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**Ariane Hudelet, *The Wire, Les règles du jeu***

Paris: PUF, 2016, 198 pages

**Flore Coulouma****Electronic version**URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/inmedia/906>

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## REFERENCES

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- 1 David Simon's cult television series *The Wire* has been the subject of a very rich academic and non-academic production since the end of its initial broadcast on HBO in 2008. It has also become a favorite among French academics in the past few years, yet apart from the collective works *The Wire*, *Reconstitution collective* (Les Prairies Ordinaires, 2011), and *The Wire*, *l'Amérique sur écoute* (La Découverte, 2014), no comprehensive monograph on the subject has been published in French until now, most of the bibliographical references being only accessible in English. Ariane Hudelet's book, *The Wire*, *les règles du jeu*, aims to fill that gap. Since *The Wire* is now considered a cult phenomenon, as Ms Hudelet reminds us in her introduction, her study is doubly welcome; on the one hand, it provides a review of the French and English-language literature on the subject, which will be useful to students and researchers. On the other hand, Ms Hudelet's book offers a unique and original interpretation of the series, and sheds light on its main issues and themes, using as its guiding thread the productive notion of "rules of the game." At about 200 pages (four 50-page chapters) the book is substantial, but it is nonetheless explicitly designed to be accessible to both academic and non-academic readerships.
- 2 Ms Hudelet starts by defining the notion of rule. *The Wire*'s perhaps most iconic recurring line ("That's the game, yo") is universally shared among the series' characters, across all social classes, on both sides of the law. Ariane Hudelet uses its complex polysemy as her gateway into the many aesthetic (especially visual), narrative, and political levels of the series. The "game" refers to the chess game that low and mi-

level gangsters play to pass the time while waiting for customers; it also refers to the dangerous game of drug trafficking and gang life, and, more generally in the series, to the fixed game of an oppressive social order whose dehumanizing structure makes every actor a powerless pawn (chapter 1 “Un jeu de dupe?” [a fool’s game?]). The predetermined logic of the game is exposed at different levels, in the series’ relation to space: the many social hierarchies mapped out onto the Baltimore landscape make the town a chess board on which conflicts play out between and within social groups (the police, the gangs, the school system, the local politicians, and the newspaper). Ariane Hudelet also uses this first chapter to address the many criticisms leveled at series creator David Simon for his allegedly excessive pessimism. According to his detractors, Simon’s vision of a struggling post-industrial Baltimore leaves his characters no way out; it is too bleak to inspire and uplift viewers. Ariane Hudelet argues against this, pointing out how Simon’s “formal strategies” (48), both narrative and visual, create a sense of involvement and excitement in the audience that averts the pitfalls of utter resignation.

- 3 The book’s second chapter turns to the notion of game as a pleasurable endeavor, and focuses on the series’ aesthetic and playful dimension. The series’ “narrative complexity” (52), its many echoes, and its sustained suspense engage the viewer in a decoding challenge that largely contributes to the series’ appeal: the deeper level of the narrative, including detective plots, social codes and interconnected networks, strongly emulate the “productive confusion” of a video game (61), and partially explains the audience’s enthusiasm for *The Wire*. Ariane Hudelet devotes part of her analysis to the repetition/variation structures that frame the dialogues and stage directions as well as the visual and sound effects throughout the series. David Simon paired these aesthetic choices with a deliberately slow tempo, thus reclaiming the “long term” as crucial to his narrative’s investigations and to the unfolding of the plot itself. For Ariane Hudelet, the series’ long-term strategy is also instrumental in generating and maintaining the viewers’ interest.
- 4 Chapter 3 focuses on the series as a game of representation based on the complex relationship between fiction, realism and reality: the stakes of fiction are an explicit sub-plot of season 5, the “meta-fictional” season of the series. *The Wire* uniquely combines realistic, documentary modes with a fully owned theatricality (107), thus highlighting the discrepancy between fiction and reality. This leads Ariane Hudelet to a broader reflection on the relationship between sign and meaning, an issue that allows David Simon to denounce the referential void at the heart of neo-liberal capitalism. At this juncture Ms Hudelet could have productively used the analytical tools provided by language philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose work on game, language and reference could further enlighten us on the series’ own relationship to meaning and reference. Ms Hudelet’s third chapter also examines the issue of violence as intrinsically linked to the question of language. Finally, Ariane Hudelet rounds up her study with an analysis of the meta-textual and self-referential dimension of the series (chapter 4). She meticulously reviews the series’ proliferating references to cinematic, televisual and literary genres, and shows how they anchor *The Wire* within a hybrid, seemingly fragmented generic tradition. The series retains a strong formal unity, however, thanks to David’s Simon’s coherent “vision d’auteur” [authorial viewpoint] (173).

- 5 Ariane Hudelet's book is a very pleasant read. It is never pompous or overly technical yet provides scrupulously detailed and illuminating micro-analyses, thus giving the reader access to a subtle understanding of the aesthetic and narrative logic of the series. *The Wire, les règles du jeu* also enables the reader to apprehend the series within a broader context, and to understand the multiple traditions (literary, cinematic, televisual) at stake in the art of TV series.
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## AUTHORS

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