Critical Response
I
Wired

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In the fourth season of HBO's television show *The Wire*, a major mayoral debate unfolds shortly before the Baltimore city election. The debate comes through in a series of fragments, in audio sound bites addressing Baltimore's crime epidemic and views of the three candidates—incumbent Clarence Royce, challenger Tony Gray, and the eventual winner Tommy Carcetti—campaigning on different television screens. The visual focus of this sequence, however, is not on the debate itself but on the massive ensemble of characters that is either watching or not watching this episode of political theater. To a few of Baltimore's citizens it is a central event, but to most this contest is entirely peripheral. During a series of short scenes that takes the debate as its nexus, members of the Royce and Carcetti camps scrutinize the television coverage. Meanwhile, detectives in the homicide unit watch with distant interest, listening selectively for issues that pertain to their daily criminal investigations. Ex-con Dennis "Cutty" Wise, in another vignette, notices the debate on his screen before immediately switching the channel to a football game. Even further at the edges, Namond Brice, a young aspiring drug dealer, turns off the debate as if it were televisual static and begins to play *Halo* 2, a first-person shooter videogame.[1]

In this series of shots, plotting is subordinated to the detailed mapping of Baltimore's intersecting social and political worlds. Rather than com-

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1. See David Simon, "Soft Eyes," dir. Christine Moore, 2006, *The Wire: The Complete Series,* DVD, 23 discs (2002–8), season 4, episode 2.

pressing time—an all-too-common function of filmic montage—this se-
quence enlarges connections that bind together the story lines and
lifeworlds of vastly different, though overlapping, Baltimores. This seg-
ment, like the show in its entirety, offers neither immersive spectacle nor
episodic disjointedness. It does not unfold for the piercing cinematic gaze
of the Hollywood spectator, and it proves equally incomprehensible to the
distracted domestic glance of the traditional television viewer.[2] In the
show's own idiom, absorbing this more capacious mapping requires "soft
eyes." This critical capacity is what a veteran public school teacher suggests
to Roland "Prez" Pryzbylewski when he begins working at Baltimore's
chaotic Tilghman Middle School and feels incapable of reaching the stu-
dents. "You need soft eyes," his more seasoned colleague tells him.[3] It is the
same advice that homicide detective Bunk Moreland later offers to Detec-
tive Kima Greggs when she arrives on her first murder scene: "You got soft
eyes you can see the whole thing. You got hard eyes, you staring at the same
tree, missing the forest."[4] Over the course of sixty hour-long episodes and
five seasons, *The Wire* demonstrates how a network of institutional forms
of Baltimore city life—law enforcement, the drug trade, legal institutions,
the prison complex, schools, segregated city zones, political agencies, and
media outlets—produces poverty, racism, corruption, and structural in-
justices. The series suggests that penetrating something as complex as an
urban network requires an attentive, painstaking way of looking. It re-
quires multiscalar thought that negotiates the micro- and macrolevel units
of reality—the individual, the family, the neighborhood, the city, the na-
tion, and the globe—that interact but are not fully coextensive. To grasp
interconnections among people and institutions, an American city and its
myriad worlds, only soft eyes will do.[5]

   Networks, organizational forms made up of nodes that are intercon-

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2. I draw the language of cinematic gaze versus televisual glance from Chris Chesher,
"Neither Gaze nor Glance, but Glaze: Relating to Console Game Screens," S*CAN Journal of
Media Arts Culture* 1 (Jan. 2004): scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=19
   3. Simon, "Soft Eyes."
   4. Simon, "Refugees," dir. Jim McKay, 2006, *The Wire,* season 4, episode 4.
   5. While *The Wire* employs the metaphor of "soft eyes," it also invokes a wider sensorium.
As the tagline for the first season advises the viewer, "Listen Carefully."

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nected by links, have played a part in many disciplines, including economics, biology, informatics, neurology, epidemiology, and sociology. *The Wire* captures something of the structure and the feeling of technological, social, and financial systems by adopting what I have elsewhere called a network aesthetic.[6] The most direct way that the series foregrounds networked structural relations among people and institutions is by tracing out webs of communication. During their investigation of the Barksdale drug operation, the Baltimore Major Crimes Unit utilizes a technological network of walkie-talkies, cloned pagers, and wiretaps. Subsequent seasons feature cloned software, text message surveillance, decryptions of information-laden photographs, and computer-generated visual models of a disposable cell phone communication network. Unlike most other televisual police procedurals, *The Wire* does not fetishize new technologies or make them central to the narrative. Avoiding technological determinism, the series dramatizes the way that various media both improve and limit investigations into social structures.[7] The first season juxtaposes Baltimore Police Department and federal investigations. Unlike the FBI—an organization that the show depicts working with computers, live video surveillance, and fiber-optic lenses—the underfunded Baltimore Homicide division still relies on typewriters in the early years of the twenty-first century. Detective Jimmy McNulty of the Major Crimes Unit discovers that Barksdale's crew also uses low-tech, throwback pagers instead of cell phones. It turns out, however, that the Barksdale technological protocol has less to do with cost effectiveness than with strategy (pagers, unlike cell phones, are not directly traceable). Instead of setting up a sophisticated wiretap, McNulty proposes the idea of cloning the dealers' pagers by copying their frequency so that the police investigators register a page simultaneously with their targets.[8] Further engaging such information warfare, the targeted drug traffickers respond by modifying their communication channels.

   The numerous investigative technologies of *The Wire* make visible the structure of the drug networks that operate within Baltimore and extend far beyond it. Significantly, in the third season of *The Wire*, Detective Lester Freamon explicitly employs the language and methods of network

   6. See Patrick Jagoda, "Terror Networks and the Aesthetics of Interconnection," *Social Text,* no. 105 (Winter 2010): 65–90.
   7.   One negative representation of technological applications, for instance, appears in the third season when police majors are required to use PowerPoint presentations during COMSTAT meetings to update the commissioner and deputy commissioner about criminal activities in their districts. This software enables falsified statistics that fail to depict the dynamic systems of crime in Baltimore.
   8.   See Simon, "The Buys," dir. Peter Medak, 2002, *The Wire,* season 1, episode 3.

science in pursuit of larger structures. Briefing the Major Crimes Unit, he presents a network graph that he has produced through a painstaking pattern analysis of discarded phones ("burners") that still retain recently dialed numbers in their memory.[9] As Freamon explains, "This is the pattern of a closed communication network. Something you'd expect from a drug organization. . . . Our data shows that over 92% of the calls were made within this network, with the average call lasting less than a minute. Again, suggestive of drug trafficking." Even such suggestive data proves insufficient to catch the involved players because, as Freamon had explained earlier in the episode, the data they gather are irredeemably "historical." "We can give you the network no problem," he tells his unit, "but by then it's a week old and they've dumped their phones."[10] Ultimately, arresting Avon Barksdale's business partner Stringer Bell for drug trafficking necessitates yet another technological adaptation. The Major Crimes Unit utilizes a device called the Triggerfish machine to pull numbers directly off of cell phone towers and uses sophisticated data analysis to build its case. Through sophisticated data analysis, they are then able to map out a grouping of associates that turns Baltimore simultaneously into a destination and a node of the drug trade.

Technological communication networks, a key feature of all five seasons of *The Wire*, are significant in the ways that they give both the Major Crimes Unit detectives and the viewers of the series access to twenty-first century social networks. The show's formal features, which forge visual and audio links among a web of major and minor characters, repeatedly draw from and complicate social network analysis, a major social scientific methodology used to map assemblages of actors represented as "nodes" connected by "links."[11] The vocabulary of social networks entered the social sciences in a prevalent way in the 1960s and 1970s (a period that also saw the expansion of systems theory and the emergence of world-system analysis, two conceptually related approaches).[12] As David Knoke and Song Yang explain, prior to the serious study of networks most social

9. The language of systems, networks, and connections recurs in many contexts throughout the show. At the end of the fourth season, for example, the sociologist David Parenti is shown giving a presentation about "learning adverse" students that includes a network graph.

10. Simon, "Back Burners," dir. Joy Lusco Kecken, *The Wire,* season 3, episode 7.

11. See David Singh Grewal, *Network Power: The Social Dynamics of Globalization* (New Haven, Conn., 2008), p. 182.

12. The roots of this methodology can be traced back to Georg Simmel's work at the turn of the twentieth century as well as to research in psychology and anthropology beginning in the late 1930s; see Georg Simmel, *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms,* trans. Anthony J. Blasi, Anton K. Jacobs, and Mathew Kanjirathinkal (Boston, 2009). It was not until the late twentieth century, however, that the study of social networks was popularized by psychologist Stanley Milgram's "small world" or "six degrees of separation" thesis, which

science scholarship assumed that "actors make decisions and act without regard to the behavior of other actors." Social network analysis served as a corrective to such assumptions, demonstrating that "actors participate in social systems connecting them to other actors, whose relations comprise important influences on one another's behaviors."[13]

The style of *The Wire* aligns with the core insight of social network analysis by representing a distributed system of social relations instead of focusing on a dominant protagonist. Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano have observed that, by representing individual and institutional interconnections, David Simon's show produces something that aspires to Fredric Jameson's aesthetic of "cognitive mapping."[14] Jameson defines "cognitive mapping" as the "mental map of the social and global totality" that can "enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole."[15] On the one hand, *The Wire* produces precisely such a "mental map." The Major Crimes Unit even represents the changing Barksdale drug organization visually, on a bulletin board filled with surveillance photos, suspect names, and crisscrossing lines of relationships among the known players. This cartography of social and financial relations, which grows in complexity throughout the seasons, takes the shape of a web. The changing Barksdale network emphasizes that police work is a prolonged process of connecting the dots and not, as is the case in television police dramas like the CBS show *CSI*, of merely solving episodic cases.

On the other hand, *The Wire* frequently challenges the abstractions inherent in traditional mapping by attending to the raw and intimate particularities of Baltimore life. Instead of producing a stable grid of preestablished social categories, *The Wire* explores the messier and less easily categorized network of disorganized capitalism.[16] In this sense, the series operates as an aesthetically rich counterpart to actor-network-theory, which was formulated as an alternative to traditional social network analysis by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law in the 1980s. Instead of

contends that everyone in the world is connected through a small number of intermediaries. See Stanley Milgram, "The Small World Problem," *Psychology Today* 1 (May 1967): 60–67.

13. David Knoke and Song Yang, *Social Network Analysis* (Los Angeles, 2008), p. 4.

14. Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, "Baltimore as World and Representation: Cognitive Mapping and Capitalism in *The Wire*," *Dossier* (2009), dossierjournal.com/read/theory/baltimore -as-world-and-representation-cognitive-mapping-and-capitalism-in-the-wire/

15. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C., 1991), pp. 415, 51.

16. See Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism* (Madison, Wisc., 1987).

regarding the social as a stable concept, Latour treats society as "a process of assembling" and a mode of dynamic interconnection. The "social" is about tracing connections and associations. Instead of grand theories of arrogated social units such as "classes" or "races" or "nations," Latour urges researchers to observe particular actors and situations. A richness of analysis, he suggests, emerges from the description of particularity that is obscured when we produce theories of abstract wholes. "Society," as he contends, "is the consequence of associations and not their cause."[17] *The Wire* similarly complicates standard social groupings. Characters such as Omar Little—a gay black man who fearlessly rips off drug dealers, forms an alliance with the Major Crimes Unit, and lives by a code that keeps him from harming anyone outside of the drug trade—defy traditional socio-logical categorization.

While *The Wire* engages in vertical social mapping within organizations, such as the police department and Barksdale's drug operation, it also extends its analysis horizontally among different cross-sections of Balti-more. Technological networks come to trace not merely the structure of the Baltimore heroin trade but also the agents that enable the drug culture to exist in the first place. If the program's eponymous wire serves on one level as a mode of interinstitutional surveillance, it also resonates at a formal level. In the first season, Wallace (a sixteen-year-old hopper work-ing for D'Angelo Barksdale's crew in the Baltimore low-rises) recognizes a boy named Brandon who has been robbing the crew's stash houses. He calls in the discovery to his superiors, thereby setting off the chain of events that leads to the target's death. Since this sequence takes place late in the evening, no one in the Major Crimes Unit is present to take notice of the multidirectional communication that unfolds surrounding the murder. Nevertheless, the computer that is automatically tracking the dealer pagers registers the entire succession of exchanges among members of the Barks-dale crew as they locate and murder Brandon. In the final moments of the episode, the camera cuts between the live pursuit of Brandon by the mem-bers of Barksdale's muscle and the Major Crimes Unit's computer, which is dramatized by close-up shots of numbers appearing on a display screen and corresponding modem audio. This computer records all of the pages. Without capturing anything about the social relationships among the in-volved players (something towards which the show itself strives), the com-puter records a network map of the murder. In this scene, technology— both the computer within the diegetic space and the televisual camera

    17. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 1, 238.

itself—registers a crucial causal sequence. The opening shot of the very next episode extends this metaphor by slowly tracking an electrical wire that runs above Brandon's dumped, lifeless body across a couple of back-yards to Wallace's window. In this shot, the technological wire represents a material connection between Wallace and the deceased Brandon, which is otherwise obscured by the abstractions of computer data and the legal proceedings that this surveillance information legitimates.[18]

   Alongside technology, the key nonhuman actor that connects charac-ters from different socioeconomic and institutional backgrounds in *The Wire* is capital. In the first season, Detectives Greggs and Ellis Carver follow drug money passed from a Barksdale mid-level dealer to a man in an expensive car, discovering that the $20,000 they apprehend is headed to the office of State Senator Clay Davis. As the ties among law enforcement, the drug trade, and state politics dawn on Lieutenant Daniels (the head of the Major Crimes Unit), he astutely observes, "I'm bringing in a case that goes everywhere." In a moment of frustration, he tells his wife, "see this is the thing that everyone knows and no one says. You follow the drugs, you get a drug case. You start following the money, you don't know where you're going. That's why they don't want wiretaps or wired CIs or anything else they can't control. Because once that tape starts rolling who the hell knows what's going to be said?"[19] Daniels's metafictional observation, in-dicative of someone with soft eyes, seems implicitly to be criticizing the form of the crime show and standard methods of reporting. Capital in *The Wire*, as opposed to these other forms, operates less like a standard causal agent that propels forward a linear chain of events than as the substance that links together the decentralized nodes of a social network. Of course, the police leadership repeatedly ignores a distributed perspective, insisting that predictable causal chains are less politically threatening than networks

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    18.   See Simon, "The Pager" and "The Wire," dir. Clark Johnson and Ed Bianchi, *The Wire,* 2002, season 1, episodes 5 and 6. Similar wire-tracking shots recur later in the series. For example, in the fifth season, a winding shot follows an illegally established pink police wire to a corresponding modem; see Simon, "React Quotes," dir. Agnieszka Holland, *The Wire,* 2008, season 5, episode 5. In this context, the twisting wire invokes the tangled lie that McNulty and Freamon create in order to deceive the police department into offering them the personnel and surveillance gear they need to put down a major case.
    19.   Simon, "Lessons," dir. Gloria Muzio, 2002, *The Wire,* season 1, episode 8. Lester Freamon similarly explains, "You follow drugs, you get drug addicts and drug dealers. But you start to follow the money, and you don't know where the fuck it's going to take you" (Simon, "Game Day," dir. Milcho Manchevski, 2002, *The Wire,* season 1, episode 9). Moreover, it is not only the Major Crimes Unit that realizes the importance of following the money. In the fourth season, Omar is able to rob a major drug shipment from New York precisely because he follows the movements of key drug players and their money (Simon, "That's Got His Own," dir. Joe Chappelle, 2006, *The Wire,* season 4, episode 12).

that they "can't control." Nevertheless, the network aesthetics of the series, as a whole, reveal communications media and the systems they form to be potentially productive investigative tools that can help us better understand contemporary capitalism.

Freamon, like Daniels, uses capital to discover a web of corruption that extends everywhere. Working from one of Barksdale's confirmed Baltimore properties, Freamon pursues a paper trail that leads him to a network of Limited Liability Companies and other fronts that are owned legally by the drug boss. Unfortunately, the investigation is curbed shortly after it begins. As soon as State Senator Davis discovers that the Major Crimes Unit is jeopardizing his own interests, he calls a meeting with Lieutenant Daniels and Major Ervin Burrell. After trying to reason politely with an obstinate Daniels, who insists on continuing the investigation, Davis snaps: "Fool, what do you think? That we know anything about who gives money? That we give a damn about who they are or what they want? We have no way of running down them or their stories. We don't care. We just cash the damn checks, count the votes, and move on."[20] Instead of invalidating a network analytical approach, the senator's repugnantly pragmatic justification of his dubious dealings demonstrates precisely why distributed thought is necessary to make sense of networks in all their interanimating complexity.

In toggling among different institutions, *The Wire* contends that police departments, politicians, schools, and media outlets tend to take myopically self-serving views with regard to their own part in the larger systems of drug trafficking, urban violence, under-resourced schools, and racial discrimination. The series suggests that our society focuses on and fears the wrong types of networks. America's misplaced obsession with the threat of reified terrorist networks, for instance, is a repeated theme in the series. In the first episode, during an introduction to the fearful Baltimore drug trade, a newscast about international terrorism entitled "America at War" flashes across the background, which through ironic juxtaposition reminds the viewer of the war taking place every day in American's urban landscape. Later in the season, after Daniels and his squad attempt to take the Barksdale case to the federal level, the FBI explains that it is no longer interested in drug cases because of a new federal counterterrorism imperative. Agent Terrance Fitzhugh explains, "the trouble is we have these post-9/11 protocols. We can't pick up any new narcotics work unless it goes to priority organized-crime targets." His FBI colleague adds, "to run with you on this, we need a recognized OC target. Or, even better, a connect to

20.   Simon, "Cleaning Up," dir. Clement Virgo, 2002, *The Wire,* season 1, episode 12.

counterterrorism or corruption." Later, an indignant McNulty bursts out: "So drugs and murder don't cut it anymore? Well, how about terrorism? These guys have dropped fourteen, fifteen bodies. The witnesses, cooperators."[21]

   In early twenty-first-century America, the prevalence of crime, drugs, unemployment, and violence within our nation's most impoverished communities is largely displaced by a seemingly endless focus on sensational threats posed by terrorist networks or unstable economic networks. As *The Wire* suggests through some of the coded names attached to the heroin sold on the Baltimore streets—Killer Bee, Death Row, W.M.D., Greenhouse Gas, Apocalypse, and Pandemic—the state of America's urban spaces and the state's functional abandonment of people living in these zones should be the real focus of attention. Unfortunately, in both the case of the "war on terror" and the "war on drugs"—and even the "war on poverty"—the networks underlying them are converted into reified figures that enable endless conflict.[22] Siva Vaidhyanathan suggests that such language makes it "impossible to tell when a war against a network is over because it can't be seen."[23] In the show, Detective Carver makes a similar comment about the so-called drug war to Detectives Greggs and Thomas "Herc" Hauk: "Girl, you can't even call this shit a war," he says. "Wars end."

   The fundamental threat to social life in *The Wire* is neither terrorism nor drugs as such. It is the internal terror of the American capitalist system itself. Certainly a critique of contemporary capitalism is nothing new, even in mainstream film and television. As Kinkle and Toscano have observed, numerous popular cinematic works, such as Tony Gilroy's *Michael Clayton* (2007), offer limited critiques of capitalism. Most of these films, however, still posit underlying conspiracies and are based on limited systemic analyses that are narrowly organized around a paranoid individual agency. *The Wire* takes a different approach: "Not conspiracy but tragedy, not contin-

   21. Simon, "Sentencing," dir. Tim Van Patten, 2002, *The Wire,* season 1, episode 13.
   22. *The Wire* generates an extensive critique of "war" rhetoric, particularly as it operates in the so-called war on drugs. In the third season, Major Colvin explains to Sergeant Carver that a combative approach on the corners is a self-fulfilling prophecy: "I mean, you call something a war and pretty soon everybody gonna be running around acting like warriors. They gonna be running around on a damn crusade storming corners, slapping on cuffs, racking up body counts. And when you at war, you need a fucking enemy. And pretty soon, damn near everybody on every corner is your fucking enemy. And soon the neighborhood that you're supposed to be policing that's just occupied territory." He adds, "Soldiering and policing, they ain't the same thing" (Simon, "Reformation," dir. Christine Moore, 2004, *The Wire,* season 3, episode 10).
   23. Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Anarchist in the Library: How the Clash between Freedom and Control Is Hacking the Real World and Crashing the System* (New York, 2004), p. 171.

gency but compulsion, dominate *The Wire*."[24] Through unyielding trag-
edy, *The Wire* indicts a system that has served those in power—a structure
that has neglected those people whom Simon (quoting Michael Harring-
ton) calls "the other America" and has kept them in perpetual poverty.
"But what really ails America," he contends, "is this":

> Raw, unencumbered capitalism is an economic force and a potent
> one. But it is not social policy and amid a political culture of greed
> and selfishness, it is being made to substitute for social policy. The
> rich get richer, the poor get fucked, and the middle class of this coun-
> try—the union-wage consumer class that constituted the economic
> strength of postwar America—is fast disappearing as the need for
> union-wage work disappears. Raw capitalism—absent the moderating
> aspect of a political system that cares for the great mass of voters (or
> non-voters) who uphold that system—is not good for most of us. It is
> great for a few of us. We are building only the America that we are
> paying for, and ultimately, it is going to be an ugly and brutal place,
> much like the city-state depicted in *The Wire*.[25]

In place of empty political solutions, Simon offers a thoroughgoing diag-
nosis of the problem—a narrative charting of both the organizational
components and social consequences of contemporary American capital-
ism. Despite Simon's description of the series, *The Wire* does not posit a
grand theory of capitalism. Patiently, from episode to episode, it follows
particular individuals who are subject to institutional protocols and eco-
nomic constraints but who defy, however fleetingly, the seeming inescap-
ability of the social whole. Theories of a seamless social totality too easily
produce stability out of dynamic processes. *The Wire*, however, teems with
contradictions and instabilities. The series carefully attends to the contro-
versies, contradictions, and messy complexities of American social life.
The connections that make up social networks, after all, are rarely smooth
and continuous. Every political ecology— every socially embedded system
of accumulation—is a precarious, tottering structure.

   This systemic fragility manifests in a storyline at the end of the first
season of *The Wire* that concerns Bubbles, a character who is many
things—a heroin junky, a friend to others on the streets, and a reliable
informant for Detective Greggs, to name a few. After struggling with his
addiction, Bubbles attempts to clean himself up but finds that he is invari-

   24. Toscano and Kinkle, "Baltimore as World and Representation."
   25. David Simon, "Exclusive David Simon Online Q&A," interview with Simon, 16 Aug.
2006, www.borderline-productions.com/TheWireHBO/exclusive-1.html

ably caught between multiple worlds. The structural support that he needs to move off the streets (which includes shelter, a job, and the encouragement of friends and family) is difficult to come by. Eventually, he turns to Greggs, who listens sympathetically and promises him a couple hundred dollars so that he can rent an apartment. They make an appointment to meet the next day when she plans to give him the money. Greggs, however, is shot during an undercover operation that takes place that same night and is rushed to the emergency room. When she misses the meeting with Bubbles the next day, he feels abandoned by his only meaningful link to the social world and regresses into his heroin addiction. In this sequence of made and broken promises, *The Wire* dramatizes the precariousness of escaping one's structural position within an American capitalist network.[26]

   Through its network aesthetics, *The Wire* poignantly attends to the systemic nature of human suffering in early twenty-first-century America. The show does so not only by foregrounding social systems but also by reconfiguring a host of other cultural forms, including the distributed causality of the social network, the threaded subplots of the Victorian multiplot novel, the aporetic cyclicality of the Greek tragedy, the singular-though-generalizable case of the police drama, the self-contained episode of the TV sitcom, and the cumulative seriality of the modern, long-form narrative television show. All of these cultural forms invoke different aesthetic imperatives and different historical temporalities. They exist on varied, though by no means incommensurable, scales. The concept of the network is, simultaneously, *one* of these orders of thought and a material metaphor for organizing the relationships *among* these distinct levels. In this way, *The Wire* is less a map of a social totality than a means of modulating the relations between narrative forms within a dynamic and changing social sphere. The series is less impressive for its mimetic reproduction of social totality—an authenticity that rarely goes unremarked in commentaries and reviews—than for its self-reflexive struggle with the relations of part and whole, node and network, city and world in the era of global capitalism. This critical problem of our time, as *The Wire* repeatedly demonstrates, cannot only be addressed in sociological, political, or economic registers. It must be taken up as a formal and aesthetic problem as well, especially if we are ever to imagine what today seems impossible—the emergence of new networks of social and collective life not determined by what Simon calls "raw capitalism."

   26.   See Simon, "The Cost," dir. Brad Anderson, 2002, *The Wire,* season 1, episode 10.