



“*The Wire*, Seriality, Media and Global Politics”

Workshop, 16-17 May 2015

PLH-1-102, Plattenstr. 47



This workshop on television and seriality looks at the portrayal of the African American urban underclass in *The Wire* and identifies analogies between the show and Bombay cinema, even while investigating the limits of such a cultural cross-mapping. In the final analysis it asks why TV-series like *The Wire* have become so important in the twenty-first century.

All students, members of staff and other interested parties are cordially invited to the workshop. Please register by sending an e-mail to Elizabeth Kollmann (elizabeth.kollmann@es.uzh.ch).

Saturday, 16 May (PLH-1-102, Plattenstr. 47)

10:00-10:30 Opening: Lars Koch (Dresden) & Elisabeth Bronfen (Zurich)

Lars Koch and Elisabeth Bronfen will be opening the workshop by talking about the network they are setting up on issues of series and seriality.

10:30-12:30 Anupama Rao (Barnard) “Bombay to Baltimore (*and back*): Space, Capital, and the Subaltern-Urban” (Lecture and discussion)



The Wire's cult status is now global, and not merely local. Some of this is to do with its function as urban ethnography that references, yet updates concerns that began with the “Chicago school” of urban sociology of the interwar; concerns with the relationship of space and social difference, of the city and its racialized underclass. By exploring the convergent histories of sociological theory, visual culture (photography, and now film and television), public housing, and subaltern social life across India and the United States, Bombay and Baltimore, Prof. Rao’s paper will explore what appears, increasingly, as a shared imaginary of survival, self-making violence, and value production in the dark spaces of remaindered life. She will draw on clips from key films from Bombay cinema (*Satya*, *Company*, *Gangs of Wasseypur*) to show how an American noir sensibility has emerged as a critical practice of subaltern visibilization, and speculate on the limits to such cultural translation.

12:30-14:00 Lunch at the English Department

14:00-16:00 Arvind Rajagopal (NYU) “Learning from *The Wire*”

The Wire's extraordinary success as a TV series about a “black site” stretched across the American heartland, namely the African American urban underclass, has been copiously studied and commented upon. It has been seen as an example of the critical and creative turn taken by a segment of the cultural industry, as a maturation of the audience and a de-massification of viewer tastes in the era of addressable mass culture. David Simon himself, among others, has also described it as a move away from postmodern irony and narrative fragmentation and towards ancient Greek myth.



Prof. Rajagopal's analysis aims at understanding the show as a case study in making the black underclass simultaneously spectacular and theoretically invisible. His paper will draw on selections from the series, and from his experience in teaching an undergraduate seminar on the course.

16:00-16:30 Coffee break

16:30-17:30 Roundtable discussion

The workshop will be rounded off with a discussion on why television series such as *The Wire* have become so important in the 21st century. Researchers who will be responding to this question include Sue Vice (Sheffield), Sylvia Mieszkowski (Bayreuth), Barbara Straumann (Zurich) and Ana Sobral (Zurich).

Sunday, 17 May (PLH-1-102, Plattenstr. 47)

Programme t.b.a.

Recommended viewing

Company. Dir. Ram Gopal Varma. 2002

Gangs of Wasseypur Parts 1 and 2. Dir. Anurag Kashyap. 2012.

Satya. Dir. Ram Gopal Varma. 1998.