the diegesis it contains, where institutions themselves are portrayed in their societal context. Large institutions such as the police force, the school system, city hall etc. are thus all seen as elements within the larger systemic level that Kinder identifies. In this perspective a school is not just framed as an educational institution but is also a site of struggle for teachers and children, which, in the vision of *The Wire*, can only be appreciated and understood in the context of the loss of jobs, unemployment, and the war on drugs. It is in this way that *The Wire* makes full use of the ever-expanding 60 hour long narrative to paint a societal portrait that would be difficult to accomplish in other art forms, except for maybe the novel.<sup>3</sup>

### “The king stay the king”

In his 2012 video essay “Style in *The Wire*”, Erlend Lavik points to a central scene where D’Angelo Barksdale explains the game of chess to two of his subordinates in the drug trade. D’Angelo emphasizes how pawns stay pawns and that “the king stay the king”<sup>4</sup> which, adding to its semantic centrality, is also the epigraph of that very episode. The parable is not lost on his subordinates and one of them, Bodie Broadus, tries to reject the notion that the stratified “social structures” of chess should be applicable to his life. Believing in the notion of social uplift, Bodie accepts that pawns will only stay pawns “unless they some smart ass pawns” (1.3). It is only much later, in season 4, that Bodie realizes that “this game is rigged, man. We like them little bitches on a chessboard” as he puts it to Detective Jimmy McNulty (4.13). Bodie’s character arc is in and by itself a long narrative portrayal of how different social phenomena, when seen in relation to each other, compound a network that is so hard to escape for a character such as Bodie. This scene, then, is synecdochic for the series’ systemic portrayal of contemporary urban realities. This is a world of social reproduction rather than of social uplift and change.

An important part of Lavik’s analysis, however, is how it points to another scene in the series that builds on the parable that D’Angelo makes in the pit in the low rises of Western Baltimore. In this other scene, Detectives Lester Freamon, Bunk Moreland, Kima Greggs, and Jimmy McNulty are standing in a square discussing and venting their frustrations over being forced to push a case prematurely due to pressure concerning clearance rates (1.6). “Just as this institutional dysfunction is most pointedly exposed in the conversation that ensues,” Lavik argues, “the mise-en-scène alludes to the previous discussion between D’Angelo, Bodie, and Wallace about chess” (Lavik 2012). In the foreground of the shot, two hands move pieces around a chessboard making the detectives in the background of the shot look “like pieces in the game” (Lavik 2012). These two chess players in the extreme foreground, then, “resemble Olympian Gods pulling the strings from above, making the characters mere puppets, victims of forces beyond their control” (Lavik 2012).<sup>5</sup> This scene is thus the visual representation of how these characters are moved rather than movers. Indeed, *The Wire’s* portrayal of the untoward elements of this socio-political situation does

not present Baltimore's problems as solvable in any obvious way and the show portrays a political and institutional reality that seems to be unable to change due to the interrelated problems of different social strata that compound this bleak reality.

The detectives, while trying their best to do their jobs, are met with an institutional logic that runs counter to their professional logic. Their efforts are counterproductively thwarted by the very institution they operate within. They then come to serve an institution that fails to adequately serve the society it is supposed to project. The institution's focus on clearance rates is thus berated for going against the detectives' ambitious efforts that might bring about change. Consequently, this narrative arc is tied in with the synecdochic chess scene in the low rises and the mise-en-scène of the dialogue in the square, which, seen in relation to one another, makes for a rather eloquent way of criticizing the "Olympian" omnipotence of institutional logic.

Patrick Jagoda argues that "oscillating between episodic and serial form, post-1990s programs not only are able more regularly to convey linearly delivered narratives but also can suggest complex communities, cities, and universes that ground social networks" and, mirroring Mittell's analysis, further argues that "*The Wire's* aesthetic makes sensible associations among its featured social actors and the networks they form" (Jagoda 2016, 105-106). This argument parallels David Bordwell's notion of the network narrative. Bordwell argues that such narratives present characters with converging fates and, he writes, "the very overtness of the converging-fates strategy can make the plot cohere" (Bordwell 2006, 99). In this sense, it is useful to view *The Wire* as a network narrative. Bordwell elaborates his point, switching the term "network" for "multiple-plot", by stating that "[w]hen a multiple-plot brings strangers together, the more that the narration emphasizes their separate lives, the more we expect significant encounters among them" (Bordwell 2006, 99). However, where a series like *Heroes* (2006-2010) is almost teleological in how it sets up different narrative lines that the viewer will expect to cross at some point, it is a different case with *The Wire* where the networked structure is presented more as a side effect to the show's sociological gaze; its network is systemic in its sociology but not neatly systematic in its narrative structure. A perhaps particularly poignant scene in this respect is when Major Bun-

ny Colvin and drug addict Bubbles happen upon each other at the site of the former Hamsterdam project, sharing thoughts about whether Hamsterdam had been a good thing (3.12).

### Systemic Logic

As Kinder rightfully notes “an urban focus doesn’t guarantee a systemic analysis” (72). Kinder also stresses that it is the viewer’s emotional engagement with the show’s characters that makes the viewer care about these issues (76); in doing so, Kinder zeroes in on a key aspect of how the politics of *The Wire* is directly connected to its aesthetic appeal. For with *The Wire* it is important to distinguish between a societal criticism and a systemic one. Whereas the former refers to the broad scope that such a criticism advances, the latter term refers both to the breadth of scope as well as an interrelatedness of seemingly disparate elements, and considering how *The Wire* tries to tie both deindustrialization, the war on drugs, as well as political culture to the living conditions of urban dwellers, the show’s criticism is surely a systemic one. At one point, Bill Rawls lectures McNulty about the importance of so-called clearance rates, i.e. a quantitative way of measuring the effectiveness of the police force (1.6). Making clearance rates the guiding principle for police work hints at how a political focus on accountability and measurability affects the priorities of law enforcement, which, the viewer is called to understand, is to the detriment of the important case that McNulty is working on at this point in the series. And because the viewer is aligned with McNulty rather than Rawls the show is very clear in whose point of view the viewer is to side with. Donald T. Campbell, the American social scientist, once described how measures created to ensure a positive outcome of a public institution’s efforts can have directly adverse effects. In Campbell’s words:

The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor (Campbell 1976, 49).

The problem that Campbell identifies here is all but a precise mirroring of the criticism *The Wire* presents, i.e. the conflict that can

arise in the interplay between people trying to live up to the overall mission of the institution and how that work is measured and consequently (mis)managed and how quantitative ways of monitoring police work can, in effect, “distort and corrupt” the very work that it was intended to improve upon. The issue that is at the heart of Campbell’s objections is that, faced with certain quantitative social indicators such as clearance rates, the police force is barred from living up to its overall purpose.

In the simplest of terms, the overall purpose of a police force is to prevent and solve crime just like the overall purpose is to socialize and teach children to their best of the school’s ability. The criticism that Campbell and *The Wire* point to, however, is that certain measures within these institutions encumber such functionality. In *The Wire*, the overall purpose of public institutions is undercut by certain measures that originally were supposed to assist the institutions in living up to their intended purposes. Film scholar Linda Williams points to how episode 4.1 contains “an intricate cross-cut of very short beats comparing a PowerPoint presentation given to teachers with a PowerPoint presentation given to police” which to her is a way of suggesting how similar the challenges that these institutions face are (Williams 2014, 71). The quantitative logic of measuring, however, effectively redirects the efforts away from the highest of goals to goals which are more easily measurable. As a consequence, the efforts of a public institution are directed not at their overall objective (i.e. teaching kids and solving crimes), but are rather aimed at living up to the measurements which have been imposed by a political logic. As Lawrence Blum correctly notes “[t]he rules of the institution are constantly at odds with constructively addressing any of the issues with which the institution is meant to engage (crime, education, governing the city)” (NP). This logic is what so frustrates McNulty in the above mentioned scene, and which also frustrates Pryzbylewski in season four when working at Edward Tilghman Middle School. The way that season four introduces the school system as a main setting serves to illustrate how educational institutions, police enforcement and social realities are interrelated and to draw this connection is very important for *The Wire*’s systemic analysis.

### Scope

This political portrayal of networked institutions thus ties in with *The Wire's* centrifugal complex narrative format, which, when seen as whole, presents a general and ambitious social portrayal whose scope, incidentally, is broader than much academic research. Sociologists Anmol Chadda and William Julius Wilson argue that part of *The Wire's* accomplishment lies in how it “demonstrates the interconnectedness of systemic urban inequality in a way that can be very difficult to illustrate in academic works,” which tend to focus on in-depth analyses of individual factors which are only “implicitly understood among scholars” as being intertwined (Chadda & Wilson 2011, 166). In contrast to such approaches that aim at understanding different social ills, the scope of *The Wire* is thus to be seen as an ambitious *synthesis* that examines the intertwined and networked nature of these different phenomena. Historian Robert Rosenstone argues that film excels at showing historical developments as “a process of changing social relationships in which political, personal, and social questions and categories are interwoven” (i.e. not examined separately) (30) and though *The Wire* is neither a historical drama nor a film, this long serialized narrative excels superbly in showing social connections. As such, it is through its format as a sociological network narrative (a *formal* trait), that *The Wire* successfully demonstrates its *political* point of showing “the interconnectedness of systemic urban inequality” as Chadda and Wilson put it (Chadda & Wilson 2011, 166). In a classroom discussion on drug dealing, middle schooler Zenobia stresses this relationship when she says “[w]e got our thing, but it’s just part of the big thing” (4.8), which is also the epigraph of that episode. To Zenobia “the big thing” is probably the drug game but – through the use of dramatic irony - the viewer understands “the big thing” as the entire socio-economic structure that shapes the lives of the students of *The Wire's* fourth season.

Television scholars Murray Smith and Jason Mittell argue that by following certain characters more than others, viewers gain *attachment* and *access* to these particular characters and when both of the elements are in place viewers may come to feel *aligned* with and even *allegiance* with said characters (Mittell 2015, 129-134). Mittell defines the latter term as “the moral evaluation of aligned characters such that we find ourselves sympathetic to their beliefs and



ethics and thus emotionally invested in their stories” (134). Drawing on Murray Smith and Jason Mittell, one could argue that when these characters (that the viewer is aligned with) explicitly criticize the institutional logic, the show is, in effect, inviting the viewers to see things from the perspective of these police officers. In keeping with Mittell’s terminology, it seems that the viewer’s allegiance with, e.g., Kima Greggs and Lester Freamon is the textual feature that invites the viewer to align his/her point of view with that of the Major Crimes Unit and, in turn, calls for the viewer to see the institutional logic as a destructive element in the storyworld of *The Wire*.

### **A Form of Politics**

But how does all this answer the question of how *The Wire* expresses its politics; i.e. the issue that arises from being a political serial that calls for change but which presents a situation as all but unalterable. When Omar dies he is replaced by Michael and when Bubbles cleans up Dukie is just the next addition to the ‘dope fiends’ as Bubbles would say (Nannicelli 2009, 201). When the Barksdale organization crumbles the void is filled out by Marlo. Similarly, the idealistic mayor Carcetti is faced with the harsh reality that the role of the mayor is to “eat shit” and not really change anything as his predecessor tells him (4.7). Though these observations could be seen as justifying Dreier and Atlas’s criticism that *The Wire* is defeatist, I believe it is more productive to view this as part of *The Wire*’s argument that incremental reform will not suffice in this situation.

Overall, the series is more prone to point out problems and try to influence opinions by creating sympathy for various groups of people rather than forwarding concrete solutions but *The Wire*’s circular logic of social reproduction nonetheless shows how it seems impossible to change one thing, say the schools, without attending to unemployment, loss of jobs, and the war on drugs *at the same time*. Jakob Isak Nielsen rightly notes that the serialized format of *The Wire* is integral in presenting the individuals as being fixed in structures. He also argues that if one were to adjust something at one point in this circuit it would influence the state of affairs at another point in this circuit (Nielsen 2012, 86-87), but I argue that this “circuit” is structured in a way that probably makes it very difficult to change anything at one point in the circuit as these different phe-

nomena are structured in a way that ensures that this state of affairs reproduces itself. It is a gridlocked situation.

Due to the networked roadblocks that keep this untoward system in place, it follows that the *systemic nature* of this situation is at the heart of the problem. It would go against the politics of *The Wire* to suggest that the source for a positive change is adequately powerful to change things in the current situation. Positive forces are indeed there – Bunk, Kim, Colvin, Carcetti, Waylon, Cutty etc. – but with them being overpowered by their institutions as they are, the show’s politics rejects the notion of a positive outlook; i.e. “it is all going to work out eventually.”

Because in the networked narrative format that *The Wire* embraces so fully, viewers get to see how social catastrophes are interconnected and in this sense we see both cause and effect of a great many plotlines. This textual feature is, by extension, intricately connected to the social portrayal that *The Wire* puts forth. As such, it can hardly be overstated how much the formal choices found in *The Wire* are connected to its politics. In most episodic police procedurals the viewer is only privy to the information that has to do directly with solving a crime – not what the background of the crime is. In *The Wire*, however, “the “social factors” excluded from most procedurals are promoted to centrality” (McMillan 2009, 53). It is because *The Wire* is presented as a form of sociological network narrative that it presents the viewer with *both* cause and effect in a way that sets this show apart from more traditional forms of police procedurals. In this serialized narrative, the viewer is presented with both the effects of institutional mismanagement at the street level but also how and why this institutional logic is reproduced politically, which is a key element in season 3. It is in this sense that the show’s politics stresses the point that, at a basic structural level, the institutional realities are so crippled that what is needed is a *systemic change*.

That *The Wire* is interested in making a case about systemic violence and not individual cases is something that is suggested rather subtly in the very first scene of the series, which, then, comes to stand as a form of mission statement for the ensuing series (1.1). In this scene, McNulty is talking to a witness in order to figure out why a young African American nicknamed Snot Boogie has been killed. With a police officer trying to get information from a witness,

the sound of sirens, a murder victim lying on the street and the bluish lights from police cars, the scene invokes many of the classic, generic elements of a police show and the viewer would not be completely off the mark if she expected that the ensuing narrative would follow a police investigation focused on finding and trying Snot Boogie's murderer. But no. There is no further mention of Snot Boogie and in this sense the opening scene invokes the elements of the police procedural – with its focus on guilt and blame – but the ensuing narrative omits the investigation of Snot Boogie's murder. As such, the dialogue and mise-en-scène of the opening scene suggests that the show is a crime case – but not about an individual case.

Learning that the murder victim, Snot Boogie, had been known to repeatedly steal the pot at a craps game, McNulty asks his unnamed witness why they would continue to let him play. The witness replies: "Got to. This America, man." The case that *The Wire* investigates is thus not the case of Snot Boogie but in the exact words "This America, man." Not another America, but the one found in ghettos of Western Baltimore. Linda Williams argues that this scene suggests that "the solution to an individual crime, such as "who shot Snot,"" is not the real point of the episode. Rather, "*The Wire* is on the trail of a much larger crime than street-level homicide. That crime is the failure of American social justice" (Williams 2014, 85-86). That reading follows how Snot Boogie stresses the second word of the sentence. However, copula deletion, a characteristic feature of African American Vernacular English (Trotta & Blyahher 2011, 21-22), is used for maximum effect as the omission of the verbal phrase allows for this potentially ambiguous statement in terms both (1) invoking America as both a spatial category with *several Americas* and, as Williams argues, (2) America as "both a place and an idea" (Williams 2014, 84-85). The opening scene, then, works as a political method statement for the scope of *The Wire's* social diagnosis and thus serves as an inkling of how it will look to examine the roots of "This America".

### Exit

It then follows that there really is a point to *The Wire's* bleakness. That bleakness is inherent in its politics – had it been more hopeful it would betray the systemic character of its societal criticism. Frequently drawing on Greek mythology and other canonical figures

from literary history, David Simon often contextualizes his work on *The Wire* as being parallel to or in opposition to other narrative formats and writers and in this seemingly off the cuff remark below from a 2007 interview conducted by David Mills, Simon uses the genre of the western to discuss the power of the individual in relation to structures:

“The Wire” has not only gone the opposite way, it’s resisted the idea that, in this post-modern America, individuals triumph over institutions. The institution is always bigger. It doesn’t tolerate that degree of individuality on any level for any length of time. These moments of epic characterization are inherently false. They’re all rooted in, like, old Westerns or something. Guy rides into town, cleans up the town, rides out of town.

There’s no cleaning it up anymore. There’s no riding in, there’s no riding out. The town is what it is (Simon in Mills 2007).

The bleak outlook of *The Wire* is thus related to how ‘the town’ is all there is. In the systemic logic of this television serial, all the characters are interlocked within institutional constraints which stop them from really affecting change on their surroundings. Simon’s mention of “epic characterization” seems to speak to how characters on *The Wire* do not transcend their surrounding environment; they do not rise above it. What Simon thus implicitly argues is how *The Wire* is consistent in its systemic analysis. Thanks to *The Wire*’s interest in social ills and its focus on class as an explanatory category, some critics likened the show to novels of Charles Dickens, which, however, to Simon “fell badly on us.”<sup>6</sup> In Simon’s view, Dickens “would make the case for a much better social compact than existed in Victorian England, but then his verdict would always be, “[b]ut thank God a nice old uncle or this heroic lawyer is going to make things better.” In the end, the guy would punk out” (Simon in Pearson 2012, NP). Simon is thus saying here that Dickens was not consistent in the societal criticism that he otherwise presented in his novels; his plotlines would eventually create more hopeful ending which, Simon’s suggests, actually wound up undercutting his political argument.

In this sense, it becomes clear why it is important that *The Wire* paints such a bleak picture, for if there were a potentially redeeming element in this defunct system, viewers would be invited to believe that the potential for improvement was already embedded in the current state of affairs. And *The Wire* avoids letting the viewer think like that. So in this sense, Dreier and Atlas are correct in their characterization of *The Wire*, but I believe that they nonetheless miss the purpose of why *The Wire* paints such a bleak picture in this particular way. Because had it been a more uplifting and redeeming story, the systemic nature of its societal portrayal would fall away and then the show would, in Simon's words about Dickens, "punk out", i.e. not embrace the logical consequence of the politics it espouses. So because *The Wire's* portrayal of society is marked almost solely by *reproduction* at an institutional and structural level, its call for *change* seemingly becomes almost paradoxical or quixotic. But it is precisely in doing so that it remains argumentatively consistent in its call for change. The show's "bleakness", then, is thus at the very heart of *The Wire's* call for a paradigmatic, political shift. So while Kinder correctly identifies the systemicness of *The Wire's* criticism she does not connect it to the bleakness that Dreier and Atlas point to, yet it is only by tracing how these two textual elements are connected that one sees that this is the way that *The Wire's* social criticism achieves a coherence and consistency in its argumentation. *The Wire* is not a flawed call for change; on the contrary, it remains consistent in arguing that such change must address the systemicness of the current situation.

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### Notes

- 1 To Mittell, *The Wire's centrifugal* form of complexity stands in opposition to the *centripetal complexity* of *Breaking Bad* in which a focus on a single, central protagonist works to "create a storyworld with unmatched depth of characterization" (Mittell 2015, 223).
- 2 "Hvis narrativt komplekse TV-serier inviterer oss til å innta rollen som amatørnarratologer, kan vi si at *The Wire* inviterer oss til å innta rollen som amatørsosiologer."
- 3 See Nielsen 2012 for a comparison of the contemporary television serial and the novel.
- 4 Joe Trotta & Oleg Blyahher explain that "Non-standard subject-verb agreement is a typical aspect of AAVE [African American Vernacular English] which is frequently used in *The Wire*" and they even use this very line by D'Angelo to illustrate that point (Trotta & Blyahher 2011, 20).
- 5 Other than Lavik's video essay and the present essay, at least eight other peer-reviewed publications refer to Simon's paratextual comparisons with Greek mythology – and that does not even consider the journalistic comparisons: Etheridge 2008 (155), McMillan 2009 (50), Sheehan & Sweeney 2009 (NP), Love 2010, Vest (173), Crosby 2013 (7), Williams

2014 (4), Lister 2015 (69). It thus seems clear that this statement – this authorial paratext – seems to have made its mark in terms of framing the discussion about *The Wire*. Tore Rye Andersen (2012) has traced how there is a circuit where – in his example literary – works are discussed in a way that is affected by such authorial paratexts. He shows how a work subsequently is read through a cultural context that is, in part, constructed by the creator of the work, or, in the case of film and television series, one of the creators. With paratexts functioning as thresholds, i.e. a certain vantage point from which viewers and critics engage with texts, it is important to note that this is, in fact, a possibility and moreover one needs to acknowledge how this may come with certain perils; i.e. that criticism may mirror the paratextual analytical remarks made by any number of creators rather than engage in a critical examination of the text in question. In any case, this methodological issue is one that the critic must be aware of and not overlook the chance that s/he merely parrots paratextual claims.

- 6 See also Schelstraete & Buelens 2013 for a discussion of *The Wire's* relation to Dickens. Interestingly, David Bordwell notes that Dickens' 1864-65 novel *Our Mutual Friend* is also structured as a network narrative (Bordwell 2006, 100).