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Lost in Space No Longer: The Visionary Union of 'The Wire'

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Lost in Space No Longer: The Visionary Union of *The Wire*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
English

by

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Abstract

In its serial space, David Simon's *The Wire* season two relates the seemingly "disconnected" union men, foreign sex worker women, and African-American drug traders and crosses constructed boundaries of race, gender, sexuality, and geography to evoke the possibility of a transnational working class. *The Wire*'s serialized narrative trespasses the limitations of money and numbers games and of individual characters to build, scene by scene, what Roderick Ferguson calls in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* "the location for new and emergent identifications and social relations" (108).

Television Studies, *The Wire*, Labor Unions, Sex Trade, Serial Narrative, Social Space

INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTUALIZING AND THEORIZING BALTIMORE CONTEXT

David Simon's television series *The Wire* explores the “official” and “unofficial” institutions and spaces in the city of Baltimore, such as the police department and criminal organizations. Often investigating their interrelations, the series dramatizes a new institution, organization, or territory each season, never excluding the ground it has previously covered. Therefore, by season five, which introduces the institution of *The Baltimore Sun*, we see these complex, overlapping contexts of – to name *only* a few – the drug gangs, a union, a multinational criminal organization, city hall, the school system, and the public health and judicial systems. As Gus Haynes, the city desk editor of *The Baltimore Sun*, explains about any substantive investigation of an issue, "I think you need a lotta context to seriously examine anything" (5.02).

David Simon and *The Wire*'s multitude of writers, actors, editors, crew members, and producers created the show within the larger context of the “War on Drugs.” In his essay “*The Wire*'s War on the Drug War,” Simon has called the “militarization” of drug enforcement a “war on the underclass.” Related to this idea, "in the twilight of (legal) economy," Elijah Anderson argues in *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*, "[d]rug economy emerges" (108), so while capital from "official" corporations may be routed elsewhere, "new" and "illegal" economies thrive in these deindustrialized spaces like West Baltimore. Seeing little economic and industrial opportunities, many locals labor in "unlawful" companies (drug organizations), yet when the "abject" participate in one of the few economies available to them (i.e. the drug trade), they are arrested and prosecuted, which institutes an untenable position for many residents: either poverty or criminality – often both. Although every season of *The Wire* dramatizes this “war on the underclass,” seasons one and three explicitly depict the

viciousness and the limits of such a militarized assault. Furthermore, season three implicitly responds to the then ongoing Iraq War and examines through the story arc of drug decriminalization who profits and who loses within a military-industrial complex. Other seasons, like four and five, represent this country's urban education crisis and devolution and devaluation of ethical, complex, and democratic journalism.

In season two – the focal point of this thesis – the series depicts the plight of ethnic Polish and black stevedores. Members of the International Brotherhood of Stevedores begin their mornings at the Clement Street Bar, drinking beers and raw eggs that the bartender Delores helps prepare. Then, the laborers head to the union hall and hope enough ships arrive to provide work for everyone. To generate more jobs for more gangs, Local 47 President Nat Coxson believes the organization should throw its political weight behind the grain pier, which developers may eventually transform into condominiums. If the grain pier were "rebuilt" for ships, not homes, then there would be a modest increase in working days, Nat argues (2.01). However, union secretary-treasurer Frank Sobotka proclaims that a few more ships just won't rate. Instead, he proposes pressuring the state to dredge the canal to allow many more ships port access and thus exponentially increase work for the longshoremen (2.01). While the canal plan may be a long shot, the grain pier rebuilding – which is a more feasible and reachable goal – is no panacea.

The canal and grain pier seem to be *local* and *state* issues, but to understand the union's dilemma, we have to historicize the stevedores and their native city Baltimore, Maryland, placing them in a global context. International forces flow through the local, so that even on a dock in moribund Baltimore, the workers are standing as if on a precipice overlooking the entire globe. They reside in a deindustrialized city that has been subject to neoliberal policies that have disenfranchised the working class while moving jobs from the city to other regions and

countries. On a fundamental level, of course, the canal and grain pier issues involve attracting global industries back to Baltimore ports, yet neoliberalism stymies the union's efforts. In *Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path Toward Social Justice*, Bill Fletcher, Jr., and Fernando Gapasin explain neoliberalism as the "philosophical underpinning for the reorganization of global capitalism" (45). The "reorganization" consists of "privatization, deregulation, casualization of the workforce (use of casual workers to avoid committing to full-time contracts), deunionization, and free trade" (45). In this reorganization, even as markets are opened up, the state does not vanish; instead, it has a vested interest in deunionization, diminishing a force that could be an obstacle to liberalized trade. "U.S. imperial aims," Fletcher and Gapasin explain, are realized by the "neoliberal authoritarian state" (96). Fletcher and Gapasin concede that "[g]lobal forces have weakened the nation-state in many respects, particularly in the Global South, but the nation-state has also become stronger in some ways, particularly in its ability to enforce its will on its citizens" (96). Demonstrating its strength, the state in *The Wire* eventually dismantles the union and claims to be securing the borders post-9/11, though the Feds have a real interest in busting the union through press defamation and finally the Federal Marshall's takeover (2.10, 2.12). Furthermore, the state intersects with global neoliberal capital, two forces that may seem distinct but have a vested interest in diminishing the power of the working class. In *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats Are Hijacking the Global Economy*, Moisés Naím writes about one consequence of neoliberal globalization: "It is perhaps the financial revolution of the past ten years that has more benefited the drug trade" (78). Surviving on the same political economy, "legitimate" and "illegitimate" businesses converge in money laundering operations, so that the "diffusion of the drug business into the fiber of local and global economic life is much harder to fathom, let alone combat" (67). In *The*

Wire, with the money earned from the Greek's shipment of drugs and women, Baltimore criminal organizations (and in season two, the union) launder their money through "legitimate" business and banks and thereafter funnel that cash into campaign donations and development deals that empower the city and the state to further weaken the already near-destitute labor organizations.

However, despite the financial triumphs of its oligarchic leadership, Baltimore has to survive the "creative destruction" of capitalism. Deindustrialization and suburbanization threaten the welfare of the city. According to Douglas Rae in *The City: Urbanism and its End*, cities are "among the least agile creatures in America's system of capitalist democracy – they move slowly, reactively, and awkwardly in response to change initiated by more athletic organizations" (24). Subject to both state and federal regulations, cities must also contend with "corporations in other states, or governments on other continents" who "make the plays" (Rae 24). Regarding the macro-view, according to David Harvey in *The Urban Experience*, globalization and neoliberal economic policies can make "machinery, buildings, and even whole urban infrastructures and life-styles...prematurely obsolescent" (191). Relating this idea of premature "obsolescence" to *The Wire*, in "'We Ain't Got No Yard': Crime, Development, and Urban Experience," Peter Clanfield explains that "the concrete local conditions of the city" are connected "to the (apparently) more abstract economic, political, and ideological forces shaping its spaces and their uses" (38). Not merely isolated, the city and its population are subject to global, national, and local forces.¹ For example, Elijah Anderson in *Code of the Street* writes that with the "growth of global economy," "[d]eindustrialization" has "made skilled and semiskilled labor disappear,

¹ Both City Hall and the corners (indeed, the entire of Baltimore) respond to what Ann Cvetkovich and Douglass Kellner in "Introduction: Thinking Global and Local" call the "new forces of globalization on local and specific conditions" which make "local cultures...adapt to, appropriate, inflect, and rework global phenomena" (13). Rather than the nation-state and the city vanishing in the transnational flows of capital, media, technology, and people, they are transformed.

which had previously supported the working class" (108). In addition to laborers leaving the city after companies outsource jobs overseas (or moving them to other states), deindustrialization affects the physical urban environment, something David M. Alf in "Yesterday's Tomorrow Today: Promise of Reform" explains in terms of Baltimore whose loss of "95,000 manufacturing jobs" "between 1970 and 1995" resulted in the dilapidated "superblock housing projects and blighted corners" (30).

THE MONEY AND NUMBERS GAMES

Receiving no help from the largely anti-union state and national government, Frank Sobotka entrusts himself and the IBS to the very kind of entity that has, in part, disempowered the trade unions: neoliberal multinationals. To preserve the livelihoods of his union brethren, Frank facilitates an illegal smuggling operation, trafficking in both drugs and women. To fight oppression, then, Frank becomes complicit in oppressing others, in particular foreign women brought over and forced into prostitution. His is an untenable position. Earning money from the multinational's illicit trade, Frank attempts to buoy his union by playing the "money game": paying for lobbyists and consultant reports and donating to political candidates to spur "talk" and hopefully action regarding the grain pier and, more importantly, the canal. The money is a ruthless strategy in Baltimore to fund the political elite and empowered, while using disenfranchised spaces and people to generate more wealth. The "[m]oney," Leigh Clare La Berge explains in "Capitalist Realism and Serial Form: The Fifth Season of *The Wire*," "places the socially legitimate characters in the same contemporaneous time/space as the mostly black, criminally illegitimate ones" (551). In the fourth season, for instance, Lester Freamon peruses boxed-up subpoenas that he sought to issue after following the drug money in the city. The bureaucratic machine, however, halted his investigations, but in this scene, the camera focuses

on folders with names like Ed Bowers, Maurice Webber, and Clay Davis — movers and shakers of Baltimore who benefit from drug money. Furthermore, the scene illustrates the pervasiveness of this money as these "legitimate" figures attend a fundraiser where they chat up Mayor Thomas Carcetti. The money game links together the mayor and even drug kingpin Avon Barksdale, who has properties throughout the city and whose "donation" money has ended up in the pockets of the most politically powerful, including the district attorney. The money, once again, is everywhere, though few seem to benefit, except for the already wealthy and powerful.

This money, which in the end bests Frank, intersects with the "numbers game" — a statistical narrative, such as the homicide unit's clearance rate, that articulates a relatively stable image of the city. In *The Wire*, the institutions of Baltimore, Maryland, subsist on numbers, like Comstat data, the murder rate, election polls, and test scores.² Both the police department and education system participate in this process of "joking the stats," a technique which attempts to resignify the meaning of numbers, words, and bodies to portray an institution as improving or effective. In particular, the numbers game regulates bodies. According to Sophie Fuggle in "Short Circuiting the Power Grid: *The Wire* as Critique of Institutional Power," "reducing the number of violent crimes occurring in a city over a given period of time does not necessarily require the actual reduction of specific crimes deemed violent but, instead, their classification as violent." More than just a reclassification, the city and its institutions govern the population with the technology of the numbers game. In "Governing by Indicators and Outcomes: A Neoliberal Governmentality," Svein Hammer argues that "[s]tatistics can in this way be seen as part of the

² This numbers game pervades the city. For instance, Roland "Prez" Pryzbylewski listens to Edward Tilghman Middle's vice principal, Marcia Donnelly, discussing test preparation (4.09). He protests teaching merely the test questions that, as his colleague Grace Sampson explains, assess "nothing" except allegedly in some cases "teacher performance." Prez, exasperated, claims he's seen this before: when institutions like the police department juke the stats, "robberies" become "larcenies" and "rapes disappear." "We juke the stats," he goes on, "and majors become colonels. Been here before." Sampson then rejoins, "Wherever you go, there you are" (4.09).

processes that open up society for government" (82). By classifying and categorizing people and urban phenomena, like crime and poverty, statistics "functions not only as part of the play of truth, [but] as the tool that makes it possible to operate with distinct categories, connect things, compare, indicate probability, and so on" (82). Numbers become the technology of "truth," a rational narrative by which the city attempts to rearticulate itself amid competing national and global flows. The numbers game regulates the official narrative of reality and presents this data to its citizens even as their daily experiences contradict the statistics. Within the series, gentrification and urban planning corroborate the "truth" of statistics – at least, politicians attempt this corroboration to attract a larger middle-class tax base.

When Thomas Carcetti is mayor-elect, for instance, leading a meeting of city staff and officials, he contemplates waterfront development – at the expense of union jobs at Locust Point – to connect the city to Washington and possibly bring in casinos to increase tax base (4.09). However, according to Carcetti, "[g]etting crime under control is key to sparking investment here, jump starting growth" (4.09). Under previous administrations, to achieve this crime reduction, police officials "juke" the stats – reclassifying rapes, robberies, and other crimes as lesser offenses and using the numbers to portray a more stable and "safe" urban environment, especially when trying to gentrify the "inner city." While Carcetti initially issues a directive to refrain from jukeing the stats, by season five, when he runs for governor and desperately needs the numbers to show progress, his chief of staff Michael Steintorf and Nereese Campbell (the council president who will succeed Carcetti as mayor) orchestrate the resignation of the uncooperative police commissioner Cedric Daniels. Carcetti's hack, the politically shrewd Major Stan Valchek, becomes commissioner and "cooks" the numbers in the mayor's favor (5.10). For political gain, business interests, or the money game, Baltimore's governmentality creates a narrative of

progress that reassures the bourgeois middle class, while city policies consistently disenfranchise segments of the impoverished population and destroy union jobs.

In season five, notorious Senator Clay Davis, to avoid what he thinks will be a Federal indictment, explains the complicated intersection of the money and numbers games to Lester Freamon. His explanation reveals the global circulating through the local – the drugs flow through Baltimore, transform into money, and then finally are routed to political elite who profit from this “illicit” economy. The lawyers, like Maurice Levy, take “high-end drug work. They don't just make money off the criminal fees” (5.09). Drinking and spinning his tale, Davis continues, “They the ones that make the path for all this street-corner money” and show the dealers how to launder and “invest” it overseas and locally to benefit “anyone who got a project or a game in need of cash. Developers, people lookin' to capitalize, elected folk” (5.09). Drug money, then, finances development – or, for a character like Stringer Bell, the illusion of development via block grants – and the drugs arrive in Baltimore through the Greek's multinational organization, which means that even in these local spaces the global circulates. The numbers and the money games work in concert, one diminishing the “empirical” reality of crime, while the other gentrifies areas and runs out the poor and minorities. These games make bodies abstract and disposable, representing and regulating the population for capital and money to flow into the pockets of developers, fundraisers, and other city officials. Almost schizophrenically, the city officials pontificate about drug and crime prevention only to neglect spaces where the drug trade reigns, so that – directly or indirectly – the profit can be routed back to these same officials.

To help create and sustain that “truth,” the money and numbers games often lead to redevelopment, such as city developer and fundraiser Andy Krawczyk gentrifying the harbor where industry once thrived. In the series, political and business elites write the union out of its

space as the city replaces its former industries and work places with condominiums. While the money game eventually disposes of the union bodies, and the numbers game justifies redevelopment to attract new businesses and slow suburban flight, these games work against the union yet *relate* them to other disposable and abject bodies throughout the city. In the money and numbers games, the union makes contact – generally unacknowledged or unconscious connections – with the rest of the working class in Baltimore. The games function dialectically, then, evicting bodies from the city’s official spaces and limiting political resistance, yet by the ubiquity of the games, all these bodies are brought into contact by their oppression, which could lead – though it rarely happens in the series – to vital challenges to the games of Baltimore.

SOBOTKA, THE DEAD WOMEN, AND SERIAL SPACE

The money game and its players con Frank Sobotka, and with his homosocial, heteropatriarchal union, he fails to challenge city, state, and global systems that have eviscerated labor power. Defining the collective as ethnic Polish and African-American male, Frank and his “brotherhood” limit potential working-class political action: they cannot see beyond their own normative formations. In the end, the money and numbers games play Frank and the union, but they also disempower immigrant sex workers. The women, as we will see, are smuggled onto shore, and if they survive the passage, then the Greek organization prostitutes them at local strip clubs that have ties to gang members, such as Orlando’s – a front for Avon Barksdale. These same drug lords funnel money into the “legitimate” political economy wherein characters like Senator Clay Davis launder the cash for various schemes and faux “development” projects. When the immigrant women of season two die on the *Atlantic Light* ship, however, their bodies – mostly unidentified – trouble the stability of the numbers game, specifically the homicide unit’s clearance rate. In part responsible, Frank smuggles in the women without knowing the contents

of the containers. When the “girls,” as he calls them, perish, he is infuriated until the Greek offers financial solace and Sobotka realizes to play the money game he must accumulate more cash. Rather than seeing his situation as related to the women – who are also exploited *laborers* – he becomes complicit in trafficking female third-world bodies, commodified in global flows and criminalized, reviled, and “used” at the local level. The survival of Sobotka’s heteropatriarchal union trumps the women in importance. The union excludes genders other than males, and other than a case of incest (a drunken Nick Sobotka with his cousin), the brotherhood does not evince any nonnormative sexualities. Even though individual characters – and here, of course, the IBS – fail to see the complexity of a *potential* transnational working class, rich in diversity and nonnormativity, the serial space of *The Wire* assembles – fragment by fragment – all the seemingly “disconnected” bodies and their lived spaces, crossing constructed boundaries of race, gender, sexuality, and geography. While Frank imagines one collective possibility and the women are subject to exploitative numbers games and categorizations, the serial trespasses the limitations of these games and of individual characters to build what Roderick Ferguson calls in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* “the location for new and emergent identifications and social relations” (108).³

For this study, rather than localizing and isolating the union, examining the “twilight” of their struggle as perceived by David Simon, I plan to follow the advice of Gus Haynes and investigate a whole “lotta context” (5.02). Although it may appear to be, the union story is not a narrative extricated from other stories. The union workers do not exist apart from other

³ In this study, Ferguson uses “queer of color analysis” to examine how black nationalism unintentionally intersects with liberal ideology in that both rely on normative heteropatriarchal social formations. Ferguson urges that queer of color analysis can “debunk the idea that race, class, gender, and sexuality are discrete formations, apparently insulated from one another” (4). Furthermore, “complex formations” that “transgress” such divisions need to “approach[ed]...as sites of knowledge” (148).

characters in Baltimore and the globe, such as the drug dealers, hustlers, addicts, bourgeoisie, city officials, and most especially the foreign dead – in particular the fourteen dead women who haunt the second season. Their spaces overlap within the serial; their bodies are *relational*. Like the union wage workers, many of these “street” characters become abject and disposable. The money and numbers games that operate in Baltimore disempower certain bodies and empower others, while the serial space continually “rescues” and collectivizes a whole host of characters who seem disparate and lost in the “actual” spaces of Baltimore, Maryland. In other words, unlike the money game, which values primarily the “bottom dollar” in human relations, and unlike the numbers game, which categorizes and regulates “humans” to construct narratives of progress; the serial space creates a complex composite of laborers that does “not evoke class to occlude the significance of all other differences” (Ferguson 134). The narrative “engages” the “normative” binaries of oppressor-oppressed, male-female, black-white, and national-international to “transgress” such divisions and suggest the radical possibilities of a transnational union model (Ferguson 148).

RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY: SERIAL SPACE

To write about nonnormative and radical collective possibilities, Omar Little and his diverse posse of gays, lesbians, the disabled, and other game “veterans” would be the obvious and *worthy* subject of discussion. However, many critics, such as Eric Beck in “Respecting the Middle: *The Wire*’s Omar Little as Neoliberal Subjectivity,” have written eloquently and at length about such topics. Like Beck, most *Wire* critics engage the show conceptually – that is to say, discussing its ideas as if the series were only sociological – but few writers have presented close readings and analysis of the visual, scenic, and generic elements of the narrative structure. Thus, much of *The Wire* in terms of its visual power as a representational medium remains an

“undiscovered country.” In addition, season two has been neglected in *Wire* criticism, except for a few notable articles, like Stephen Lucas’s “Networks of Affiliation: Familialism and Anticorporatism in Black and White,” in which he investigates the global-local forces regarding the IBS. I am moving beyond social-scientific and conceptual readings of the show, however, and demonstrating that *The Wire*’s serialized narrative contains yet unnoticed and unexamined ideas and meanings. On the surface, season two makes few direct connections regarding collective possibilities that both include and exceed the borders of the dock; however, various tropes, leitmotifs, themes, and scene constructions evoke these ideas. Since bodies are *relational*, Frank’s body should not be read in opposition to Nadya’s – the only identified woman among the dead foreign sex workers. Neither Frank nor these foreign dead would be the obvious choice to demonstrate “new and emergent identifications and social relations” (Ferguson 108), but the show’s seriality is this *other* space largely uninvestigated and rife with radical relations among the characters. In addition, readings should not segregate the white workers from the black drug dealers and hoppers. The serial narrative as a whole connects all these disenfranchised bodies – most especially, the dead women and low-level drug workers – and attempts to articulate complex and vital transnational collective possibilities and resistances to the fierce and often destructive local games and neoliberalism.

In “It’s All Connected: Televisual Narrative Complexity,” Ted Nannicelli – unlike many critics – reads *The Wire* in terms of its seriality. Quoting television theorist Sarah Kozloff, Nannicelli defines seriality as shows whose “stor[ies] and discourse[s] do not come to a conclusion during an episode, and threads are picked up again after a given hiatus” (qtd. in 190). By contrast, a series’ stories generally “conclud[e] in each individual episode,” such as in the many *CSI* incarnations (qtd. in 190). Arguing that *The Wire*’s “tendency toward serialization”

creates more “narrative complexity,” Nannicelli writes that the show generates its stories differently from traditional series and novels, a literary form to which the serial is often compared. Of course, a television serial does not have to be in binary opposition to the novel – or to any literary form. Rather, *The Wire*, dense and complex, appropriates various forms, such as the novel, into its serial narrative and threads together a multitude of characters, plots, themes, and tropes.

To understand this complicated dynamic between the “realistic” city spaces and the “artistic” serial space, Viktor Shklovsky’s terms “fabula” and “syuzhet” may help characterize the tension between and the operation of the “real” and the “fictional.” In *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*, Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis explain fabula “as a cause and effect chain occurring in time and space” (72). “It is usually understood,” they continue, “as the raw material or the outline of the story, prior to its artistic organization” (72). The syuzhet involves the “artistic organization, or ‘deformation,’ of the causal-chronological order of events” (72). According to Shklovsky, the syuzhet “defamiliarize[s]” the fabula through “artistic devices” (72). In *The Poetics of Personification*, James J. Paxson considers “tropes and figures” to be essential to Shklovsky’s “defamiliarization” and “discourse,” a synonym of syuzhet (115), so rather than focusing simply on the organization or presentation of the story, I will investigate how visual tropes, rhetorical figures, leitmotifs, themes, scenes, and parallel plots construct and complicate the syuzhet. *The Wire* organizes its stories serially over twelve or thirteen hours each season, so its emplotment is rich, complex, and daunting in its density and artistic devices. While moving the story forward, some scenes connect by images, motifs, and plots, for instance, to previous scenes often in earlier seasons. So while time always moves forward in *The Wire*, the seriality and its artistic devices are not confined to a linear construction.

Rather than applying the syuzhet and fabula as an acolyte or strict formalist would, I am instead appropriating and complicating these concepts with spatial analysis. In *The Wire*, as the “story” of the series continually involves the conceived spaces and its architects reigning at the expense of the oppressed, the artistic devices nevertheless connect together the dispossessed and disposable. The show has a fraught relationship with the social sciences and with “space” in particular. While at times realistically representing perceived, conceived, and lived spaces of Baltimore, the ideas of the show are not always so readable and apparent if one confines analysis to such social spaces. In the serial space, however, a mass of signification opens up that reveals the complicated, heterogeneous social interrelations that exceed the characters’ visions of possibility and survival.

SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC AND SERIAL SPACES

Although the show’s serialized narrative necessitates different readings than strict social-scientific approaches, *The Wire* nevertheless presents a city’s portrait in a highly realistic way, making the series part of the lineage of “social realism.” *The Wire* examines these social geographies – many of them marginal – although for a season many of its characters invoke the supremacy of product, not territory. Slim Charles, lieutenant once for Avon and now for Proposition Joe, explains the fundamental and practical role of space after Marlo Stanfield’s takeover of the West and the competition from New York dealers: “Man, all this theorizin’ how it be about product, not territory, you can’t talk that shit if a nigga snatchin’ all the territory and won’t take none of ya product” (4.03). Like Slim Charles, Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* argues for the centrality of space within capitalism. According to Lefebvre, spatial practice (perceived), representations of space (conceived), and representational spaces (lived) are three methods that encode, produce, sustain, and even dissolve material space. Spatial practice

“embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, ‘private’ life and leisure)” (38). This practice “secretes...society’s space” (38); it is the rehearsal of daily routines within organized urban spaces. This is the quotidian, the mundane, and the everyday routed through the streets, neighborhoods, and places that make the city seem coherent. Representations of space are “conceptualized,” “the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers” (38): in other words, the institutional and official *architecture* of space. Lefebvre’s final element in this triad of space – representational spaces – is “directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’, but also of some philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe” (39). In the abstract space of neoliberal capitalism, “social relations” are reproduced in “spatial practice,” while representations of space, “in thrall to both knowledge and power, leave only the narrowest leeway to representational spaces,” wherein people can imagine other ways *to be* and other alternative spaces to *create*.

While the social-scientific spaces contain characters continually oppressed and, except for some notable cases, segregated, the serial construction reveals bodies to be relational, a concept David Harvey explores in *Spaces of Hope*. He provides a more dynamic definition of the body than Lefebvre, one that relates indirectly to *The Wire*’s corporealization. Although the body is, in part, a “social construct” (16), it does not have to be “a passive product of external processes” (99). As we shall see, Nick Sobotka would be one example of an active, not passive, person caught up in the processes of the city. Harvey defines the body dialectically and calls it “a relational ‘thing’ that is created, bounded, sustained, and ultimately dissolved in a spatiotemporal flux of multiple processes” (98). In this “relational-dialectical view,” the body “internalizes the

effects of the processes that create, support, sustain, and dissolve it" (98). Therefore, the body is both material and corporeal, yet it is also mutable and volatile, changing and transforming in various global and local forces, discourses, and institutions (Harvey 98). It is a dialectic of the "real" and "abstract," the "actual" and the "imagined," and the "corporeal" and "incorporeal." In *Gender, Identity, & Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*, Linda McDowell furthers this idea and explains that bodies "are more fluid and flexible than we often realize" (34). They "vary" by "place" (34), which means that within the serial space of *The Wire*, the characters relate and signify distinctly; they are recuperated despite their disposability in the conceived spaces of Baltimore.

The stories generally depict the numbers and money games that divide and socially disempower characters, while the serial space shelters characters and exceeds their limited political visions to relate bodies across race, class, gender, sexuality, and geography. For instance, in season five's "Dickensian Aspect," Mayor Thomas Carcetti speaks about revitalizing the port using careful rhetoric that conceals the disempowerment of the local union. Nick Sobotka, nephew to the now-deceased union secretary-treasurer Frank Sobotka, curses at Andy Krawczyk, shrewd fundraiser and developer, and accuses him of selling the waterfront to a "yuppie asshole" (5.06). After giving his speech, Carcetti asks about Nick whom the police escort away. Smiling calmly, Krawczyk explains that Nick is "nobody" (5.06), and Carcetti does not pursue any further information because Krawczyk has sufficiently disempowered the young man for the sake of political and economic expediency. The union laborer is "nobody." Because he has been reduced to *metaphor*, his body is marginalized and ignored in the processes of the money game and development. For Carcetti and Krawczyk, Nick simply disappears from the story. Within the entire serial space, however, considering the vast array of plots, we see Nick's

trajectory paralleled to D'Angelo Barksdale, a young and intelligent drug lieutenant, who insists on challenging the dominant ideology and space of Avon Barksdale, his uncle. Also connecting to these characters, Boadie Broadus is the pawn turned lieutenant who realizes too late the drug game is rigged. Both D'Angelo and Boadie die, a fate Nick escapes, but all of them are shunned or made disposable once they attempt to intervene in unjust conceived spaces, asserting an alternative through their own lived spaces. Even though he does not perish, Nick is "evicted" from the conceived spaces in Baltimore. His body a nonentity, young Sobotka has little social or political capital, a plight similar to D'Angelo's and Boadie's. But as *The Wire* relates together all these other disposable characters, all the others who suffered similar "fates" in the story, the bodies interconnect in a community that exists nowhere *except* in the serial space. In the story, the characters rarely bond as a class over racial, gender, sexual, and geographic divides, although one fascinating exception would be Omar Little; primarily, it is the serial space that allies these bodies together to form new "social relations" (Ferguson 108).

PART I: ENVISIONING A NEW UNION

FRANK AND THE MONEY GAME

Like every other social group, organization, institution, and space in the series, the IBS struggles in these tumultuous and rigged games of money and numbers. Losing ships to other ports throughout the country and the globe, the IBS barely stays afloat financially, especially since its members need money to lobby local and state officials to become "pro union." In the meantime, as stated in the introduction, to accumulate this money, secretary-treasurer Frank Sobotka relies upon an organization that resembles the multinationals that have thrived during this era of neoliberalism, spanning operations across the globe to increase profit and avoid the vestiges of regulations in the United States. The Greek pays Frank for smuggling in contraband,

but the money game is “rigged,” and no matter the cash Frank can throw to the city and state, another space has already been conceived and, eventually, realized on the waterfront. Although Frank tries to work within the money game – to beat against its current – the unceasing, vicious flows of capital and money overwhelm and make him disposable, leading to the destruction of his union space that he has unfortunately confined to the docks.

Circulating throughout the city, the money game manifests itself especially in property development, something Clay Davis reveals to Detective Freamon. Development imposes representations of space upon the residents: the administration is one of reform (both Mayor Clarence Royce and later Thomas Carcetti claim this), and development rehabilitates the city (even though the residents’ lived experiences contradict this). These representations – as Lefebvre would term them – have material and spatial consequences. For instance, in “Collateral Damage,” Nat Coxson’s fears about the grain pier have already been realized. When Major Stan Valchek meets fundraiser and developer Andy Krawczyk at his office to learn more about the union’s money dealings, the major notices a model condominium named “The Grainary.” Krawczyk has conceived this space, and he will transform this miniature representation into an actual condominium. Not asocial or inert, this representation of space reveals how the city and its developers already plan to rewrite the terrain of the docks, to erect buildings that substantiate their numbers game and political narratives of reform and revitalization. Apparently, no matter the money Frank has been throwing into the game, the plans for the grain pier – and, of course, for the riskier project of the canal – have been politically unrealizable. The model condominium has more political power than all the bodies of the waterfront workers. In this process of development, the workers have been made disposable. As Krawczyk will later say to Carcetti about Nick Sobotka, the workers are “nobody” (5.06).

The Wire's seriality, however, contains visual tropes that at once connect and, much more, disconnect Krawczyk and Sobotka, both men having competing visions for Baltimore. This idea certainly resides in the story, but the syuzhet further reveals the ultimate incommensurability between the two men. Furthermore, as Frank envisions a sustained labor community, the trope of windows also reveals the *limits* of Frank's vision yet begins to create a space Sobotka cannot yet foresee. In this scene with Valchek and Krawczyk, for instance, the visual motif of windows and vistas reveals the opposition and dialectic between conceived and lived spaces. Valchek complains that Frank and his union donated a stained-glass window to the church, the art work being displayed in the nave – exactly where Valchek planned to place his donated window. Krawczyk dismisses Valchek's consternation, explaining, "A guy pays for a window, he gets a window" (2.02). For a moment, Sobotka and Krawczyk seem relatively equal players, each paying for his window – one in the church, the other overlooking the waterfront. However, Frank's window depicts black and white longshoreman unloading a ship. It is a tableau of the union's hope for continued vitality. Notably, the stained glass at once contests Krawczyk's vision of the city yet limits the resistance of the homosocial black-white union. The longshoremen cannot yet see beyond their own brotherhood. Male workers are the normative gender of the union, both true currently and, according to the tableau, in the future. As we will later see, the serial will explode this confining heteropatriarchal model and evoke "new...social relations" (Ferguson 108).

Nevertheless, Frank describes the space he wants to protect, but in the end, his vision appears only in art. Krawczyk overlooks the harbor with Valchek and surveys properties that he will redevelop over time. He has the luxury not only of lived space, creating his model condominium, but he also has the social, political, and money capital to conceive space, gentrifying the harbor

for profit. Frank realizes his vision only in the stained-glass window; Krawczyk looks out of his window onto the harbor, the machinery of the port – actual space for which he has conceived a future reality. The window frames his vision for the harbor: place as commodity. At the end of the series, a business associate claims, "You can't put a price on a water view," and Krawczyk laughs, explaining, "Oh, yes, you can. You definitely can!" (5.10). These men gaze through the window at Westport, the latest property Krawczyk has acquired cheaply to maximize profit. Again, being the monarch of all he surveys, Krawczyk peers out the windows that frame space for him, and in the narrative of the series, this motif presents him as an official spatial architect or urban planner, a man who can conceive and impose these representations upon the waterfront. Of course, while making rampant profits, this developer receives little political interference as his properties bring in more residents to increase the tax base of the city while pushing out "undesirables" – including union workers – to other sectors of Baltimore, where crime and drugs cheapen property that will later be bought up and gentrified by men like Krawczyk. The cycle is both vicious and lucrative.

Frank buys his window, as Krawczyk has bought so many, but the stained glass presents an image of lived space, hoped-for reality, while the developer's presents vistas to be exploited and redeveloped. In the game of money, Frank may best Valchek who competes for the nave in the church, but in the cityscape, Frank's vision remains artistic, not *actual*. However, Frank does believe money will eventually transform this vision into a reality. The window is a gift to the priest and the church, which will hopefully reciprocate a reward: the priest putting Frank into contact with a state senator (2.01). When Sobotka first enters the church, however, he sits in a pew and pulls a wad of cash from his pocket to stuff into an offertory envelope – cash earned from his illicit smuggling operations. The camera draws close and focuses on Frank's hands.

Then, the priest rests his own hands on the pew, and this tableau showcases the cash that flows from one hand to another. The centerpiece of the shot is the money, this offering that partly funds the church and accumulates some social capital for Frank. Before Sobotka even begins the conversation with the priest, he fills the envelope with cash. Before language, there's money. Before favors, there's money. And before political action, again, there's *money*. The priest does not refuse the gift, or any of the others Frank gives, but he insists Frank does not need a "German window" or exorbitant "offerings" to set up a meeting with the senator (2.01). Both astute yet limited, Frank knows the money game circulates everywhere and that those who can wield the most cash generally gain what they wish. But the money game has also distorted his vision so that he interprets it as a primary relation among people. To connect to another, one must have one hand open for a greeting and the other flush with cash. Sobotka's judgment is not necessarily fallacious or erroneous. After all, Krawczyk does exactly this. The union worker fails to realize that, no matter the money he acquires, the game is rigged in the developer's favor who has *more* social and financial capital and who has won the argument about profitability. In other words, it is both "better" and more lucrative for the city to redevelop, not to invest in the vestiges of the working class.

Frank, however, is not a Greek, Krawczyk, or Stringer Bell (however, like Stringer, Frank has faith in a system that ultimately cons him). Believing the money game to be inevitable and unavoidable – and, undoubtedly, at some elemental level, it *is* – Frank perhaps misses other methods of action and intervention to save the union. Fundamentally, though, his vision of the city and its spaces contrasts with Krawczyk's. For instance, Sobotka rarely gazes at the port and its industry through the vantage point of a window. Frequently, the show features Sobotka outside, looking admirably at the harbor. These places of work and the union hall are Frank's

conceived spaces, which eventually prove fated for redevelopment. For Frank, the dock is a living cathedral. In this season's first episode, Frank surveys all the men and machines working, unloading ships and moving cargo, and bright blue cranes and red containers enliven the dock and create this working-class baroque image. Here, Sobotka and the union do not seem alienated from their labor – here, they seem at home. Later, in "Collateral Damage," Sobotka sits on a bench at Fort Armistead Park, and the camera overlooks his hulking shoulders and gazes toward the gray steel of Francis Scott Key Bridge: both have the incredible task of supporting others. As the bridge does not merely exist for itself, neither does Frank, which he shouts to Nick regarding the money: "You think it's for me? Is that what you think, huh? It ain't about me, Nick" (2.04). At this harbor, he wants to show his nephew a particular "view," one that competing global and national ports and local development threaten. In these *open spaces*, Frank attempts to impart a vision of Baltimore to Nick and, later, to his son Ziggy. In the church, giving the priest the window, Frank's hands are full of cash. In these open spaces, however, Frank invokes relation, community, and unity – anything to sustain their lives on the docks. He wishes for possibilities not yet foreclosed. The series positions him in these public and open places purposefully to show Frank as a character who has a grand sense of the city and who realizes it's not entirely "about" him. He needs his union. Though the money game both entrances and entrenches him, Sobotka tries to relate to others and to communicate his vision without falling victim to capitalistic greed. Thus, he hollers at his nephew, "It ain't about me, Nick" (2.04). For a time, he must labor within the same game as Krawczyk, Sobotka believes, to preserve and protect his relations on the dock. His is a complicated view and a complicated relationship with money. He attempts to use money and its game to support his organization, ranking this as the primary and best possibility his union has, no longer giving much credence to organizational intervention in the money game.

Unfortunately, Sobotka does not see beyond his local union and the Greeks who have been funding them. Sobotka *can* see more, but remains unfortunately myopic due to the money game. In the serial space, however, Frank will connect with other characters in revolutionary ways.

At a meeting about the prospects of canal dredging and grain pier rebuilding, Frank tells the other union men that “[f]or the canal, they’re gonna have to fight a little bit longer and dig a little bit deeper” (2.06). Nat Coxson, president of Local 47, doubts Frank’s assurance that more money will produce political action and state assistance with the canal. “So says Frank,” Nat interrupts: “I gotta say, for my money, we lucky if we pull out the grain pier.” While Frank insists that “we spent the money and took our best shot,” Nat uses a clichéd phrase to scrutinize the money game. Disbelieving in the power of money for the union, he nevertheless invokes “money” to explain this limitation. Nat’s cliché reveals the contradiction of money within this series: it is everywhere, yet distributed to few. Or, in this case, its power is unequally distributed. “For his money,” the grain pier may be salvaged before developers acquire that space, but no matter the lobbyists, the consultant reports, and all the donations Frank gives to local and state officials, Nat disbelieves that such money can go “so far.” “For my money,” then, functions as a paradox, a phrase in contradiction with its own premise. Nat refutes the idea that their “money” will realize their plans for the harbor. Instead, he proposes that the union members – body by body – must “make some noise.” “The money only goes so far,” Nat argues, “Now, we gotta make some noise.” With the noise, they will let their “legislators know that [they] watchin’ on this.”

Both Frank and Nat ultimately want to preserve the union. However, Frank’s plan requires and privileges lobbyists, environmental consultant reports, and money donations to politicians and city and state leaders. Nat does not bedevil such plans or vilify Frank’s method

that includes so many intermediaries between the union and Baltimore and Maryland officials; instead, he reckons with the limitations of all the machinations of the money game. Inevitably, though, Nat's "noise" is not raucous, never swelling to a roar. Since it is more profitable for the elite to redevelop the harbor, this is what happens (2.12). And the diminished union membership hinders any robust collective intervention. Theirs would *not* be a working-class protest – merely some male laborers feebly shouting so that someone, anyone, might hear them. This is not an inherent failure of the labor movement. Rather, within the *story*, no such movement exists. Nat's "noise" would be from the few workers left on the docks, not the workers – male, female, black, white, Latino, and queer – throughout all of Baltimore and the globe, acting in solidarity.

Furthermore, Krawczyk has "city hall's ear," according to Major Valchek (1.01), and he has business ties throughout the community and the state, in cahoots with both licit and illicit capitalists. Krawczyk even serves on the school board. The series metaphorizes him: he is the ubiquity of money that nevertheless serves the few. Frank was never going to win in the money game. Similarly, Nat's direct intervention could prove a viable alternative, but the rank and file have too few bodies – limited to a heteropatriarchal foundation – and cause too little noise. Compared to Krawczyk's ubiquity, the union bodies now recede to the periphery of the city, becoming "nobodies": abject and disposable. City and state officials and neoliberal economic policies thrust the workers to the periphery of the civil body, but being abject, these laborers could still endanger the institutionalized order of the city. "Even jettisoned," Kelly Oliver writes in *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-Bind*, "the abject can still threaten the social" (56). Yet more than "abject," the laborers are also made "nobody" and disposable: however threatening they may be, they still have no space or terrain or "turf" on which to take a stand. The series rarely refers to these workers after season two, which might be an omission worth

critiquing. But their absence in the story indicates, in part, how the socio-political processes of the city, the state, and the globe have emptied these bodies of meaning. Nick makes “noise,” as Nat so early proposed, but the bodies of the male laborers are quickly “evicted” from this new conceived space (5.06). However, as each season evokes scenes of labor and laborers, the narrative never strays from the working class in all its diversity and complexity. No organization or group rallies the exploited, however. The union seemingly disappears. Condominiums replace them. Nevertheless, the union “model” remains a central trope of season two – and, one could argue, throughout the series – and by this model, the serial begins to incorporate a complex, nonnormative, and transnational working class within its composite fictional space.

THE DEAD WOMEN AND THE NUMBERS GAME

Early in season two, Beadie Russell notes the political potential of the union model regarding human trafficking and undocumented women workers. When she and Detectives Bunk Moreland and Lester Freamon meet with the FBI to identify the origin of the dead women found in the shipping container, the Federal agents explain that one girl can bring in “half a million” for “club work and prostitution” over the “next couple of years” (2.03). “So somebody messed up,” Bunk concludes. In the money game, the women are highly valued but at the same time unidentified. The FBI agent explains that these women come here from “Romania, Moldova, Russia, Albania,” “places that don’t have much of anything” (2.03). Even as the agent locates the women, they remain without identity. They come from “faraway” and hope for something else as they have little in their home countries. Yet the agent does not perceive the morbid irony of his statement: the women attempt to escape their countries only to find a graveyard in the United States. According to the FBI, there are about “40-50,000 undocumented women working in the U.S. alone.” “Fifty thousand,” Bunk exclaims: “You need a whole new agency just to police

them.” In a series largely about the dysfunctions of city and state institutions, Bunk proposes a solution that the audience could read as cynical or improbable, which is countered by Beadie: “What they need is a union” (2.03). Rather than policing the women – a top-down *patriarchal* and bureaucratic strategy – Beadie identifies with these women and proposes unionization to prove that such a model does not have to be strictly homosocial and heteropatriarchal, as it is in the IBS. Beadie focuses on the women and their collective potential in resisting both the exploitative money and numbers games. In the series, the foreign women are abstracted into numbers and deployed in the money game, trafficked to the point that they either earn a profit for a multinational or become a political liability for city hall and the police department. The union, of course, can be another form of institutionalization, particularly regarding the collection of unions in the AFL-CIO. But Officer Russell suggests something beyond merely aligning the women with institutionalized unions: the issue becomes one of representation, the way the collective can organize workers to strengthen bargaining rights – or, more broadly, human rights – of individuals. The union model could articulate identity to empower the women politically against the global-local forces that frequently disempower them. But *none* of this happens within the story or fabula of the series. While the serial will use this union model to interconnect the dead with the laboring men, in the social spaces of the city, the women – if we read them serially (by tropes and metaphors) and focus on their abjection – occupy an ambiguous and, for a time, powerful place in the discourses and games of Baltimore.

In one sense, the foreign women are complete victims – lured from their countries, raped, and then murdered. And if they had survived, they would have been forced into stripping and prostitution. Yet the dead bodies unsettle the fragile narrative the city constructs of itself, primarily through statistical data like the homicide unit’s clearance rate. For instance, in *Reading*

Kristeva, Kelly Oliver explains that “[t]he abject is what is on the border, what doesn’t respect borders. It is ‘ambiguous,’ ‘in-between,’ ‘composite’” (qtd. in 56). The abject “represents what has been ‘jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin’” (qtd in. Oliver 56). “Even jettisoned,” Oliver continues, “the abject can still threaten the social, the Symbolic order” (56). The Symbolic order here could be likened to the civil and criminal law of Baltimore and, more importantly, to the discourses and institutions by which the city sustains itself: namely, the money and numbers games. To construct this image of reform, the city must present a “healthy” narrative through statistics and gentrification. Yet abject bodies – like laborers, African-Americans in the projects, and sex workers – endanger the stability of these empirical narratives, even though they are “excluded.” The police can whisk away Nick and black citizens can be ghettoized, but sometimes the abject threaten socially constructed “legitimate” spaces, which often depend upon binaries of empowered and disempowered. Not only do numbers obscure the everyday "reality" of the city, the official institutions can even regulate what does or does not appear in the discourse of Baltimore. As the school determines what the word "proficient" means to mischaracterize institutional efficacy, the police determine at times what "murder" signifies – and whether some bodies in West Baltimore row houses even exist. And as Bunk later makes clear in season five when city hall suspends the investigation, twenty-two dead black people just "no longer rate" (5.01).

Occasionally, the contradictions become so apparent that the processes and the games threaten collapse. Regarding the dead women, whose murders at first seem unsolvable, city, county, and state officials strive to ignore or rid themselves of these bodies that will raise the murder rate and almost certainly dash any hopes of a strong clearance rate. These “abject” bodies contradict these technological and statistical narratives of progress. Therefore, no official wishes

to take on these “unsolvable” murders because they would demolish the clearance rate, that technology of “truth.” At a meeting of city, county, port, and coast guard commanders, they focus on geography – the place of death – and are reluctant to take on thirteen homicides. Colonel Bill Rawls, head of the Criminal Investigation Department, declares to his county and coast guard colleagues that “this isn’t a city problem” (2.02). All of them pristinely dressed in their uniforms, the men sit around a boardroom table and deliberate over who will “eat” the murders. No one wants to give the women a “home” because the Jane Does are political liabilities. Like the union workers, the women are more valuable if they disappear, which would then stabilize the numbers game. After his peers force Rawls to take on the homicides, in the next scene, Sergeant Jay Landsman and Detective Ray Cole, exasperated and overwhelmed, stare at the fourteen red “J. Does” the office worker writes onto the CID board. Interestingly, Rawls has to “eat” or cannibalize these murders – *metaphorically* speaking. The city of Baltimore has to ingest what is abhorrent to it, what seems to threaten the borders and constitution of its civil body. These corpses, at first, seem inassimilable, their horrific power endangering the political narratives constructed by these privileged male city, county, state, and government officials. If the bodies must be “eaten,” then the cases must be solved, and the abject *must* be rendered as object and assimilated into the discourse of the clearance rate. In the end, the cases are solved; the bodies enter the discourse of the city, therein processed, solved, and rendered into statistics. Then, they are thrust from the narrative of Baltimore and displaced as powerless medical cadavers into a lab. They have a place, a certain meaning, and a purpose. The numbers game, at least momentarily, stabilizes.

Within the story, the Jane Does’ bodies are perennially rejected, wasted, and finally placed in medical labs. From containers on the *Atlantic Light* to the containers in the morgue and

then the medical labs, their bodies and their “meaning” are confined. Their abjection early on exceeds and troubles an aspect of the numbers game, but in the end, the city’s socio-political processes render the women static and ordered, inoculated as any threat to Baltimore’s civil narrative. According to Linda McDowell in *Gender, Identity, & Place*, “the ways in which bodies are presented to and seen by others vary according to the spaces and places in which they find themselves” (34). Bodies, McDowell explains, “are more fluid and flexible than we often realize” (34), but to contain the corpses of the women, to assimilate them into a comprehensible stats game, the city officials limit the significance of the Jane Does: cases are solved, numbers processed, and bodies ushered into labs. If the clearance rate, like other numbers games, partly tries to remain coherent and also represent the city’s stability, then the dead women must be contained in some calculation and comprehensible number.

THE WOMEN AND THE UNION IN SERIAL SPACE

In the story, Frank and the union workers do not politically identify with the dead women. Few connections exist between the union bodies and the bodies of the women, except in the police investigation. However, in the serial space, *The Wire* relates these bodies through scenes, visual leitmotifs, tropes, and themes. While the clearance rate attempts to constrain the meaning of the corpses, the seriality of *The Wire* exceeds such confinement, allying the Jane Does to the stevedores through a multitude of artistic devices. The show's syuzhet offers different relationships than *merely* criminal-victim or exploiter-exploited. Depicting the largely white male privilege of the union, *The Wire*'s serial narrative moves beyond categorizing binaries of privileged and unprivileged and seeks out other ways that the bodies may associate, specifically within a labor union model. The serial queers the normative foundations of the IBS and transgresses their limited conception of the union and includes *other* bodies, like the dead

foreign women, in a more dynamic, nonnormative, and transnational laboring class. If bodies “vary according to the spaces and places in which they find themselves” (McDowell 34), then the serial space presents the laborers and the corpses as the conceived spaces of the city *and* the lived spaces of the characters have not.

Frank imagines the money game may preserve his union and, what’s more, allow it to flourish. The money game, of course, plays him because the city’s and state’s oligarchic structures exclude him. Frank accumulates money to funnel it back into the state that, by the season’s end, dismantles his union. Similarly, Nadya enters the shipping container to emerge in a new place, filled with “opportunities” that will allow her to aid her family back home. To get to this “place,” she is raped and exploited, something she likely did not foresee. Like Frank, though, she fights back, which is why she is killed first. Sobotka reaches his limit with the government and therefore turns to an illicit organization to buoy his union; and when the Greek’s operation eventually unsettles his conscience, Frank decides to fight against them – even if he has to confess to the state. Both Nadya and Sobotka believe in some other “world” or “space” that they can achieve, if by questionable means, but both have a limit to what they will yield personally and conscientiously. They never realize their respective visions, and from the beginning, circumstances have been “fated” against them. Both of these characters envision different lives in different spaces. Nevertheless, where their visions end, the serial seems to begin as the show constructs through tropes and other artistic devices the relation between these characters, allying them, if nowhere else, in the fictional space of a potential transnational working class.

The season, for instance, begins and ends with floaters. First, Detective McNulty finds a woman who was murdered and then dumped into the harbor. Later in the season, Frank Sobotka's corpse floats to the surface, the union man killed for his imminent cooperation with the

police. Unlike the other dead women, the "floater" is eventually named – Nadya – and McNulty uses a letter and a picture found on her person to identify her. Although he no longer is officially a murder police, he strives to discover more about this one woman so that her body can be sent back home, not used as a medical cadaver. Despite the picture and the letter, despite the assistance from a foreign national who translates Nadya's words, McNulty fails to learn much more about Nadya. Even when the Major Crimes Unit finally solves the case, the women are not identified. But the serial space *does* identify the women as laborers. The sex workers are the paragon of exploited labor. Had the women survived, they would have been chaperoned everywhere by the Greek's henchmen and prostituted to various clubs and customers. The seriality dramatizes the idea of the women as laborers by turning Frank into what Nadya is: a "floater." And, indeed, Nadya also resembles Frank – a worker. Thus, we begin to see Ferguson's "new...social relations" (108) dramatized: where characters imagine isolation and segregation, the serial constructs unforeseen relations, similarities, and nonnormative class connections.

Further correlating the characters, before the syuzhet of the season, we know that Nadya made passage in a shipping container, and in the first episode, we also see Frank working in a shipping container transformed into an office. Both bodies are, at first, enclosed – on the dock, in a ship. While Beadie Russell stares nostalgically at Frank's "office" in the last episode (2.12), one can also read these containers as what may separate Frank and Nadya and what connects them. The office privileges Frank because he makes a "home" there, conducting business, while Nadya is lured by an illusion and thrust into the container. Eventually, it becomes an oppressive site as the men on the ship rape the women. Through tragic circumstances, both characters ironically "escape" these containers and end up in the Chesapeake Bay. The Greeks dump

Frank's body into the water near the Francis Scott Key Bridge, the site where Nadya was thrown overboard. Sobotka's life ends where her "narrative life" begins. Both of them emerge from the Chesapeake Bay right near the bridge, this very same bridge Sobotka earlier gazed toward as he dreamed with Nick about the sustained existence of the union. In that *open space*, Frank has attempted to justify the purpose of his union and to foresee the future. As stated in the previous section, however, Frank's vision could not extend far enough. The serial makes this place central to both Frank and Nadya to unite the characters. The open space signifies a global moment wherein the serial allies the body of an ethnic Polish laborer with a foreign woman worker. While Nadya may not be part of Frank's vision, the narrative construction nevertheless integrates her body – which is a synecdoche of the other women – into an idea of a transnational working class that transcends nation-state affiliations and heteropatriarchal restrictions.

The circumstances of Frank's and Nadya's deaths and their reappearances, of course, suggest the asymmetrical privileges of these male and female bodies. Once she floats to the surface, the police bring Nadya to shore where a few detectives look over her person – attractive, they say – and hope she isn't deemed a homicide. Frank, however, resurfaces in the harbor where he has worked for years. From the Francis Scott Key Bridge, his body "travels" to the docks, and as his body is lifted from the water and placed on the ground, his union workers gather around, shocked and despondent. More than just a serendipitous event, Frank's body floating to the dock should be related to Nadya's corpse floating near the bridge. On shore, no one can identify her – on shore, everyone gathered around can identify Frank. When we first see Nadya, the camera shows both a long shot of her body surrounded by the detectives and a close-up of her face, neither angle revealing much about her at that point. Nameless, she's christened the "floater." When Frank's body emerges from the Bay, his fellow union workers surround him, and the

camera pulls back to reveal the panorama of the dock, the machines and buildings in the background. The camera angle even backgrounds the ambulance to the bodies of the workers, whose dominance in the frame signals their importance: we don't read just one body – Frank's corpse; we read all of these bodies together in male solidarity. In this moment, despite the tragedy of Frank's death, his body remains, as Harvey would describe, "an ensemble of socio-ecological relations" (*Hope* 236), which in this scene would be the social, political, and masculine solidarity of his stevedores. His political identity and resistance have not vanished as this tableau suggests: workers know him, identify him, and through their relations, resist Frank's disappearing from the lore of the dock and the union. Nude, covered only by a body bag, Frank's body has more political reality and identity than the unfortunate and clothed Nadya. However, bodies being *relational*, we should not be reading Frank's male body strictly in contrast to Nadya's. As the union bodies are relational within the story of that framed shot of the dock, the serial space connects the bodies of Nadya and Frank, something that becomes apparent in their respective pictorial representations.

Furthering the interconnection, a picture represents Nadya just as a campaign poster represents Frank, but both function differently in the story. Exasperated with his job, McNulty eventually rips up Nadya's picture, while Ott, who was going to run for secretary-treasurer, pins up Frank's campaign picture and insists everyone vote for him (2.13). Refusing to "change" leadership, the IBS succumbs to U.S. Marshal control. Despite the threat from the state, the IBS rallies around Frank even in death; however, Nadya's picture evokes little action except for McNulty's brief interest in identifying her. The picture represents her, but it has little political consequence in the fabula, while Frank's picture inspires sentiments of unity in his collective. The context of a united laboring front gives his poster meaning. But there is an even *greater*

context than the IBS or, for Nadya, McNulty's brief crusade. Even as Frank's poster seems privileged over Nadya's torn picture, the narrative space provides the context for both, creating a meaning and correlation between the two representations. Though the games may disempower them, in the open space of their scenes, associated by the troping of the bay and the bridge, the characters are "reborn" and allied in a way that they were not while still living. They are the transnational working class, unrealized in the story but constructed within the seriality. Frank never knows about the picture, and McNulty never sees Frank's campaign poster. The connection between the two representations is apparent *only* in the serial space. While one may be negated and the other fade over time, Frank and Nadya remain interconnected and interdependent, two members of a working class that is often disempowered in the social spaces of the city and the globe but "realized" in all its radical nonnormative and political potential in *The Wire's* seriality.

The "ensemble of socio-ecological relations" (Harvey 236) among the union men and dead women become apparent in the syuzhet. While the contrast between Frank and Nadya certainly suggests the privilege of the male body over the female – the American male as tragic hero, the foreign female as unfortunate victim – the serial space complicates the binary between privileged and unprivileged. The serialized narrative contests the homosocial, patriarchal space of the union and, through artistic devices, evokes "social relations" among the men and women that do not conceal gender and other differences. The serial's union model includes nonnormative relations – meaning that stevedore men and foreign sex worker women could relate by class and labor to battle oppression without having to fragment collective efforts with limiting ideas of gender privilege. In other words, with a complex, robust, and transnational working class, members could make a "noise" that Nat has not imagined possible. The collective

is essential, but it cannot be based on internal and often unrecognized prejudices and exclusions. The serialized narrative fictionally refunctions the union model to bring about a much more dynamic, nonnormative working class. For instance, as the stevedores surround and identify Frank, so the serial space *surrounds* the body of Nadya, who remains mostly anonymous throughout the *story*. In the seriality, though, again and again, the show relates her to Frank – Nadya, and the other Jane Does, are the unacknowledged laborers concealed from Frank’s narrow conception of the working class. The seriality shows that the union bodies and the bodies of the women are relational and allied, even when the characters cannot perceive this. It is not that the IBS is essential to “rescuing” the women laborers. Rather, the serial employs a “union model” to broadly conceive of a potential transnational working class. As the union and the women are “evicted” from the conceived spaces of the show – and while their lived spaces, in the case of the union, are demolished or oppressive – the seriality nevertheless shelters them, as it were, in these pieced-together narrative spaces. The idea of a complex working class never emerges from the *story* per se or within the city’s realistically depicted socio-political spaces. *The Wire’s* serial space exceeds the bleak story lines that present often devastating global-local forces. The syuzhet assembles what has been rent apart, empowers those who have been oppressed, and gathers together all the fragmentary narratives that would have otherwise been marginalized and forgotten in the conceived spaces of Baltimore.

CONCLUSION: SERIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE WORKING CLASS

The Wire’s stories, of course, present characters who bond despite differences in race, class, neighborhood, gender, sexuality, and international geography. After all, in season two, Omar begins to assemble his motley posse: lesbian gangsters and his male lover at first comprise this group. Later in the series, veteran gangsters and Latin Americans form this global coalition –

a temporary alliance – that perpetrates the biggest heist of the series. Also, in season three, Thomas Carcetti becomes the first white mayor in decades after he allies with Delegate Odell Watkins, an African-American community leader. Furthermore, Baltimore city and county drug lords form the New Day Co-Op that, until Marlo dismantles the group, curbs violence and shares product to increase profits for the collective. My argument has *not* been that the characters *never* relate or cross boundaries for a variety of purposes. Instead, rather than confining my analysis *just* or even *primarily* to the stories, I have investigated the serialized narrative to understand what other relations are not readily apparent from the fabula but are constructed through editing that conjoins visual tropes to conjure a transnational collective conception of “the union model.” In season two, as the money and numbers game work against both the union laborers and the dead women, the seriality dramatizes an alliance – showing these bodies to be relational – that the fabula does not depict.

The working class reconstruction is not isolated to the union and the women, of course. For example, in the fabula, a chasm seems to divide the ethnic Polish white drug dealers and the young black drug dealers. While the former emulate the latter, appropriating a putative “gangster” fashion and deportment, the whites rarely come into contact with the blacks. Even though the white and black neighborhoods face similar economic circumstances, both being either gentrified or neglected by city officials, the two spaces seem discrete, not interrelated, to their residents. The final montage of “Port in a Storm” acts as a visual synecdoche of a central tension in season two – the social, class, and spatial divides between blacks and whites. As artistic devices construct an alliance between the stevedores and the dead women – making these bodies correlative rather than discrete or oppositional – so the serial space also connects the white and black laboring communities. The union model offers one potential collective to

reconstitute the class bonds between the different genders, and the serial space clearly includes the drug trade laborers as part as this large, complex working class. And with more space, we could expand this definition to include a multitude of examples, characters, and classes, including the subversive cops – like McNulty and Freamon. While the money and numbers games often disempower bodies in the spaces of the city, the drug game – both *part of* and *apart from* those games – can also be oppressive, even though in its marginalized space it contains complex human characters with complicated systems of ethics that sometimes resemble official “ethics” in global capitalism and other times critique them.⁴

In the final montage of season two, the camera pans along a street filled mostly with white dealers – and even a white “hopper.” The next scenes are in slow motion and feature a close-up of a white drug trader and then a shot of Poot and Puddin who glower from a stoop. In the fabula, Frog, a white dealer, and Poot, a black one, do not meet, but the serial construction places these Southeastern and Westside residents in the vicinity of each other. The drug game certainly connects them, especially since both distribute product smuggled from overseas via the Greek organization. While the white dealers are humorously obtuse and elementary in the technology and codes of the drug game – which often thwart city and state efforts to police the dealers – they nevertheless labor in a similar profession to their Eastside and Westside “counterparts.” Even if the whites and blacks were to integrate more, to form an even larger “New Day Co-Op,” then the laborers would still be subsisting on one of the few economies available for the disenfranchised and marginalized. The syuzhet, however, interconnects those

⁴ For instance, in “Networks of Affiliation: Familialism and Anticorporatism in Black and White,” Stephen Lucasi argues that Stringer Bell, Avon Barksdale’s underboss and would-be legitimate business man, represents “corporate ethos” (137), a man primarily concerned with wealth, not the value of human life. Stephen Lucasi suggests, however, that Avon is not as dehumanizing as Stringer, the ruthless corporate boss. Avon, Lucasi contends, represents “local-familial ethos” (138) and participates in local Eastside-Westside basketball tournaments and, early in season one, appears to be the head cook at a family-neighborhood barbeque. According to Lucasi, Avon attempts to establish “traditional, noncommercial familial relationships” (138).

within and without the drug game and those directly and indirectly made disposable in both the numbers and the money games. As with the women, the drug laborers are incorporated into a larger nonnormative working class that *The Wire* assembles in its serial space. As the montage continues, La La, an African-American stevedore, pulls Johnny “Fifty,” a white stevedore, off a wall as both men drink with the others, presumably drowning their cares after losing the union to the state. This is not a simple piece of propagandistic brotherly camaraderie. La La’s expression is stolid but wearied; “Fifty” grimaces as if in pain. For a moment, the encounter appears violent or, at least, surly until La La wraps his arm around Johnny’s shoulder as the two men stumble onward. Historically (and even presently), race has been a fraught issue in the labor movement and, of course, in the national culture. Bill Fletcher, Jr. and Fernando Gapasin explain that “in the 1600s, ruling elites, as a matter of ensuring social control over the workforce, used racist oppression as a means of driving a wedge between workers” (10). Creating these “differential[s] between workers” allowed the landed ruling class “to set groups of working people at odds with one another” (10). Eventually, as the authors argue, “the color line became the main division within the working class, although other divisions – by religion, ethnicity or nationality, and gender – played important roles as well” (10). In the serial space, La La and Fifty trespass this normative color line that has regulated and fragmented unions. The montage places these stevedores after the tableaux of the white and black drug traders to suggest the possibilities of the “union model”: a complex assembling of the working class across the color line – and, indeed, across any lines, including gender, sexuality, *and* geography. The serial visually presents the union model as capable of allying people despite “differences” that often fragment the laboring class. *The Wire* certainly critiques the homosocial space of the union, but it envisions through its

seriality the political potential of a transnational working class forming across lines of race, gender, sexuality, and geography.

Through images, tropes, leitmotifs, and scene constructions, the serial space expands and reworks the “union model.” *The Wire* seems to dramatize social justice unionism, a concept explored in *Solidarity Divided*. As Fletcher and Gapasin argue about “twenty-first-century unionism,” one “cannot view class oppression simply as an economic concept that exists in isolation from other forms of oppression in capitalist society” (167). Social justice, they argue, must eclipse the historical focal point of “employer-employee relations” (167). The authors conclude that “class struggle is not restricted to the workplace”; therefore, “neither should unions be” (174). In addition, “race and gender,” they argue, “are not sideshows to the alleged real story of class” (179). Rather, race, class, gender, *and* sexuality all intersect, and *The Wire*’s serialized narrative attempts to evoke this “whole” nonnormative picture of the potential labor movement: the serial is, in other words, “the location for new and emergent identifications and social relations” (Ferguson 108).

The IBS rarely moves beyond the dock and its surrounding neighborhoods, but the serial narrative brings the organization’s members into contact with other groups with whom they *could* align themselves and thus transcend their normative social formations to include foreign sex workers and even “pawn” drug dealers who are also marginalized and made disposable in the global-local processes of Baltimore. With his conceived space of the union hall and his imagined space of the stained-glass window, Frank Sobotka and the other stevedores may not see the political and cultural potential of a larger city, state, and transnational working-class movement. Instead, Frank has allied his union with a neoliberal global organization that flourishes post-big labor and welfare economy, and along with the state, this global black-market organization leads

to the destruction of the union. “Licit” and “illicit” economies blur when the series reveals the Greek as an informant for the FBI, a collusion that should be read as a metaphor for the expansiveness and amorality of neoliberal capital. To battle neoliberalism, Frank “invests” himself in a *neoliberal* political economy, a damning and paradoxical maneuver. Also victims of global political economy, the dead women – and, frankly, all laborers – represent an alternative to neoliberalism: global and nonnormative coalitions that magnify the power of workers, the poor, and the disenfranchised. Demonstrating this idea, the television show’s serial space reconciles groups that seem separated from each other. Neoliberalism and all of the city’s districts, neighborhoods, and institutions may often segregate oppressed populations, but while these boundaries divide, the serial narrative crosses such divisions and creates this dynamic and transnational “class” space that is yet unrealized in the “real” Baltimore, only imagined, but still possible. All that seems lost in the city is, in a word, found in *The Wire*.

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