As Terry Flew\(^1\) has pointed out there is currently an increase in the use of ‘new humanist’ discourses in the cultural industries. Consequently it is not surprising to find a relationship between informed engagement with the values of neoliberalism and appeals to universalistic humanist values in *The Wire*. In the following investigation of *The Wire* I analyse episode one of season three (3.1): “Time after Time” in the context of the political-economic culture of HBO. This is done in three stages: first, I consider the role HBO executive management plays in the distribution of original drama series such as *The Wire*, secondly I consider the role of ‘parafimic’ material in translating the screen text in the context of HBO’s affiliation to the values and principles of neoliberalism, and lastly I investigate the philosophical application of ‘new humanism’ in the screen text. In doing this I am interested in the presence of both reflexivity and compliance to the principles of neoliberalism in *The Wire*.

*Keeping The Wire in context: An HBO original drama series*

*The Wire* is unmistakably an HBO original drama series, and HBO is a company that according to McChesney\(^2\) is unparalleled in its dual role of content production and international distribution and is described as a global power-house for Time Warner that ‘gobbles up’ new countries. Currently HBO’s main role is as a transnational distribution company:\(^3\) this has far exceeded its original role as a cable television company.\(^4\) It is in this role that HBO’s compliance to the values and activities of neoliberalism can be most clearly seen.

Initially HBO’s activities as an international distribution company may seem incongruent with the narratives in HBO original drama series, such as *The Wire*. I contend that this incongruence is not as clear-cut as it initially seems and draw from Lisa Duggan’s work on how, despite what is commonly projected from the point of view of neoliberal elites, the global economy is actually dependent on cultural affiliations and artefacts to demonstrate how *The Wire* is integrally connected to HBO. Lisa Duggan has pointed out that neoliberalism is not promoted as a set of interests and political interventions, “but as a kind of nonpolitics—a way of being reasonable, and of promoting universally desirable forms of economic expansion and democratic government around the globe”.\(^5\) Duggan also claims that the broadest cultural project of neoliberalism is the conversion of global cultures into market cultures. I argue firstly, that HBO is highly active in transforming global cultures into market cultures, and secondly, that these activities are consistently described by HBO executives as reasonable and universally desirable.

These two factors can be seen in a recent interview with Simon Sutton, HBO international president. In this interview Sutton describes HBO international distribution activities: “We often go to channels that maybe wouldn’t have an appetite for a broad, commercial product. We actually do better with more niche channels. Let’s take public broadcasters in Scandinavia; they really like our product. By focusing on a slightly different customer base, it’s really been to our benefit”.\(^6\) Sutton
goes on to describe HBO free market policies, arguing that HBO channels tend to be the channels that buy HBO programs because they are the most suitable customers: “If our channels are buying the programming, it’s because they’re the most appropriate customers for it and they’re willing to pay the appropriate amount. We don’t favor them per se. It’s a free market for the shows. HBO Latin America, for example, does buy our programming in Latin America, and that’s because they value it”.

In this interview one can see how the logic of the free market is presented as neutral and apolitical: HBO is presented as a company that simply provides a specific type of entertainment in locations around the globe because specific demographics of consumers in different global locations have the desire to be entertained by these type of televisual programmes. There is no acknowledgement of the economic dependency on global cultures and no acknowledgement that these global cultures have been turned into market cultures.

Duggan notes how economic policy is presented by neoliberal elites as a technical apparatus that is separate from politics and culture, and unaccountable to either political enquiry or cultural critique.

This rhetorical separation of the economic from the political and cultural arenas disguises the upwardly redistributing goals of neoliberalism - its concerted efforts to concentrate power and resources in the hands of tiny elites. Once economics is understood as primarily a technical realm, the trickle-upward effects of neoliberal policies can be framed as due to performance rather than design, reflecting the greater merit of those reaping larger rewards.

This rhetorical divide between culture and economics acts in part so that neoliberal executives such as Sutton do not feel the need to address the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism.

The fact that HBO does not address the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism at the level of executive management is not surprising. What is surprising though is that the more controversial aspects of neoliberalism are often addressed in the content of HBO original drama series. The lack of reflexivity seen in the emphasis HBO executives such as Sutton place on the fallacy that neoliberalism is apolitical is not replicated in the narratives of the series such as The Wire. I argue that there are traces of both reflexivity and complicity in the episode of The Wire that I analyse below and I am interested in what institutional and philosophical apparatuses are used to maintain this complex position towards neo-liberalism. I suggest that academic debates on the increased popularity of ‘new humanism’ in the creative industries of the new economy provides philosophical insight into the engagement (critical and non-critical) with neoliberalism in The Wire, and that the arena of fandom provides insight at an institutional level.

The institutional apparatus: The use of parafilmic material to interpellate fans of The Wire

Fandom is used by HBO as a site of translation between what at first glance may seem like two incompatible languages: namely neoliberal HBO executives desire for the
upwards distribution of capital and the gritty, politically engaged content of HBO original drama series such as *The Wire*.

Fandom is a site negotiated by HBO through peripheral content. I refer to this peripheral content as ‘parafilmic’ material. The term parafilmic is used because *The Wire*, although televisual in format, can be described as filmic because of the aesthetics, character development, and complexity of narrative in this screen text. Furthermore, episodes of *The Wire* are often watched back-to-back in a practise of spectatorship that closely resembles the consumption of film.

Parafilmic material can be divided into two groups: DVD supplementary materials and internet based material. In this paper I concentrate on DVD based parafilmic material. DVD based parafilmic material refers to supplementary material such as director commentaries and interviews with cast members, set designers, or script writers. Parafilmic material, which is primarily a marketing exercise for HBO, impacts on understandings of and engagement with the drama series. This material is particularly relevant in the Australian context from which I write. Although the drama series *The Wire* has been shown on Australian network television it did not achieve the ratings necessary for prime time television and was quickly relegated to a 12.30am time slot on channel nine. Despite the lack of popularity amongst mainstream audience in Australia it has been continuously brought to my attention that *The Wire* is popular amongst a select demographic of individuals, namely: postgraduate students, young academics, and those who can be identified as members of the creative classes. This demographic tend to watch the series on DVD format.

HBO DVD supplementary features interpellate ‘fans’ of HBO drama series. I am interested in the impact of this type of supplementary material on the meanings made by well-informed and heavily invested audiences. It has been suggested by Jenkins that “Fan culture muddies boundaries, treating popular texts as if they merited the same degree of attention and appropriation as canonical texts. Reading practices (close scrutiny, elaborate exegesis, repeated and prolonged rereading, etc.) acceptable in confronting a work of “serious merit” seem perversely misapplied to the more “disposable” texts of mass culture.”

The encouragement of heavy spending on HBO products is threaded through the parafilmic material that accompanies *The Wire*. This can be seen in the voice-over for episode 3.1 (included as an extra in the DVD box set). The voice-over consists of a conversation between David Simon and Nina K. Noble, who are introduced by Simon, the creator of the series, as the executive producers. In this voice over Simon divides his attention between discussing the ways that the humanity of the characters in *The Wire* are maintained and promoting *The Wire* DVDs and other HBO products. Noble provides acknowledgment of David Simon’s ideas and briefly discusses the cinematography in the episode.

The subtlety with which ‘fans’ are encouraged to spend heavily varies from the not particularly subtle way in which the marketing for DVD box set of the HBO Mini-series *The Corner* is linked to a discussion of the casting of Robert Wisdom for the role of Howard “Bunny” Colvin:
Simon: We knew we wanted Robert Wisdom for this role we first encountered him reading for a part - the part of blue in the, ah The Corner, as it turned out that did not come off. He was not part of that production but I did remember what a strong read he gave, not only on tape but on call-back and Bob and I kept him in mind ... We knew where we were going in this season. We knew we wanted him to play this signature role. A wonderful actor and The Corner for those of you keeping score was a six-part, six-hour mini-series.


Simon: Um. Won a bunch of Emmys. I believe it’s available on DVD.

Noble: I think it is.

Simon: I think it is too.

To the complete absence of subtlety at the end of the voice over, fans are simply told to purchase as many copies of the DVDs as possible:

Simon: That’s right if you’re watching The Wire you have to go back and watch every episode five or six or seven times. There is nothing else to be done but to buy all the DVDs. Buy one for each and every member of your family and just continue to review.

Noble: That’s right because any character could come back any number of times.

Simon: You couldn’t possible watch our show...

Noble: Even the one’s that are dead.

Simon: That’s right they could come back in photographic form and you won’t know who you’re looking at. Everything connects. It all matters.

Noble: That’s right.

Simon: We try to teach them and yet they don’t understand.

It is difficult to read comments such as “We try to teach them and yet they don’t understand” as anything short of condescending. This attitude towards fans of The Wire is in contrast to the attributed superiority of The Wire in comparison to other television drama. The show is promoted as brilliant, and hence worthy of consumption, because of its humanism:

Simon: This was the season where we tried to create the political world and add that to The Wire universe and it was necessary because only the political world could render a verdict, maybe an inevitable verdict on Holden’s - on the experiment that the Western district commander, on Holden, was going to take to legalise drugs. Um one thing I don’t like about ah traditional television dramas when there’s somebody who, there motives are unexamined and they’re really not there in story except to render a verdict. They’re just the big bad evil Mayor, or the big bad evil police commissioner and they’re not really examining the forces at work on them. The Wire goes to great pains, great pains to try to make everybody motives for humanity intact.

I am in agreement with Simon that the pains with which the characters humanity are kept intact in The Wire is one of the reasons the series is so engaging and worthy of
devoting one’s time and attention to. None the less, the complexity of the series does unfortunately also provide justification for the promotion of a ‘correct’ reading of The Wire:

Simon: *Every season the first scene is in fact the metaphor for the entire season, as was this. We were using the idea of a housing project being demolished presumably for a new and more vibrant Baltimore as being a metaphor for reform and we were taking a glancing blow as well at the idea of the um, postmodern world. There is also in this season a drug war that occurs between the established Barksdale family - the Barksdale gang and the new insurgency run by Marlo Stanfield. That was a metaphor again for Iraq. So, there was a lot going on and you basically need to take very careful notes and voluminous notes and maybe a couple of postgraduate courses or you just got to watch carefully. One of the two.*

Simon’s promotion of the idea that one would benefit from postgraduate studies in order to understand this drama series alludes to the idea that there are ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ readings of The Wire. Fandom is shaped through parafilmic material that encourages ‘correct’ engagement with the screen text and consumption of products for increasing ones knowledge of this material. Furthermore, the complexity and status of HBO drama series as ‘quality television’ does not offer the same opportunity as popular culture to ‘muddy the waters’ of class distinction. The narratives in The Wire are deliberately dense. It is debatable whether these narratives can be penetrated or fully understood without formal or informal close scene analysis. HBO parafilmic material supports and maintains distinction. Consumption of and participation with HBO parafilmic material is an exercise in the acquisition of ‘cultural capital’ and that this practice is manipulated by HBOs neoliberal aspirations and practices in the global economy. Parafilmic material such as Simon’s and Noble’s voice-over translates the screen text into a commodity that must be purchased in order to truly understand the complexities of the story being told. Despite the potential benefits of participation in cultural politics gained through intensive engagement with screen texts such as The Wire “the contest has an unusual payoff: Fans help the culture industries recoup their marketing costs for stars and texts in return for its limited access. Real control of the industry remains in the hands of the few”.

*The philosophical apparatus: The use of ‘new humanism’*

The screen text, sans parafilmic interpretation, is more removed from the commercialism of neoliberalism than either parafilmic material or the mechanisms of distribution of HBO original drama series. Saying this does not however imply that the screen text is not engaged with the values of neoliberalism. The screen text is very much enmeshed in the ‘new economy’, and I argue that this relationship is maintained through the use of ‘new humanist’ narratives.

Thirty years ago humanism was in retreat. According to Mark Gibson Cultural Studies played an important role in this decreased popularity through the use of theory such as Louis Althusser’s understanding of Marxism as ‘theoretical antihumanism’, Roland Barthes’ declaration of the ‘death of the author’, and the anti-humanism of Foucauldian geneology. Gibson suggests however that there is a reversal of this trend;
agreeing with Flew\textsuperscript{16} that the ‘new economy’s’ interest in creativity and intellectual property has provided the impetus to reengage with humanism.

Flew considers this humanism to be sufficiently different from humanism of the past to be considered a ‘new humanism’. He defines it as new because it “does not possess the baggage of earlier forms of liberal humanism, as it is more enmeshed within the realms of commercial popular culture” (2004,167).\textsuperscript{17} Flew argues that ‘new humanism’ differs from older humanism because it is not interested in either saving the culture of elite literary criticism (Bourgeoisie Liberal Humanism) or cultivating an anti-capitalist consciousness (Marxist Humanism) and furthermore:

\begin{quote}
Importantly, the new humanism is designed to impact upon the conduct of commercial enterprises, and the corporatizing public sector, and to align social consciousness and cultural awareness with enhanced economic productivity in the context of globalisation and multicultural societies.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

In other words this ‘new humanism’ actively positions itself as a valuable tool for use in the new economy: as a tool for shaping social consciousness in alignment with global neoliberal capitalism.\textsuperscript{19} As opposed diving into overt celebration of this, the appearance of ‘new humanism’ however requires careful and considered critique. The problematic traits of humanism have been extensively critiqued: during the 1980s and 1990s liberal humanism was criticised by Foucauldian anti-humanists, such as Celia Kitzinger, for ignoring difference, for universalising human experience and hence maintaining the status quo. It is crucial that in contemplating the use of ‘new humanism’ in the ‘new economy’ that one learns from the historical use of liberal appeals to humanity and humanist ethics to justify imperialism and is cautious of the repetition of racialized economic policy and practices being justified through humanist philosophy.

Despite this cautionary note and despite holding the belief that much insight has been gained from Foucauldian anti-humanism - including the value of difference, and the need to be self-reflexive and alert to structural inequalities, I do however recommend openness to the potential values of a ‘new humanism’. As Nicolas Rose has pointed out anti-humanism urged us to abandon belief in not only human essence, but “of the human being as the centre, originator and principle of history, epistemology, language or politics”\textsuperscript{20} Rose asks whether there may be “more appropriate ways to investigate these questions of our materiality as human beings”.\textsuperscript{21}

In the first scene of the episode 3.1 of \textit{The Wire} the audience is introduced to values that arguably are ‘new humanist’. In the first scene a medium shot is used to film three members of the Barksdale Crew walking towards the basket ball court where a speech is being made by the Mayor of Baltimore, Clarence V. Royce in celebration of the demolition of the Franklin Terrace Towers. As they walk a mother and her children cross their path. There are sounds of children playing. A debate is witnessed between old humanist values and values that are deemed more fitting to a contemporary ‘new humanist’ political and economic climate:

\begin{quote}
Poot: \textit{I don’t know. I’m kinda sad. Those towers be home to me.}
Bodie: \textit{You going to cry about housing project now. Man they should}
\end{quote}
have blown the motherfuckers up a long time ago if you ask me. Poot: Man it aren’t all been bad. I be seeing some shit up in dem towers that still make me smile, yo.

As the boys pass a wrecked car the scene cuts to the speech:

Mayor Royce: A few moments from now the Franklin Terrace Towers behind me, which sadly came to represent some of this cities entrenched problems, will be gone.

The camera cuts to a still of these towers, which are kept in focus while the towers in the background are out of focus. This shot is reminiscent of a photo and a sense of nostalgia is created. The camera then cuts back to back to the three Barksdale boys who are now walking faster towards the courts. The camera shifts between the two speakers and as their speech and walking pace increases the speed with which the camera moves increases which gives a sense of urgency, not only because the Franklin Terrace Towers are to be demolished in a matter of minutes, but because society is changing form and just as Poot is informed that he must catch up to this ‘new humanism’ so must the audience:

Mayor Royce: Now what do you say, are you ready for a new Baltimore?

The camera cuts to a close up of a young, pretty, African-American woman in the crowd who is clapping at the same time as looking dreamy and sad.

Crowd (in Unison): Yeah!

For the following conversation the Barksdale boys are filmed through the crowd and captured in a medium shot through the wire fence of the basket-ball court, thus allowing us to identify with the feeling of isolation and harsh material conditions that may be experienced if one does not conform to the new rules for humanity:

Poot: Man. My whole life been around the towers. Man I feel. Shit, I feel like I don’t got no home man. Bodie: Council just moved ya mama to pocket grove didn’t ya. You aren’t homeless nigger. You just damn near out of work that’s all. Poot: What do you mean? Bodie: Look all over this city you have people, even out of the city you have people. Coke and dope twenty-four seven. Where was it they go? You live in the projects you aren’t shit, but you selling product here you got the game by the arse man. Shit. Now these downtown suit wearing bitches have snatched up the best territory in the city from yol. If you’re going to have some problem with something have a problem with that.

Bodie lays on the line precisely what Poot’s concern should be: Poot is told that his nostalgia for home and for community are not worthy of consideration and that the thing that he should be concerned about is how he is going to continue to make his living now that the location of his employment (selling drugs in the Franklin Terrace
Towers) is being demolished. The values that Poot upholds are reminiscent of the values in the humanism of Kurtz and Wilson where the goal was “to pursue life’s enrichment despite debasing forces of vulgarisation, commercialisation, and dehumanisation”. These values are in contrast to commercialisation, which is the central value of ‘new humanism’. The scene cuts to a long shot of the Mayor who reinforces the collective embracement of a new Baltimore as he readies himself to push down on the detonator:

Mayor Royce: Alright everyone, count with me!

As the crowd counts backwards from ten we see the first use of a slow panning camera, which moves around the crowd in a circular motion pausing on various members of the crowd, hence enforcing the notion of a collective humanity that embraces this change. The camera lingers slightly longer in a long shot of the Barksdale boys with Poot looking away and Bodie leaning on a fence looking nonchalant.

It is a new era, and it calls for a new version of humanism. Society is encouraged to embrace this change, to shout “yeah” in unison just like the crowd does as it gathers to witness the demolition of the Franklin Terrace Towers. The new philosophy of humanity: ‘new humanism’, is inextricably linked to the acquisition of capital. In the opening sequence the scene is set for a further differentiation between Poot’s outdated values and the values of ‘new humanism’.

**A Compulsory ‘New Humanism’?**

In the parafilmic material accompanying this season of The Wire one witnesses the interpellation of fans to purchase a product that is deemed worthy of repeated viewing and detailed attention precisely because it is a drama series that maintains the humanity of all the characters, or in other words because it is a humanist product. Through both philosophical and institutional apparatus the audience may feel as if they are being seduced into accepting the idea that humanism and capital belong hand in hand. In the third sequence of this episode this message is elaborated on.

The Barksdale crew conduct their business meetings in a funeral parlour. The members of the crew sit like schoolboys in the funeral parlour pews and professional etiquette, requiring hands to be raised and the members to stand before they speak, is imposed. In response to Bodie’s concern that they need to take over new territory now that the Franklin Terrace towers have been demolished Stringer responds:

Stringer: Nah man, we done worrying about territory man, what corner we got, what project. The game aren’t about that no more, it’s about product. Yeah. We got the best product so we’re going to sell wherever we are. Right? Product motherfuckers. Product. Chair recognises Slim Charles.

Slim Charles: Our people got to stand somewhere don’t it. I mean all the product don’t mean nothing if you’re constantly getting your arse whipped for standing on another fool’s corner man.

Stringer: Alright. We had six of the towers on the terrace right. All well and twenty-four seven, but three of those we had to give up to Prop
Joe’s people to upgrade the package we was putting out there right. Now how much you think we lost in the deal.

Stringer: Alright the answer is we made more. Half the real estate twice the product and our profit went up like eighty nine percent. Yol, get it straight. The territory isn’t going to mean shit if your product is weak. Go ahead and ask them motherfuckers trying to sell them four ten poles when you’ve got niggers running around in Japanese and German cars in America all day. Territory aren’t shit especially when you consider that it’s the territory that be bringing the bodies and it’s the bodies that be bringing the police.

Bodie: How are we going to stand on some corner that aren’t ours?

Stringer: Well we’ve got the best product right. Well chances are we’re going to be able to bring in the competition by offering them to re-up with us from our package. Feel me. Everybody making money sharing in the real estate.

In imparting this lesson Stringer touches on humanist values, i.e. the value of human life (not committing murder) and the value of freedom - retained in a very literal sense by not being incarcerated. These humanist concepts are however couched in economic terms: the economic power of having a superior product is said to establish a hierarchy that means that other gangsters will purchase from the Barksdale crew, hence they will be dependent on them and will not go to war with them. These humanist values are secondary gains that are governed and protected by a primary interest in the increase of capital. Slim Charles is concerned about the viability of this proposition:

Slim Charles: What if they don’t cop our re-up bill?

Stringer: Well I’m going to worry about that when it happens. Until then Mr Charles we going to handle this shit like business men. Sell the shit, make the profit and latter with that gangster bullshit.

In response to the questions posed by Bodie and Slim Charles Stringer speaks softly with the paternal air of a patient teacher. His argument is promoted as rational and he is protective towards the members of his gang. He does not manage to retain this composure after Poot’s question, in response to which he hits the microphone and moves towards Poot in a highly aggressive fashion:

Poot: does the chair know we’re going to look like some punk arse bitches out there?

Stringer: Motherfucker. Yol, I will punk arse your shit …

Stringer’s Right Hand Man: Yol Frank, Poot had the floor man.

Stringer: Shut the fuck up. This nigger too ignorant to have the fucken floor.

In response to this Poot looks ashamed and then sits down. The next shot is a close up of a very dejected Poot and Stringer’s twitching hand.

Stringer: You niggers need to look at the world in some new fucken light. You need to think about this shit like some grown fucken men not some niggers off the fucken corner. You heard me.
Poot nods obediently. A clear message is portrayed – to be part of society one must conform to a ‘new humanist’ philosophy where capital reigns supreme. Poot is chastised for believing that to conform to this version of humanism he will look like a “punk arse bitch”. Is ‘New Humanism’ compulsory? This is certainly the message that is given to Poot, but as readers of this screen text we are given the option in The Wire of sympathising and hence identifying with Poot. The Wire does not keep it secret that if one holds this subject position one is likely to be chastised, but none the less the option is made possible.

The critical question is whether HBO’s The Wire is simply an example of how, as argued by Flew, social consciousness is aligned with economic productivity in the global market or whether or this series encourages reflexivity and critical engagement towards the principles of neoliberalism. I hold the contention that although there is a “correct” reading of The Wire; namely conforming to the principles of neoliberalism through adopting a ‘new humanist’ position there is an undercurrent in the narrative of this series that allows one to reflect on the values of neoliberalism – to wonder whether or not one will look like, or worse yet become a “punk arse bitch” if one conforms to the fusion of humanity and neoliberalism.

In order to adopt this reflective standpoint towards the principles of neoliberalism, which are embodied in Stringer’s persona and speech, one may need to move away from the “correct” reading, to avoid the seduction of expertise, including the expertise of the creator of the show David Simon. In David Simon’s explanation of Stringer he is portrayed as attempting to bring rationality to the anti rational world of dealing drugs. In this explanation the economics of Adam Smith is promoted as a vehicle of rationality:

Simon: Stringer Bell was somebody arriving or working his way up in an industry that was in some ways very violent and anti rational and he was trying to rationalise it and make it coherent and conforming to nothing more rational than Adam Smith’s or, or ah Rollin Keynesian economics.

In Simon and Noble’s explanation of the narrative and promotion of HBO products there is conformity to the principles of neoliberalism. As Duggan points out neoliberalism has created a world where: “Capital reigns supreme, supply and demand serves as the mechanism for who gets what, and success is measured in productivity levels and net incomes. …The prevailing mindset is: If something is not measurable, then it lacks value.” In the institutional apparatus of parafilmic material we do not however see the artificial divide between culture and economics that we seen at the executive level of HBO management. In the parafilmic material the economic motives are not disguised and this makes it considerably easier for the consumer to choose whether or not “to buy all the DVDs” than when economic motives are promoted as rational and universally beneficial. Furthermore, although there is no explicit reflection towards the principles of neoliberalism, other than the comment that in this season of The Wire they “were taking a glancing blow as well at the idea of the um, postmodern world” one can sense a certain trace of discomfort towards the commodification of this product in Simon’s increase of the use of ‘um’ and ‘ah’ when he explicitly tries to sell the DVDs. David Simon’s conformity to the principles of neoliberalism is certainly not as seamless as is Simon Sutton’s.
In the screen text of The Wire we see the use of a “new humanist” philosophy where economics are seen to promote and protect values for humanity including rationality, work, freedom, peace, and the preservation of human life. In this ‘new humanist’ narrative we do not see these cultural values being used to disguise the values of neoliberal economics. I do not see the same degree of projection of the rhetorical divide between economic policy and political and cultural life in the narratives in The Wire as are seen in the rhetoric of HBO transnational distribution policies, and argue therefore that the separation of these two arenas, which have been identified by Duggan as necessary to maintain power and capital in the hands of neoliberal elites (read HBO executives), is not as clear cut when one looks at the creative product of neoliberal elites. If the divide was clear cut one would expect screen texts that were either entirely complicit with the apolitical projection of neoliberalism or lacked any trace of reference to the political-economic arena.

Although we don’t witness the artificial divide between culture and economics to be the biggest threat to the left, we do however have a new threat in that capital is seen in ‘new humanism’ to govern humanist values. In holding capital as a central value ‘new humanism’ excludes certain subject positions. It is consequently at risk of replicating one of the major flaws of liberal humanism. As Stuart Hall points out in a recent interview:

> Liberal Humanism failed because it applied to only a third, an eighth, a tenth, of the world. It had no conception of difference, no conception that when the rest of the world came into history it could do anything else but think itself through the same things and in the same way. It failed to understand other cultures.\(^{27}\)

In engaging with the values of a ‘new humanism’ we are subject to the same problems that Foucauldian anti-humanists have criticised older humanism of, namely ignoring difference. I do however, agree with Edward Said that “attacking the abuses of something is not the same thing as dismissing or entirely destroying that thing”.\(^{28}\) ‘New humanism’ in The Wire is in dialogue with less contemporary humanism. Humanist values, such as those endorsed by Poot, are still present. The audience is reminded that ‘new humanism’ is the most recent form of humanism in a long line of humanisms and opportunities are given for contemplating this history. There are opportunities in The Wire to be touched by a narrative that runs underneath the overt ‘new humanist’ narrative. This may not have the subversive potential that Jenkins has attributed to fans, but it does allow the audience to reflect on the contemporary status of humanity.

Notes


6. Daswani 2008

7. Duggan, 2003, p. xiv

8. The decision to use the term ‘parafilmic’ to describe this material was the result of a conversation with Nikos Papastergiadis who has previously used the prefix ‘para’ to describe institutional practices surrounding artistic endeavors.

9. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture, Studies in culture and communication.* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 17.) Arguments such as this position the practise of fandom as an empowered practise of resistance. Although there is a certain appeal in this argument the political economy of producers and distributors of the texts of ‘mass culture’ has not been taken into account. As Fiske points out “it is impossible to ignore the extent to which media industries may be said to engage in an attempt to economically disempower fans by encouraging heavy spending on artefacts and merchandise, which to fans represent a kind of “capital accumulation”. ((Fiske, cited in Cheryl Harris “A Sociology of Television Fandom” in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture, and Identity*, ed. Alison Alexander & Cheryl Harris (N.J: Hampton Press, 1988), 43.


13. Harris 1998, 51


16. This is clearly a contentious comment that leaves me rather sceptical as to what commercial popular culture has to offer in the eradication of the social discrimination that has been recognised as the baggage of liberal humanism.

17. 2004,167-168

18. An example of how this has worked in the film industry, can be seen in the popularity of the queer film *Boys Don’t Cry*, directed by Kimberley Pierce (1999) which despite highly controversial subject matter received wide spread acclaim amongst a mainstream audience and was very successful at the box office. The reason for the success of this film has been accredited to the use of a humanist narrative in the portrayal of a transgender character.
20. ibid.
22. Russell “Stringer” Bell is second in charge in the Barksdale crew
23. Who is of course largely recognised as the forefather of neoliberalism.
24. Referring to the economics of John Maynard Keynes.
25. Duggan 2003, 34

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