Casting The Wire: Complicating Notions of Performance, Authenticity, and ‘Otherness’

Lisa W. Kelly | 29 May 2009 | 4-The Wire Files [May 09]

In an effort to produce original programming that viewers are willing to pay for, the pay-cable channel HBO has successfully defined its output in opposition to network television. This approach is perhaps most apparent in The Wire (2002-2008), a drama that challenges many of the conventions of what is often regarded as the most standard of network genres, the police procedural, or rather ‘the cop show’. By adopting a structure that is more novelistic than episodic, and by questioning the moralistic framework that tends to inform such programming, The Wire seeks to create a complex, authentic, and credible depiction of the American city of Baltimore, through which to examine the themes of class, institutional corruption and corrosion, and the ongoing drug war.

What makes The Wire even more distinctive, however, is the fact that it features a cast that is around sixty-five percent black. Although there is a growing number of television platforms for so-called ‘black programming’ in the US, HBO’s most successful shows have traditionally been examples of white ‘quality’ programming. These include, amongst others, The Sopranos (1999-2007), Six Feet Under (2001-2005), Deadwood (2004-2006), Sex and the City (1998-2004), Entourage (2004-), and Curb Your Enthusiasm (2000-), with the latter explicitly dealing with issues surrounding race and the casting process in certain episodes. This overwhelmingly white roster of programming can be attributed to the fact that despite being broadcast on a pay-cable channel that relies more on enticing viewers to renew their monthly subscription than actual programme ratings, a predominantly black cast still limits the audience available to a show, something that David Simon, creator of The Wire, regretfully admits to.

This article will discuss the way in which the casting process in The Wire continues the complexity inherent within the narrative of the series. I suggest that by featuring a racially diverse ensemble cast that consists of acting professionals and non-actors, The Wire raises some issues surrounding the notions of performance, authenticity, and ‘otherness’. In an attempt to continue the anti-network approach to series production, the series draws on a diverse group of actors who are relatively unknown to American television viewers, resulting in a cast that is made up of British-born actors, those working predominantly on the East-coast stage, and Baltimore residents playing versions of themselves onscreen. In the case of the latter, at least, this links the programme to other (mainly comedy) productions within the HBO schedule. For example, The Larry Sanders Show (1992-1998), Curb Your Enthusiasm, and The Comeback (2005) all feature actors self-consciously playing versions of themselves in an attempt to lend authenticity to the conceit of each show. In each instance, this involves the pastiche and critique of the network television system and an attempt to create a type of ‘insider’ humour for the knowing viewer. With regards to The Wire, however, the intended outcome of the casting process is to lend authenticity to the onscreen construction of Baltimore. Nevertheless, I argue that this process results in
other effects too, particularly regarding the use of non-American actors and non-professionals.

Overall, the casting process in *The Wire* affirms the sense of ‘otherness’ that informs the show: the ‘other’ America that tends to go unseen on television screens due to the focus on mainly white, middle-class, and ultimately ‘aspirational’ characters. This ‘otherness’ undoubtedly consists of race and class, but in relation to the cast it also incorporates issues of nationality. As such, this article will discuss a number of these issues through an examination of the characters/actors Detective Jimmy McNulty/Dominic West, Stringer Bell/Idris Elba, and Snoop/Felicia ‘Snoop’ Pearson.

**Television and Black Representation**

In relation to film and television fiction, the casting process is an area that has remained relatively undertheorised within the academy. However, it is something that studies of reality television have recently begun to engage with, due to the way in which real people with divergent personality traits are chosen by producers to play heightened versions of themselves onscreen, with the ultimate aim of creating entertainment based on conflict. Adopting many of the visual codes of reality television, the aforementioned HBO sitcom *Curb Your Enthusiasm* works to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality by allowing actors to self-consciously play with their public persona and regularly reference real-life events and cultural texts. In an episode of Season One entitled ‘Affirmative Action’, this conceit is used to comment on the largely white casting process of the previous productions that the show’s creator and star Larry David was involved with. Nominally playing himself in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, David is confronted by an African American woman who accuses him of racism for the relative invisibility of non-white actors in his hugely-successful NBC sitcom *Seinfeld* (1990-1998) and for failing to hire her for his real-life movie *Sour Grapes* (1998). This is one of the few instances in which the seemingly overwhelming ‘whiteness’ of network television (and Hollywood) is explicitly referred, and which HBO seeks to distance itself from in episodes such as this, despite relying on white ‘quality’ programming for the majority of its output.

The relationship between race and network television is, however, more complex than this suggests. For example, in a report by the Bunche Center at UCLA entitled *Prime Time in Black and White*, Darnell Hunt suggests that compared to other ethnic minority groups, blacks are over-represented on television, as are whites. Moreover, by the 2002 fall season (the year in which *The Wire* premiered on HBO), black actors tended not to be stereotyped in lower-status or criminal roles, appearing instead, alongside white actors, in high-status occupations such as doctors, lawyers, and police officers. This is perhaps best exemplified by the NBC police drama *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1992-1999), which was originally based on David Simon’s book of the same name. Although careful not to situate itself as a ‘black show’ on its release, Thomas Mascaro nevertheless explains how
a close examination of the scenes of this racially and ethnically integrated series reveals variations among African Americans that etch lines of distinction into the uniform blackness typical of television. Homicide presented black people not in positive or negative lights but as textured individuals. Yet, Hunt’s study suggests that such an example of ‘racially and ethnically integrated’ programming remains ‘the exception rather than the rule’. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that with regards to the prime-time television landscape, white cast members continue to ‘dominate “screen time”, not only in terms of the number of characters, but also in terms of the prominence of the characters in their respective shows’ narratives’. In addition, the most prominent black characters have traditionally been concentrated in situation comedies that are broadcast on smaller niche networks on particular nights. This raises concerns about the portrayal of African Americans as ‘buffoonish characters ill-equipped for meaningful contribution to the larger society’, along with the continuing segregation of black and white TV viewership.

These are issues that have been raised by various television scholars over the years and it would seem that when it comes to examining black representation on screen, the casting process and the performance of the actors themselves are often taken into account. For example, in considering the type of stereotypical portrayals of African Americans perpetuated in US radio and television programming of the early 1950s, J. Fred MacDonald states that the naturally harsh voice of Eddie Anderson, the actor who portrayed Rochester in The Jack Benny Program (CBS, 1950-1964; NBC, 1965), gave him a ‘vocal quality akin to the throaty “coon” dialect developed by minstrel endmen’, a trait that did ‘little to advance the cause of the realistic portrayal of African Americans in popular culture’. There is a suggestion, then, that if the casting director had chosen another actor then the character may have been portrayed in a more positive light. This is in spite of Rochester being in the service of domesticity within the series. This idea of ‘commutation’, or rather the substitution in our minds of one actor for another, was developed by John O. Thompson in the 1970s and is something to which I will return later in the article.

More recently, Robin Means Coleman has described the comedian Martin Lawrence as the ‘king’ of ‘neo-minstrelsy’ for his array of one-dimensional and limited character types; a programming trend in which she also situates the Wayans brothers for their swaggering and stumbling depictions of urban single clowns. Herman Gray and Darnell Hunt, on the other hand, have tended to consider the institutional context of black representation rather than critique the performances of the cast themselves. For Gray, three discursive strategies have structured black representation on US commercial television, namely ‘assimilation and the discourse of invisibility’, the ‘pluralist or separate-but-equal discourse’, and ‘multiculturalism and diversity’, with the latter being the preferred but relatively underemployed approach. For Hunt, the concentration of African Americans in comedic roles on niche-networks can be described as ‘ghettoization’, a view that appears to be shared by David
Simon. In a Q&A in which Simon was asked why he thought *The Wire* did not achieve higher ratings, he replied that it was because ‘sixty-five percent of our cast was black’ before going on to explain that the dramatic subject matter was also problematic for viewers: ‘This wasn’t *The Cosby Show* [NBC, 1984-1992]. You can laugh at black people but there’s never been a sustained drama [that has gained mainstream success].’ Bearing this in mind, therefore, I want to consider the context in which *The Wire* emerged in 2002 and the importance of casting to the production.

**Casting with a Conscience: Minority Participation and the Supporting Cast**

Having previously written and produced the mini-series *The Corner* (2000) for HBO, Simon was aware of some of the benefits of pay-cable television with regards to minority participation both onscreen and behind the cameras. As well as assembling a largely black cast and shooting the series in Baltimore, the director Charles S. Dutton was able to convince HBO to bring on board a number of black crew members from around the country. While this was feasible for a six-part production, Simon states that the demands of continuing television meant that this approach was too expensive for *The Wire*. Thus, despite having a writing and production team that he describes as being ‘whiter than we wished they were’, minority participation was achieved by drawing on Baltimore and Washington locals for the show’s supporting cast. Simon describes the benefits of this as being threefold:

Yes, it leavens the project to have local faces, accents and credibility. Yes, it is fun to run some inside jokes among the cameos (Kurt Schmoke as city health commissioner, Melvin Williams as The Deacon, the Rev. Frank Reid as the Rev. Reid Franklin). But also, we can’t afford to bring the entire cast from New York, L.A. and London.

While the latter is undoubtedly true (and the comment about ‘inside jokes’ links the programme with other comic productions in the HBO schedule), the flippancy with which this remark is made is a little disingenuous, as the use of locals within the supporting cast of *The Wire* lends an authenticity to the programme that marks it out as distinctive. The often impenetrable accents and highly specific colloquial vernacular make no concessions to the average viewer but instead demand their attention and commitment. While the dialogue is due to the extensive research carried out by the (mainly white) writers on the show, the way it is delivered is of equal importance. If the aim of Simon and his creative team is to create a portrait of the city of Baltimore focusing on those residents who usually remain invisible (both in public life and on television), then the appearance of real-life locals who have experienced many of the problems and issues dealt with in the narrative only lends this credibility.

I would suggest that Simon’s approach could therefore be described as ‘casting with a conscience’ (at least with regards to supporting characters), as the production team make a concerted effort, where possible, to involve the
local community and utilise residents of the neighbourhoods in which the series is filmed. Simon acknowledges that offering speaking parts to locals is particularly problematic because it is at odds with the acting union SAG, which aims to secure work for its membership. However, *The Wire* would be a very different programme if the supporting cast was filled with jobbing actors rather than Baltimore residents with first-hand experience of the drug crisis within the city. It is important to note that it is not only parts for black drug dealers and users that are offered to locals. For example, in addition to the aforementioned Melvin Williams, a notorious drug dealer who was arrested by Ed Burns (Simon’s writing partner and a former detective) as part of a wiretap case in 1984, *The Wire*’s supporting cast also features a number of ex-homicide detectives and a former Baltimore police commissioner, governor, and mayor, as well as journalists and columnists who once worked for the Baltimore Sun. That such a diverse range of people can successfully be incorporated into the world of *The Wire* is testament to the backgrounds of the creative team and the relationships established during the extensive research carried out for the programme.

Yet, the appearance of non-professionals is not without critique. Rather than add to the authenticity of the show, the use of non-professional actors has been questioned, most notably by current staff at the Baltimore Sun. Discussing Season Five of the series, which introduces viewers to the print media and the Sun in particular, David Zurawik bemoans the use of journalistic shoptalk, the confusing mix of fact and fiction, and the lack of acting skills displayed by some of the cast. Apart from the fact that the storyline may be a little close to home for this particular Sun reporter, it is interesting that he feels the need to criticise these elements of the show’s final season, as I would suggest that they have always been present in *The Wire*. What else, but ‘shoptalk’, is the vernacular used by the various drug crews throughout the series? By having non-actors playing characters based on real people and performing narratives drawn from actual events, hasn’t *The Wire* always mixed fact with fiction? But Zurawik does not criticise the language employed by the drug dealers or the shocking events dealt with by the police and their anger at the system. This is because, unlike the world of journalism, these are more alien, both in real life and in their onscreen representation. Rather than focus on white characters’ experiences of crime or depict the police force and criminals in terms of heroes and villains, *The Wire* presents another perspective, one that is harder to negotiate but which is rewarding in terms of its complexity and credibility. It presents the ‘other’ America that tends to remain invisible to the average (white and/or middle-class) citizen and television viewer. As such, it is less concerned with the acting abilities of the supporting cast than with conveying their everyday reality.

**A Sense of ‘Otherness’: Race, Nationality, and the Main Cast**

One of the contradictions within *The Wire*, however, is that while the supporting cast is made up of local residents, many of whom have first-hand knowledge of the difficulties presented within the narrative, the main characters are played by professional actors drawn from an extremely wide area. When asked whether the production team actively seek those with a
Baltimore or Maryland connection when casting ‘traditional’ actors, Simon emphasises the near impossibility of this within the industry:

No, we don’t look for the Baltimore [connection] when hiring actors for major roles. It is hard enough finding the right people for certain parts when casting the widest possible net and too much is stake to worry about whether someone’s accent will sound Baltimore, or whether they know how to pronounce Bentalou Street. The first job is to cast an actor who can convey the totality of the character with all possible range and credibility. 20

Thus, there seems to be a disparity between the way in which the supporting cast convey credibility and the way in which it is achieved by the professional actors in the series. With regards to the former, hiring Baltimore residents with experience of the world depicted onscreen works to add to the authenticity of the series. With the latter, on the other hand, there is a reliance on their performance skills to convey a similar sense of authenticity and credibility. The former is concerned with contributing to the overall landscape of the series while the latter is about conveying a sense of each individual character and their relationships to the institutions of which they are part of.

It is for this reason that The Wire features a cast that places former drug dealers and police detectives alongside Dominic West, a white English actor schooled at Eton who went on to join the acrobatic Argentinian circus De La Guarda, and Idris Elba, a black Londoner whose most high profile role in Britain was as a policeman in the ill-fated Channel 5 soap Family Affairs (1997-2005). On discovering the backgrounds of the actors who play two of the show’s most prominent characters, Detective Jimmy McNulty and Russell ‘Stringer’ Bell, they may seem an unlikely fit within the series. Yet, although their presence is at times problematic (particularly with regards to West/McNulty), there is also a sense that their ‘otherness’ only enhances the strength of their onscreen performances.

As mentioned, the character of McNulty is especially difficult due to the fact that it is written for, and played by, a white actor. In a show that features a predominantly black cast and which deals with the various problems occurring in black neighbourhoods, the fact that the closest The Wire comes to a main character is white, seems unusual. With Simon himself being white, it could be suggested that McNulty was created as a sort of stand-in for the show’s creator. Likewise, by initially introducing the audience to a white character who features throughout the entire series, it could also be the case that McNulty is offered to white viewers as a ‘way in’ to this black world. Yet, as is perhaps to be expected, Simon explains it in more simple terms, which is that on shadowing the homicide department in the early 1990s for the book he was writing, two-thirds of the staff there were white; thus, McNulty was also written as white. 21 Furthermore, for Simon, The Wire is an ensemble piece with McNulty as the character who most often stirs things up. While he may have initially been presented as the main protagonist, the typical Irish-American disgruntled cop, both his character and the conventions of the
police procedural in general, were soon challenged, revealing McNulty to be more morally ambiguous than expected. In fact, as the series draws to a close, McNulty himself comments on this, stating that 'you start to tell the story and you think you’re the hero, and then when you get done talking you . . .', before trailing off.

It should be noted, then, that although he may have ostensibly been set up as the hero at the beginning of the series, the character of McNulty becomes less prominent in future seasons, only for him to return to the fore in Season Five. During this time, the audience is able to view the police force from a variety of perspectives, including that of Cedric Daniels, Lester Freamon, and McNulty’s one-time ally, William ‘Bunk’ Moreland. However, unlike McNulty (and the character of Daniels, to an extent), viewers are never provided with an insight into Freamon and Moreland’s private lives, as, for the most part, their storylines are restricted to their roles within the force. With McNulty, however, we are introduced to his complicated private life from the outset and, in the show’s final season, it is his actions that drive the narrative. Thus, viewers are indeed encouraged to identify with McNulty throughout the series. To return then to Thompson’s ‘commutation’ test for a moment, it is worthwhile thinking about what kind of character McNulty would have been if he had been played by a black actor? How would this have affected his status within the force, the depiction of his private life, and his actions in Season Five? How would it have affected *The Wire*’s (relatively small) ratings on HBO and its subsequent success on DVD and downloads? While there is no space to begin to answer these questions in this article, I think it is an important question to pose.

To add to this, the fact that an English actor was chosen to play the character of McNulty, particularly one with the physical appearance of Dominic West, has not gone unnoticed by both critics and fans. While many journalists seem to enjoy the novelty of a tough, Baltimore cop being played by an old Etonian, a number of fans comment on West’s (un)suitability for the role, most notably in a *YouTube* post entitled ‘McNulty’s English Accent’. Featuring a clip in which his accent appears to slip, a user named Funkmike states that “a skinny, relatively good-looking guy would NEVER be a cop in the U.S., especially not in a rough shithole like Baltimore. *The Wire* is an awesome series, but sorry to say, ‘McNulty’ looks every bit the English actor that he is”.

Whether or not it is true that good-looking guys do not join the police force in the U.S., it is the case that West has the kind of features more commonly found in British costume dramas or Hollywood romantic comedies than a gritty cop show. This statement highlights the ease with which actors can be stereotyped according to their look, rather than their acting ability, and it is perhaps to the production team’s credit that they looked past this when casting *The Wire*. However, once viewers are aware of West’s Britishness (and not all of them are), there does seem to be a correlation with his character, in that as a white cop in a predominantly black neighbourhood, McNulty represents the ‘other’ and, as such, is always trying to prove himself, a situation that tends to result in him stirring up trouble. In the final episode of Season Five, Sergeant Jay Landsman actually refers to McNulty as ‘the black sheep’, albeit in an affectionate manner. There is therefore an edginess apparent in West’s performance that is in marked contrast to the ease with
which the actors Wendell Pierce and Clarke Peters portray Bunk and Freamon respectively.

Something similar occurs with Idris Elba’s portrayal of Stringer Bell, second in command of Avon Barksdale’s drug crew and McNulty’s nemesis. With Barksdale essentially running a family business, Stringer is again the outsider, not just because of his lack of blood ties, but also because he sees himself as more of a businessman than a drug dealer, and thus has a different agenda from Avon. As an actor, Elba admits that he didn’t consult anyone in preparing for the role, as that is ‘more like mimicking and not as creative’. Unlike the authenticity that the non-actors bring to their parts due to their life experiences, Elba’s credibility again lies in his ability to inhabit the role using his performance skills rather than mimicry or drawing on his own background. The other interesting element of Elba’s performance (and indeed, a number of the other black actors within the show, including Jamie Hector who plays Marlo Stanfield), is his reluctance to adopt theswaggering and ostentatious style of many of the neo-minstrel characters discussed by Means Coleman, as well as stereotypical ‘ghetto’ gangsters depicted in more conventional television drama. Discussing in an interview for HBO’s website the features that he has in common with the character he plays, Elba refers to Bell’s understated style and his subtly authoritative stance:

Stringer is also serious in how he carries himself and so am I. Even the clothes he wears are selected not to be too bold or flashy. I won’t let you judge me on clothes I wear but it’s important that you carry yourself in a manner consistent with who you are. One of the first things I realized as an actor is when you walk into a room, how you carry yourself makes a difference before you even open your mouth. The more you can blend, the less attention people give you and Stringer achieves that.

It would seem to me that this is part of the reason that Simon avoids casting well-known television faces and instead recruits British-born actors and those with experience of the East-coast stage (such as Clarke Peters). With a writing team consisting of crime novelists and journalists (rather than seasoned TV writers) who constantly challenge and play with the conventions of the traditional cop show, The Wire is actively constructed in opposition to network television. As Means Coleman and others have argued, the most successful (or prominent) black actors on television in recent years have been those that adopt a neo-minstrelsy approach, i.e., one that relies on comic physicality and an ostentatious style that feeds into stereotypical perceptions of ‘blackness’. Elba’s decision to make Stringer ‘blend in’ rather than ‘stand out’ is in contrast to this. Moreover, the presence of British and stage actors bestow the production with a sense of ‘quality’ that is rarely associated with network television but which HBO relies on for its position within the marketplace.

‘Real is Pretend, and Pretend is Real’: The Case of Felicia ‘Snoop’ Pearson
The one character that complicates these notions of performance and authenticity further, is that of Snoop, who is played by Felicia ‘Snoop’ Pearson. Unlike the other main cast members, Pearson is not a professional actor. Yet, on being introduced to the creative team by Michael K. Williams who plays Omar on the show, they were compelled to write her a part. Instead of restricting her, however, to the background like other local residents, they created ‘a character with the same name, the same defiantly ambling gait and the same distinctive, smoky voice with its undulating, often hard-to-follow Baltimore accent’.

Moreover, Snoop was given an integral role in Seasons Four and Five, as part of Marlo Stanfield’s violent drug empire. Despite Simon’s acknowledgement of the difficulty in finding the right professional actor for a part, who can convey the character in all its totality, the Lee Strasberg-trained Jamie Hector, who plays the aforementioned Stanfield, claims that ‘Snoop is Baltimore’, and that ‘the reason Felicia is such a great actress . . . is because it’s coming from authenticity. And a lot of great actors . . . most of them had hard times. I mean, the good ones, you know? They’re pullin’ it from something, even if it’s subconsciously. I’m thinking of Brando’.

It is in the character of Snoop, then, that The Wire’s complicated mix of fact and fiction comes together. Caught up in the drug trade from a young age, Pearson was convicted at the age of fourteen for the murder of a fifteen year-old-girl and spent five years in prison. On joining the cast of The Wire four years after her release, she was still dealing in hard drugs and therefore had a foot in both realities. Writing in her memoir, Grace After Midnight, she explains how ‘real is pretend, and pretend is real . . . I wake up in the morning, get dressed, leave my work on the block to walk into a world about make-believe work on the block’. Yet, Simon is quick to dismiss the idea that Snoop ‘just played herself’ in the series, as he believes that a certain amount of skill is required to convey a sense of authenticity onscreen:

It’s all scripted. One of the things I am a little bit resentful for is we have a remarkable cast of African-American actors who are utterly unacknowledged by the industry. They are never nominated for anything. They are never regarded as having created any characterizations or achieved any sense of craft for what they are doing. It’s almost as if they think we turn the camera on people, and they just were being; that’s the way they are. And in fact, these are incredibly professional actors who are reading from a script. The dialogue is from the world that Ed policed, that I covered as a crime reporter in Baltimore for twelve years, that is very common to us from having spent time in West Baltimore.

Presumably, having given her an expanded role, Simon includes Pearson in this category of extremely professional actors. For him, the success of the series is based on the combination of extensive research and excellent writing and performances. Everyone has their part to play; it is not as simple as turning the camera on real life. It is for this reason that fans and critics are surprised to find out that Stringer, for example, is played by a softly-spoken...
Londoner, because the disparity between the actor and the character is so great.

Again, this brings us back to the way in which, by playing on the authenticity of its supporting cast (as well as its location shooting and well-scripted dialogue), The Wire complicates the performative nature of the piece. Moreover, it reveals some of the problems facing African American actors in relation to securing suitable roles within the industry and proving their abilities. For example, Pearson is able to produce such a fascinating performance in The Wire because she is allowed to fully utilise her thick, Baltimore accent and her androgynous manner. For the most part, many viewers are unsure as to whether she is a young girl or boy, and the narrative never seeks to make this clear until the series nears its end. The ease with which she dispenses violence also adds to her seemingly masculine nature, while her delivery of dialogue requires a keen ear if viewers are to fully comprehend it. In mainstream roles, particularly within white programming, Pearson would be required to conform to more rigid characterisations, and perhaps lose some of the richness of her performance (or her ‘otherness’) in the process.

Elba’s convincing performance in The Wire has, on the other hand, opened up various opportunities for the actor. Having felt marginalised in Britain, his complicated portrayal of the business brains behind a Baltimore drug crew has allowed him to demonstrate his acting range to those within the industry, a situation that is also similar to that of Dominic West. Rather than being cast for his square-jawed looks, West’s against-type portrayal of the self-destructive McNulty may open-up opportunities previously inaccessible to him. This means that while The Wire as a series may benefit from the inclusion of non-actors replaying lived experiences, for the professional actor (and indeed for the creative team when choosing main cast members), the ability to perform the ‘other’ may be ultimately more authentic.

Notes

1. In addition to the cable channel Black Entertainment Television (BET), a number of niche-networks have also embarked on ‘black-block’ scheduling strategies in order to secure a foothold in the marketplace, i.e., Fox in the mid-1990s and the now defunct UPN. [---]
2. David Simon, Q&A at the Glasgow Film Theatre, 18th September, 2008. [---]

6. Hunt, 6. [↩]

7. Hunt, 4. [↩]


15. Simon, *Q&A at the Glasgow Film Theatre*, 2008; During the period in which *The Cosby Show* was broadcast, the critically acclaimed *Frank’s Place* (CBS, 1987-1988) lasted a single season with *Roc* (Fox, 1991-1994), starring Charles S. Dutton, stretching to three. [↩]


17. In the montage sequence which closes the final episode of Season Five, viewers are offered an insight into the future lives of some of the key characters, alongside footage of Baltimore itself and a number of local residents. Although essentially updating the narrative of the series, it is on Baltimore as a location and the people who live there that the camera affectionately lingers on. [↩]


19. These details are garnered from Burns’s police case studies during his time as a detective and Simon’s year shadowing the homicide department. [↩]

20. *For the City: Q&A with David Simon*, 2006. [↩]

21. Simon, *Q&A at the Glasgow Film Theatre*, 2008. [↩]
22. *Scene from The Wire - McNulty’s English Accent*,
http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=xg_3ZSeHL4g (February 14, 2007).

23. The series self-reflexively plays with West’s Britishness in Season Two when McNulty adopts an English accent to go undercover. The laughs on the part of his colleagues are perhaps genuine as he adopts a Dick Van Dyke type accent rather than his own, more refined voice. [↩]

http://www.hbo.com/thewire/interviews/idris_elba.shtml. [↩]

25. Idris. [↩]

26. Oliver Burkemen, *When Pretend is Real*,
http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/may/24/the.wire. season.five (May 24, 2008). [↩]

27. Cited in Burkemen. [↩]

28. Cited in Burkeman. [↩]