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House vs *The Wire*

Procedure and Complexity in Contemporary US Serial Television Drama

Over the last decade, US serial television productions have garnered critical acclaim and academic attention for their complex and innovative narrative structure. Labeled Quality Television and "not TV" (promo slogan of the pay-TV channel HBO) to signal their cultural value over the presumably lowbrow standard television fare, they have preferably been compared to more reputable narrative forms, such as the novel. This paper picks up on Mittell's suggestion to read The Wire, one of contemporary television's arguably most complex productions, as a procedural instead. This genre of television is characterized by a highly formulaic structure, resolving a profession-specific problem within each episode. The Wire's episodes are neither formulaic nor self-contained. This paper compares The Wire to House, a typical, formulaic, contemporary procedural. It explores to what degree The Wire is, nevertheless, structured by comparable principles and how narrative theory can contribute to the analysis of serial plotting.

1. Introduction

Until recently, serial television drama has been at best a marginal topic of academic inquiry. This has changed with the rise of the *Quality Television* segment since the 1980s (with shows like *Hill Street* Blues, NBC: 1981-87; *St Elsewhere*, NBC: 1982-88; or *Twin Peaks*, ABC: 1990-91), and the proliferation of the pay-TV channel HBO as a producer of critically applauded serials like *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), and *The Wire* (2002-2008). Today, serial television is a highly regarded narrative form that may even threaten the status of film as the primary medium of audiovisual narration.[1] While many features of 'quality' television have hence become standard ingredients of US prime-time serial television,[2] Jason Mittell has introduced the term 'complex television' to refer to a new category of shows that includes HBO's creations, as well as cable and network productions (e.g. *Mad Men*, AMC: 2007-; *Breaking Bad*, AMC: 2008-; *Lost*, ABC: 2004-10). Most recently, the lively discourse around 'quality' and 'complex' serial television has also spurred a wider interest in *seriality* as narrative form and a phenomenon of popular culture.[3]

The mediality of serial television can be approached from different angles. Critics and television makers themselves have compared complex serials to more reputable narrative forms. Most notably, *The Wire*'s creator David Simon discusses his show as a "visual novel" (cf. Mittell 2009; Rose 2008) and Greek

tragedy (cf. Ethridge 2008). As Jason Mittell has criticized, such transmedial comparisons downplay complex television's relationship to its own medium and its own history of storytelling conventions (2009).[4] Likening a season's episodes to "chapters in an ongoing saga" (Newman 2006, 23), or describing each season of *The Wire* as a book within a novel (Rose 2008), the contemporary rhetoric particularly stresses the complexity arising from the long-term development of narrative arcs over the course of whole seasons and beyond. Mittell's research, manifest in numerous articles, book chapters and the publicly drafted book project *Complex TV*,[5] looks at this aspect from a different angle. He argues for an analysis of complex television as a "narrative model" that is "unique to the medium and thus must be examined on its own terms" (2012, "Introduction," par. 9).

As part of this research project, Mittell counters the novelistic readings of *The Wire* by drawing attention to its kinship with the *procedural*, one of television's most prototypical narrative genres (2009). *The Wire*'s gritty, authentic, quasi-documentary style, and the verisimilitude created by the high attention to detail, particularly in the representation of professional procedures, can be traced back to *Dragnet* (NBC: 1951-70), the show that invented "the formal and cultural vocabulary of the police procedural" (ibid., 434). As a result of their emphasis "on the functional machinery of the police world," both *Dragnet* and *The Wire* present "a form of 'systemic realism' that sublimate[s] character depth to institutional logic" (ibid.; cf. Mittell 2004). As Mittell argues, the resulting reduction of characters to their functions in the larger system, lack of character interiority, and the negation of characters' individualistic potentials, are principles opposed to those of the typical novel (2009, 430 f). As an alternative comparison, he suggests to explore the interaction between different systems of social organization on display in *The Wire* through the metaphor of "the game," which is used by the characters to refer to urban drug trade and institutional politics, and compares the logic of the show to the logic of video games (ibid., 431 f.).[6]

In this essay, I want to revisit some of the aspects brought up by Mittell's analysis, and draw attention to more micro-structural aspects of textual organization. While to date, Mittell offers the most convincing and comprehensive narratological view on complex serials (2006, 2012), his context-sensitive view lacks the scrutiny of classical narratological models, regarding features of textual micro-structure as well as narrative logic. At the same time, applications of narratological models developed elsewhere (mainly in literary theory) to serial television have been relatively scarce, and have not resulted in medium-specific analytical frameworks (e.g. Kozloff 1992; Allrath/Gymnich 2005). However, such a framework seems highly desirable in light of how central arguments about narrative structure are to discussions of complex seriality. In this light, the following analysis will try to demonstrate the usefulness of a narratologically oriented approach to storytelling strategies in serial television. In the remainder of the introduction, I will draw attention to some questions that arise from this perspective, and in response to Mittell's interpretation. In the subse-

quent sections, I will (2) introduce the medical drama *House M.D.* as a typical example of the contemporary procedural; (3) revisit specific aspects of serial plotting in terms of narratological plot models, and (4) explore the structural composition of *The Wire*'s first season in its relationship to these frames of reference.

1.1. "Procedural logic" and episodic structure

As Mittell points out, *The Wire*'s episodic organization departs significantly from the principle of relatively self-contained, interchangeable episodes that marks the prototypical procedural. Instead, *The Wire* resolves a grand, complex police investigation in the course of each of its seasons, and demands each episode "to be viewed in sequence and strict continuity" (Mittell 2009, 435). By taking a rather global, context-sensitive, and critical view of the systemic inter-relations that emerge over the course of *The Wire*'s five seasons, Mittell back-grounds other aspects of the "Procedural Logic" evoked in his essay's title. In the typical procedural, procedures are not only represented on the diegetic level. Significant steps in professional procedures also provide a formulaic grid that structures most episodes. If procedure is understood, according to the *OED*, as "the performance of particular actions, esp. considered in regard to method; practice, conduct," and as "the established or prescribed way of doing something",[7] the term could also refer to such standardized methods for creating stories and structuring episodes. Furthermore, such formulae are not necessarily restricted to genres that represent intradiegetic procedures. As a response to the structural constraints imposed by production and program-ming schedules, the industry has developed highly standardized practices of collaborative screenwriting, a set of procedures shared by professionals work-ing on a variety of serial television genres (cf. e.g. the screenwriting manuals by Douglas 2005; Epstein 2006). Even when they do not manifest clearly recog-nizable storytelling formulae, there are good reasons to assume that textual traces of narrational procedures may still be present in complex productions on more abstract, less obvious levels; as even today's most non-conformist productions are still industrially produced texts, co-authored by individuals trained in the 'standard procedures.' When the current discourse highlights innovations and meanings that emerge on a global level (i.e. over the course of several episodes), this may imply that the respective productions are less or-ganized on a local level (i.e. in their intra-episodic structure, or movement from plot-point to plot-point). However, whether and how they are actually organ-ized at this level remains to be investigated.

1.2. Procedures and schemata

Both on the levels of intradiegetic professional procedures and narrational schemata, the term *procedure* can be related to the reception-oriented theories of narration proposed by reader-response criticism, cognitive narratology, and cognitive film theory. In David Bordwell's words, this view treats the (written or) audiovisual text as a sequence of "incomplete and ambiguous" *cues* (Bordwell 1985, 31), on the basis of which the reader/viewer constructs a mental representation of the story, as well as hypotheses about future events. This process is constrained bottom-up by the selection and arrangement of cues in the text, and top-down by mental schemata, "organized clusters of knowledge" (ibid.) resulting from our experience with the everyday world as well as other media texts, including period and genre-specific storytelling conventions (ibid., 30-40).[8] These storytelling conventions include patterns as general as the "'canonical' story format," shared by most stories in Western cultures (ibid., 35), or as specific as the genre conventions of *film noir* or the police procedural. In Peter Wuss' terms (1993), such conventions can be understood as *stereotypical* structures that can be described on three mutually entailing levels: in production, standardized storytelling strategies predetermine the textual composition; in a group of texts, they manifest as regular compositional patterns; and in reception, repeated exposure to such patterns leads to the construction of specific schemata (or *mental stereotypes*) that direct and facilitate the reception of corresponding texts. Furthermore, Wuss stresses that these *narrational stereotypes* ("Erzählstereotypen," ibid.) are highly pervasive and not necessarily produced or understood at conscious levels of processing, which gives rise to the hypothesis that they have an impact even on the structure of seemingly nonconformist texts.

In the context of this paper, three levels of storytelling conventions seem particularly relevant: On the most basic level of narrative comprehension (i.e. according to the canonical storytelling format), we expect that the events presented in a narrative are not only chronologically and causally related, but also relevant in terms of characters' experiences of a disruption or disequilibrium in the storyworld (Herman 2009, 14). On a more specific level, the generic storytelling model of the television procedural predicts that the hour-long television episode is structured around a professional problem-solving process such as solving a crime or treating a patient. Last but not least, serial narration is also structured by production-specific conventions: According to television screenwriters, each show has its own "template," which governs the story development of the individual episodes, and manifests in production-specific reception strategies (Epstein 2006, 3-40). While canonical and genre-specific patterns seem important to any narrative, the relation of these two levels to the third seems particularly relevant for serial narratives: Not only do their episodes relate to generic conventions, they also form a more specific group distinct from the genre by virtue of the show's idiosyncratic conventions. Mittell refers to these rules as "operational aesthetics" and argues that gaining com-

petence in and conscious awareness of these principles provides one of the chief pleasures in watching complex television (2012, esp. "Comprehension" and "Beginnings").

1.3. Local and global logic

By taking a global perspective to *The Wire*'s 'procedural logic,' Mittell provides an interpretation that results from the show's narrative organization as an end-product, but backgrounds the logic of narrative progression that viewers experience in the process of watching the show, beat by beat,[9] and episode by episode.[10] One such result is the impression that in *The Wire*, the numerous characters are determined more by their institutional roles than by personal bonds and inner motivations (Mittell 2009, 430). This does not mean (and Mittell does not imply) that they would not appear as rich and complex personalities. In Marsha Kinder's words, *The Wire* derives its success "from the interplay between systemic analysis *and* emotional engagement with compelling characters" (2008, 50; emphasis added). The ongoing engagement with an ensemble of characters can clearly be taken as another feature typical of serial television (ibid.; cf. Newman 2006), albeit not necessarily typical of the procedural. As I will argue, this engagement becomes more accessible and more important under a local, micro-structural perspective.

To come to terms with the relationship between global and local frames of analysis, it may be helpful to consider the reception of serial television through the lens of the concepts of *episodic memory* and *autobiographical knowledge* discussed in neuropsychology.[11] Both types of memory structure "preserve information that is highly relevant to goal processing" (Conway 2009, 2306), and may thus shed light on how viewers process goal-related information in long-term narratives. Episodic memories are described as rich "summary records" of "short time slices of experience," preserving perceptive as well as conceptual and affective information (ibid.). A chronologically ordered sequence of such episodic memories "constitute[s] a window of episodic consciousness that functions to keep us tightly connected to our current goals and plans" (ibid., 2307). Long-term goals and plans are organized in the less experiential, rather abstract, and more contextualized structures of *autobiographical knowledge*, which are also responsible for the generation of further goals. The intriguing part of this relationship between local (episodic) and global (autobiographical) knowledge structures is that local memories have an effect on long-term goal processing as they become integrated to and contextualized within global structures. At the same time, access to the chronological order and the particular content of most slices of experience is lost after a number of days, while only particularly relevant episodes remain accessible via their contextual associations (i.e. through their importance to long-term goals, or as defining personal experiences; ibid., 2310 f.).

The dynamics of the human memory system may imply that local and global analytical perspectives provide access to somewhat opposed ends of a continuum of narrative comprehension and interpretation in a similar fashion. On a local level, stories may be processed as sequences of episodic 'slices' that are related to the current short-term goals of the characters and rich in perceptual, conceptual, and affective detail. The global level would result from the integration of these details into more abstract mental structures. However, this level of mental representation and analytical exploration may lose access to particular sub-goals after they have been completed (cf. ibid., 2310 f.), to the narrative's particular sequentiality, and to the experiential detail of particular moments. In this light, a micro-structural approach to the text should be able to complement global, systemic and contextual interpretations by drawing attention to how global meanings emerge bottom-up over the course of the narration, from an experience of 'living through' the fictional events as they are presented in the audiovisual text.[12]

At the same time, the abundance of perceptive, conceptual and affective information processed in each moment of an audiovisual narration is impossible to track analytically over the course of a longer, let alone serial narration. In light of the dynamics between global and local representations and interpretations, it thus seems feasible to focus on the logic of goal-processing. This analytical dimension is also theorized in the narratological plot models which I will discuss in the third section of this essay. But first, I will introduce the storytelling strategies of the typical television procedural.

2. *House, M.D.* as the contemporary procedural

Initially, the television industry classified serial productions as either *series* or *serials*.[13] The term *series* refers to episodically closed productions that initiate and resolve a story within a single episode, avoiding longer-term changes of state. The procedural, structured around the weekly resolution of a profession-specific problem by policemen, lawyers, doctors etc., can be seen as a specific subtype of the series. In contrast, the *serial* provides no episodic closure, weaving together multiple stories unfolding in parallel over multiple episodes. This dichotomy became permeable over the course of the 1980s. In an attempt to appeal to an educated, upscale, "quality" demographics (cf. Alvey 2004) that was particularly attractive for advertisers, the seminal productions *Hill Street Blues* (NBC: 1981-1987; a police drama) and *St Elsewhere* (NBC: 1982-1988; a medical/hospital drama) began to introduce side-stories evolving in parallel to the main case of the week, including secondary cases as well as long-term character arcs focusing on the personal lives of the professionals.[14] This hybridization, or *serialization* of the series, resulted in a structure characterized by a complex, fast-paced interplay of different narrative strands that has hence become the standard model of prime-time serial television (cf. Kozloff 1992, 90-2; Nel-

son 1997; Newman 2006). Below, I will summarize the resulting model of the hybrid series outlined in recent screenwriting manuals (Douglas 2005; Epstein 2004; cf. Newman's review of screenwriters' jargon, 2006).

The screenplay of the hour-long episode is subdivided into a number of acts (usually four or five) to accommodate the advertising breaks demanded by the broadcaster. Each of these acts is usually structured towards an impactful moment, the *act-out* (Epstein 2006, 67-74) or *curtain* (Newman 2006, 21), to maximize viewer attention before the advertising break. The act in turn contains a number of *beats*. According to Douglas, one of the episode's stories is picked up in each beat by a "motivated protagonist who wants something and drives the action to get it through conflict with an opposition" (ibid., 71). The multiple stories told in the same episode are referred to as *A*, *B*, and *C plots*, reflecting their importance and amount of screen time within the current episode (ibid.). Beyond the boundary of a single episode, beats and plots may (but need not) belong to *arcs*, stories developing over the course of multiple episodes, whole seasons, or even the whole lifespan of a production (Newman 2006, 23).[15] As Newman points out, character-related arcs that flesh out the personal lives of the recurring cast are a primary strategy to motivate regular and long-term audience commitment (ibid.). Furthermore, episodes may begin with a *teaser* or *cold start* and end in a *tag*. As a common element of crime procedurals, the teaser precedes a show's opening titles and the first act. It typically serves to establish one of the episode's main plots, e.g. by staging a murder or the discovery of a body.[16] The tag concludes the episode and attempts "to get the audience to tune in again next week" (Epstein 2006, 66 f). It ties up loose ends and shows how the main characters come to terms with the events of the episode, and may additionally introduce a new problem to serve as a cliffhanger for the next episode (ibid.).

The medical drama *House* has a highly formulaic template.[17] Almost every episode is dominated by the medical mystery case of the week, which serves as the A-plot and proceeds in a fashion similar to the whodunit of criminal procedurals (cf. e.g. the *CSI* franchise). The medical problem is typically introduced in the teaser, where the patient of the week develops mysterious symptoms that often result in a physical breakdown reminiscent of the death of a murder victim. Consequently, the patient arrives at the hospital in the first act of the typical episode. In each of the four acts, Gregory House and his colleagues then examine the patient, come up with hypotheses about the cause of the medical complications, and test them with diagnostic procedures. At the end of each of the first three acts (typically as a climactic act-out), an unforeseen complication occurs, which often invalidates the current diagnosis and makes the case appear even more mysterious and life-threatening. The correct diagnosis is finally found in act four, after which the patient is successfully treated, and released. The tag of an average *House* episode then focuses on the doctors' reactions to the personal and professional challenges they have encountered during the case, and on House's unfulfilled personal life, drawing attention to his character arc.[18] While the medical mysteries are usually initiated

and resolved within a single episode, this character arc can be seen as the show's most dramatic 'case' under a long-term perspective. Due to a leg injury, House suffers chronic pain, walks with a cane, and is addicted to the painkiller vicodin. As a medical genius with an abrasive bedside manner and disregard for medical ethics, House furthermore stands out as a fascinating deviation from the typical television doctor.[19]

House's character arc or (less frequently) the arcs of his colleagues regularly generate side plots[20] that deal with issues such as House's impoverished social life or attempts to overcome his pain and/or addiction to painkillers. Another source of side plots is provided by House's creativity in finding ways to avoid or ridicule the hospital's clinic patients. At first sight, these side plots may appear as devices of characterization, a deconstruction of genre-conventions, and sources of comic relief independent from the case of the week. But time and again, these side plots ultimately interact with the main plot. In the most crucial type of interaction, they provide House with the missing piece of information that has kept him from solving the medical mystery case in the first three acts of the episode. To give an example: In episode 2.13 ("Skin Deep"), House treats a fifteen year-old supermodel. However, the highly attractive girl turns out to be a biological male with *androgen insensitivity syndrome*, a type of pseudo-hermaphroditism that results in a perfectly feminine bodily appearance. The source of the symptoms is eventually identified as a cancer in the patient's left testicle, hidden somewhere inside the deceivingly feminine body. However, it is not a diagnostic procedure, but an unrelated clinic case that causes House to question his patient's sex, while treating a man who struggles with *couvades syndrome*, an excess of estrogen that lets him suffer a sympathetic pregnancy with his wife. As in this case, the show's medical mysteries are typically so obscure that only coincidence and lateral thinking can solve them. In this light, House's obsession with irrational distractions has been interpreted as a psychological prerequisite that makes him susceptible to this kind of insight (Huskinson 2011).

At other times, side plots may function as obstacles to the main plot. In the same episode, House also suffers from an unusual increase of pain in his leg. As a result, he becomes increasingly irritable, seems to rush critical decisions, and publicly accuses the patient's father of having slept with the patient. What appears at first as a baseless provocation turns out to be true and initiates a conflict between House and his colleagues. Cameron and Cuddy report the father's transgression to social services against House's will while House is only interested in the diagnostic value of the father's confession (it supports the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder). Ultimately, these problems remain unrelated to the solution of the main plot but are nonetheless resolved before House has his epiphany. Fitting the show's allusions to the murder mystery genre, nothing turns out to be the way it seemed: The patient denies the abuse to social services and confesses to Cameron that it was s/he who seduced the father; while House's pain is alleviated by a shot of morphine that turns out to have been a placebo.

In more abstract terms that draw attention to the logic of goal-progression found in this episode, the teaser establishes the problem of the narrative and the global goal that the patient be cured. In the first act, as part of the diagnostic procedure, this generates a sub-goal to learn more about the patient's condition, and consecutive sub-goals to remove factors that may occlude important symptoms. Since the planned investigations are risky, this necessitates seeking the father's permission. When medical complications occur in the act-outs of act one and two, the diagnostic procedure loops back to a sub-goal of gathering information and re-interpreting the known symptoms. In the course of acts two and three, this cycle also generates specific hypotheses and attempts to verify these hypotheses. Ultimately, however, the enabling factor to the realization of the global goal does not result from this sequence of goal-progression, but from the intervention of an initially unrelated problem-goal complex; the remark that sparks the epiphany springs from House's personal goal of getting rid of an annoying clinic patient.

To conclude, the template of *House* is not only defined by a four-act structure with teaser and tag but also by principles of *functional interaction* between side plots and the main plot. Furthermore, the segmentation into acts corresponds with sub-units of the main plot related to specific sub-problems and sub-goals (in act one, the doctors make themselves familiar with the case; in act two, House suspects sexual abuse; while act three is marked by the conflicting views about whether to report the abuse). This results in a tight integration of the show's idiosyncratic template with television's intra-episodic standard model of narration and with the professional procedures displayed on the intradiegetic level. This integration likely has complex implications for the conceptual and emotional engagement of the viewer that cannot be pursued here in detail. However, in light of the issues addressed in the introduction, two conclusions can be drawn. Under a local perspective that experiences the episode's plot progression from beat to beat, the various side-plots and sub-problems produce a level of complexity that is likely to keep the viewer engaged (cf. Nelson's concept of the "flexi-narrative," 1997, Ch. 2) but does not exceed the boundaries of the episode. Furthermore, the introduction of the enabling moment by way of coincidental interaction with the side-plot ensures that the solution to the problem cannot be anticipated, but remains surprising.[21] Under a global perspective taken by viewers familiar with the template, however, the knowledge that House needs his epiphanies may subvert the procedural logic. In this light, it is more likely that viewers draw satisfaction from the overall predictability of each new episode. On the other hand, House's spectacular transgressions against social norms and the creativity of his insights (a creativity that can be attributed both to House and the writers of the series) become elements that can be appreciated both for their deviation from the typical medical drama and as new iterations of a familiar schema (on the pleasures of serial iteration, cf. Eco 1962, 117-122). In this respect, contemporary procedurals seem to differ from genre ancestors like *Dragnet* or its doctoral counterpart *Medic* (NBC: 1954-56), which took care to represent real-world

procedures authentically (cf. Mittell 2009, 434; and Turow 1989, Ch. 2, respectively). In *House*, procedure seems to have become a storytelling ritual that does not represent real procedures as much as it serves as a backdrop for staging a memorable character, and for transgressions of norms that in turn become ritualized over the course of the series.

3. Serial plotting as problem- and character-related goal progression

As the discussion of *House* and of screenwriting standards has shown, narrative structure is naturally discussed in terms of plot(s). As Hilary Dannenberg has remarked, *plot* is at the same time "one of the most elusive terms in narrative theory" (2005, 435). As used above, plot is best understood as *a set of logical relationships between narrative units, which lets us understand them as coherent sequences of chronologically and causally linked events related to a specific problem and/or goal.* This integrates elements from a wide range of plot definitions. For E.M. Forster, plot consists "in the creation (and also the suspenseful suppression) of causal connections between the individual events that constitute the chronology of the story" (Dannenberg 2005, 436; cf. Forster 1990, 87). As Seymour Chatman points out, this logic is not intrinsic to the level of the story (in the sense of *fabula*), but created by the order and manner of representation in the *discourse* (1978, 43).[22] These definitions also highlight the progressive dimension of narration, defined in Bordwell's words as "the activity of selecting, arranging, and rendering story material in order to achieve specific time-bound effects on a perceiver," as opposed to perspectives that treat narratives as complete representations or structures (1985, xi).

Furthermore, the plots of specific narratives can be more or less congruent with mental plot models, i.e. universal and genre-specific *template schemata* that contain default assumptions about story structure and thus guide and facilitate the comprehension of conformant structures (cf. Bordwell 1985, 34 f.; Wuss 1993). In the most basic and general terms, stories can be understood as a progression of five stages, from (1) a state of *equilibrium*, which is (2) *disrupted*, (3) which is *recognized* by a hero, (4) who eventually makes *attempts to alleviate* the disruption, which eventually leads to (5) the *reinstatement* of an equilibrium (Todorov 1971). Bordwell describes a slightly more specific model that highlights the relationship between character, problem, and goal:

> The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. (1985, 157)

To a degree, this schema is also reflected in *House* and at least in the first season of *The Wire*. Even if House's personality remains obscure enough to sustain long-term curiosity, his obsession to solve diagnostic riddles is a sufficiently transparent psychological trait. As a result, solving his cases appears not

only as a professional goal but also as a personal challenge. In the first season of *The Wire*, Detective McNulty can be understood as a protagonist defined by his goal to take down the Barksdale organization. Furthermore, he is characterized by marital problems and a genuine attitude to police work. Despite the multitude of alternative perspectives provided by the other characters and the global, systemic interpretations evoked by *The Wire*, it is reasonable to assume that over the first season, McNulty remains a central point of orientation in this structure. Although *The Wire* is clearly not simply a story about a single protagonist, McNulty is the single character most conformant with the protagonist role anticipated by canonical schemata. Furthermore, his protagonist status is also suggested by extratextual markers (cf. Kinder 2008). On the other hand, I have shown that even the comparably formulaic template of House does not rely on a single character's movement from equilibrium to equilibrium but on a number of parallel, interactive, and hierarchically nested plot-segments. Some of them may be interpreted from the perspectives of other characters with sufficiently well-defined motivations. In the sexual abuse plot in *House* 2.13, for example, viewers may feel invited to take Cameron's perspective when she acts on her conscience and against House's orders.

If plot is understood, as suggested above, in terms of logical relationships that create coherence between narrative units, this makes it a relativistic term. For example, the distinction between main plot and side plots rests on the observation that there are several problem-and-goal-related perspectives, which create different relationships between different subsets of narrative units. Furthermore, it has been shown that these frames of orientation can shift over the course of the narrative, e.g. when we discover that a unit of a seemingly unrelated plot provides the means of realizing the goal of a different plot. As a result, plot and arc can refer to the entire narrative logic of a work, but also to more specific local configurations.[23] In Emma Kafalenos' words, this also entails that the meaning of a particular event "is subject to interpretations that may shift according to the context in which it is perceived," i.e. a matter of "functional polyvalence" (Kafalenos 2006, 6; 1999).

A framework that helps to come to terms with this pluri-perspectivity is provided by possible worlds theory (= PW theory). Where syntactic plot models describe stories as linear sequences of mutually entailing changes of state in one consistent storyworld (see Ronen 1990 for a critical discussion), PW theory operates with a set of possible worlds that constitute a whole "textual universe" (Ryan 1991, 16-23). These 'worlds' represent possible, impossible, conflicting, hypothetical, or desired states entertained in the minds of a story's characters and in the minds of the audience. Narrative comprehension entails not only the mental construction of the fictional actual world, but also these projections of possible future states and at least some of the private worlds entertained by the characters. Private worlds describe characters' knowledge (K-Worlds), obligations (O-Worlds), and wishes (W-Worlds). In these terms, plot progression can be imagined as the movement of the actual world in relation to the other worlds, e.g. toward or away from goals represented by specific

O-Worlds or W-Worlds. Conflict, a necessary ingredient to plot according to Ryan, arises out of the incompatibility between personal/possible worlds (ibid., 109-123). Finally, actions are described as "moves" in a "narrative game," which characters enact according to "plans" they devise to pursue their goals (ibid., 124-147). As a result, this model ties in nicely with the focus on goal-processing established in the introduction, as well as with the interpretative metaphor of "the game."

PW theory can also be related to specific aesthetic effects created in the process of narrative comprehension. For example, *suspense* results from an uncertainty about future states; *curiosity* results from an uncertainty about under-specified causes of the present state and/or character motivations; while dramatically effective examples of *surprise* should not only be unexpected but also coherent with and relevant to the past, present and/or future configurations of the textual universe.[24] Dramatic tensions of these types are often exploited to create cliffhangers in the act-outs or tags of television episodes. In Mittell's words, such impactful moments can also be described as "narrative enigmas" (2012, "Complexity in context," par. 13), creating questions to which viewers expect answers in following episodes. Often, narrative enigmata are characterized by an unspecific *anticipation* of consequences ('what will happen next', or 'how will X react'), rather than *suspense* in a narrower sense, related to the realization of specific hypothetical states ('will X really happen;' cf. Mittell 2012, "Comprehension," par. 15).

Last but not least, our access to the personal worlds of the characters has an impact on how we engage with the characters emotionally. For example, we may be able to infer that a character acts on values and emotions compatible or incompatible with our own morals and/or dispositions, leading to sympathy or antipathy (Smith 1995, 81-86; cf. Eder 2006). An elaborate theoretical discussion of character engagement is beyond the scope of this paper (but see ibid.). However, let me draw attention to an example from *The Wire*'s first season that highlights not only the relevance of access to characters' private worlds but also the subtlety with which *The Wire* evokes them, and how such moments of characterization relate to the show's plot logic. In episode 1.05, Wallace and Poot, adolescent members of D'Angelo Barksdale's crew, report Omar's partner Brandon to Barksdale's hit men. The hit men move in quickly to kill Brandon in retaliation for Omar's raid on Barksdale's stash house. Prior to this event, Wallace and Poot have been introduced as 'players' in the street-level 'game,' i.e. members of a group regulated by a code of conduct (a collective O-world, so to speak), but hardly fleshed out as individuals with 'private' wishes and moral values. After becoming complicit in Brandon's murder, Wallace's behavior changes: he looks downbeat, stops working with the drug dealers, and starts using drugs himself (1.06). General knowledge about human behavior is sufficient to imply that he is guilt-ridden, suggesting a mental state of conflict between the rules of the game and his personal conscience (an impression that later episodes confirm more explicitly). This shows how even without the kind of direct or indirect access to characters' thoughts common in novels, *The Wire*

creates (however implicit and context-dependent) levels of access that allow viewers to sympathize with characters. Through this access to Wallace's private worlds, we can ultimately construe a plot or character arc. As a tragic story of an innocent boy that falls victim to the social structures he is born into, this arc may evoke strong feelings of sympathy and compassion, which render the arc's local moments highly engaging. Under a global perspective, however, Wallace may be interpreted as just one of many characters falling victim to the struggle between two urban systems (cf. Mittell 2009; Ethridge 2008; Schaub 2010) and the experiential qualities of witnessing his story may be backgrounded.

To conclude, both *House* and *The Wire* display a complexity that seems typical of television drama, constituted by parallel and interactive plots or a multiplicity of evaluative perspectives on the events that emerge not only from access to the characters' private worlds, but also from genre-related and general cultural norms. Hence, cognitive engagement with serial television (and probably many other forms of narration) may be best characterized as a constant shifting of evaluative focus. As shown above, in the case of *House* this complexity is organized by a highly predictive narrative formula which largely coincides with steps in the intradiegetic procedures. In contrast, *The Wire* is primarily discussed in terms of the represented structures and procedures, i.e. the systemic interaction between two games, played out in the civic institutions and on the street-level. In the last section of this essay, I explore the somewhat antithetical questions to what degree *The Wire* also structures its episodes according to television screenwriting formulae, and to what degree it develops coherent idiosyncratic methods of plot organization.

4. Procedural logic in *The Wire*

As stated above, McNulty provides an important frame of orientation throughout the first season, as a fleshed-out individual with a clearly defined motivation and goal. McNulty is the very first character viewers encounter in the show, and throughout the first season the narrative provides insight not only into his professional motivation as a policeman but also into his role as a divorced father. As a result, he provides high levels of *spatio-temporal alignment* and *subjective access*, important prerequisites for sympathy according to Smith (1995, 83 f.; cf. Kinder 2008 regarding McNulty's protagonist status). Although McNulty's direct power over the investigation is limited, he exerts an important influence through his relationship to Judge Phelan who initiates the investigations based on the knowledge imparted to him through McNulty. In addition to his goal-orientation, McNulty can also be characterized in comparison to other characters and how they relate to genre-specific as well as extratextual norms.[25] While McNulty's goals seem largely compatible with those of the ideal, generic television cop, he is antagonized by opportunistic functionaries who are primarily concerned with building careers and stabilizing the intra-in-

stitutional political balance. This comparison places the law-enforcement characters in two groups: a group around McNulty that tries to build a sustainable case against Barksdale, and a group of those that oppose or attempt to exploit the work of the detail for political reasons. While the police detail implement a wide range of legal and investigative procedures, the other characters play political games, like the "stats game" in which a homicide is perceived foremost as a threat to departmental clearance rates. These groups are mirrored in the Barksdale organization, where unscrupulous criminals are contrasted with potentially sympathetic characters, like D'Angelo or Wallace, who struggle with the brutality of 'the game.' This allows for a variety of evaluative perspectives at specific points during the narrative, related to individual as well as more systemic goals. In this complex web of social relationships, individuals are characterized by their contributions to collective goals, but also by personal interests that conflict with the collective goals.[26]

Compatible with the genre norms evoked by *The Wire* and relatively congruent with McNulty's personal goals, the goal of the Barksdale investigation remains the most dominant frame of orientation throughout the first season and lends a protagonist status to the police detail that is formed around McNulty. Under this perspective, the most relevant plot-points of *The Wire* are constituted by steps towards or away from this goal. In this respect, *The Wire* is similar to *House* and many other procedurals where problem-solving procedures include a distribution of tasks between highly specialized individuals. In contrast to *House*, where individual characters' contributions are more or less predictable from the roles established in the pilot episode, *The Wire* dedicates a considerable time span to show how the detail grows from a dysfunctional accumulation of individuals, adding a team-building arc to the investigative arc (cf. Mittell 2009, 435). As a result, events that advance the investigation may coincide with events that reveal valuable talents in initially useless members of the detail, such as Pryzbylewski's knack for riddles, which enables the detail to decipher the Barksdale pager code in episode 1.05. This event is impactful not only as an investigative success that enables the surveillance of the clan's communications but also as an uplifting surprise that turns a good-for-nothing cop into a valuable asset, adding a sympathetic trait to his flaw.

A closer analysis of the relationships between the global arc and the numerous character arcs, sub plots, and side plots reveals that *The Wire* reproduces the principles of plot interaction and integration found in a *House* episode on the scale of a full season. A small set of principles is enough to describe the interaction of plots found in "Skin deep." (1) A principle of *branching out* creates subplots from the main plot, like the sexual abuse plot that springs from House's suspicion that the patient may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. (2) Further problems may be introduced as *unrelated side plots*, like House's pain and the *couvades syndrome* patient. (3) Side plots and sub plots can then be *integrated* or *re-integrated* to the main plot, as in House's epiphanies. However, if they constitute obstacles to the main plot (4) such plots may also be *eliminated* before the global goal of the main plot can be advanced, or temporarily *sup-*

pressed while the underlying disequilibrium is preserved so that the problem may return in a later episode. This is the case when Cuddy alleviates House's pain, only to suggest a re-evaluation of the problem and solution when she later reveals that she had administered a placebo.

The Wire preserves disequilibrium in a similar way. Covering the legal negotiations and the trial that wrap up the Barksdale case, the last episode (1.13) could be interpreted as an hour-long tag to the season. The global goal is only partially fulfilled when many members of the clan are convicted but others remain free and continue operations after the case is closed. Again, McNulty's personal perspective is highlighted when he remains dissatisfied while his friends and colleagues celebrate an overall successful conclusion to the case. Despite such ambiguities, the particular problem-goal orientation spanning the season has come to an equilibrium. Even if that equilibrium bears potential for ongoing character arcs and new problems, these remain vague and unspecific while the particular goals and sub-goals introduced over the course of the season have been resolved or become inaccessible.

Furthermore, many arcs can be said to branch off from the investigation arc, while all seemingly unrelated side plots at some point intersect with the main plot. For example, when Pryzbylewski is introduced as a loose cannon in episode 1.02, this can be read as the introduction of a problem for the commanding officer Daniels, a plot related to institutional politics rather than to the Barksdale investigation. When 'Pryz' subsequently solves the code in 1.05, this plot is re-integrated as an enabling factor under the umbrella of the Barksdale investigation. The season's overall structure can be interpreted as a branching out and introduction of new side plots, particularly over roughly the first half of the season (see also the discussion of episode 1.01 below). This expansion is followed by a reduction of overall complexity towards the end. In the last episodes, many arcs are eliminated or suspended when characters are arrested by the police or eliminated as potential witnesses by the Barksdale organization in both sides' preparations for the trials that wrap up the season.

This leaves the question to what degree single episodes are structured by conventional patterns. Produced for advertising-free pay-TV, the episodes of *The Wire* are not segmented into obvious acts. Furthermore, no regular distribution of complicating moments comparable to the medical mystery cliffhangers of *House* can be observed. Nevertheless, some regularities can be found. According to Douglas, the most prominent turning point or cliffhanger is placed 3/4 through a drama. This corresponds with the end of the third act in a four act structure or with the end of the second act in a feature film (2005, 78).[27] Such prominent 3/4 plot points can be found in about half of *The Wire*'s first season episodes. In 1.02, for example, a 'field interview' conducted by drunk officers of the detail gets out of hand, and Pryzbylewski beats up a teenage boy. In contrast to this setback, many later 3/4 points are occupied by milestone achievements. In 1.05, this is the moment when Pryzbylewski solves the code; in 1.07, Bird is arrested and the first homicides linked to Barksdale

are cleared. Similarly, episodes 1.12 and 1.13 have D'Angelo and Wee-Bay arrested around the 3/4 marks of the episodes.

Furthermore, all episodes have a teaser in the formal sense, i.e. a beat that precedes the opening titles. This teaser may serve to introduce a new sub goal for the current episode (e.g. in 1.07, where the detail intercept a call about an impending drug delivery) but more often, the teaser merely contains beats of exposition and characterization. As a result, the teaser does not serve a narrowly defined function in the show's template. However, most episodes have a clearly defined tag, i.e. they end in a particularly impactful moment that builds anticipation toward the next installment. At the end of episode 1.01, the witness who testified against D'Angelo Barksdale is found dead, a shocking demonstration of the clan's power and determination to protect their people. At the end of episode 1.05, Brandon is killed, the consequences of which affect the rest of the season. And at the end of episode 1.10, Kima finds her way into a trap laid out by Barksdale's men to execute her informant Orlando. The episode ends in a disaster, leaving Kima critically wounded. The aftermath to this classical cliffhanger is picked up immediately in the teaser of the next episode. As an overall impression, it can be said that episodes build up dramatic tensions towards such impactful endings, although not every episode has a clearly defined 3/4 point. Furthermore, the first halves of most episodes are rather expositional. They may introduce new problems and tend to feature orientation scenes that evaluate the current state of the investigation or procedural steps that have a small overall impact and thus seem rather illustrative; like the steps taken to arrest a drug runner in 1.07. This fairly self-contained, 14-minute segment is a good example for how *The Wire* takes liberties with the episodic formula of the standard procedural, which interweaves main plots and side plots in a faster, more regular rhythm throughout an episode. As a result, an idiosyncratic template is hard to find in *The Wire*. However, it is still possible to point out where individual episodes overlap with standard strategies for episodic plot composition.

In addition to the examples given above, this overlap may be illustrated with a discussion of the first episode's formal organization. It starts with an expositional segment that occupies the first 19 out of a total of 61 minutes and could be analyzed as a first act (as there are no visible act breaks in *The Wire*, the act structure discussed here is a result of interpretation). In the teaser, McNulty is introduced as a cop on good terms with Baltimore's street-level citizens (however, the teaser remains unconnected to specific plots). Subsequently, he attends a murder trial in which a witness retracts her statement and D'Angelo Barksdale walks free. In the following conversation with Judge Phelan, McNulty discloses what he knows about the activities of the Barksdale organization. In a parallel side plot, we are also introduced to Kima, Herc and Carver in their day-to-day work for the narcotics department. The second act introduces the consequences of McNulty's conversation with the judge, when the heads of both the narcotics and homicide departments find themselves confronted with Phelan's request for a report on Barksdale. This leads to a paral-

lelization of the two as of yet unrelated groups under the slowly emerging goal to initiate a full-out investigation. Around the same time (from 24:45 onwards), D'Angelo's character arc is introduced as a side plot branching off from McNulty's arc. In his interaction with members of his uncle's organization, D'Angelo now becomes an independent character with private worlds that seem at least to some extent at odds with his role in the organization. Another act break may be placed around Deputy Commissioner Burrell's decision to put Daniels in charge of a joint detail of homicide and narcotics personnel. A further plot, unrelated to the main plot, is introduced with Bubbles and Johnny, two addicts who plan to scam D'Angelo's drug-dealers with photo-copied dollar bills. This inevitably leads to a 3/4 complication, in which they are found out and Johnny is brutally punished by D'Angelo's crew. In the next beat, the members of the detail come together for the first time and a conflict about their goals is established between Daniels and McNulty. After this end-of-act climax, act four (starting 50:31) proceeds with calmer beats of reaction and characterization, before the episode ends with two surprising, long-lasting consequences of the previous events. To take revenge on the Barksdale organi-zation for the hospitalization of Johnny, Bubbles decides to take an active role in the main plot as Kima's informant. And as a cliffhanger for the next episode that also relates back to the court trial, the witness that had incriminated D'Angelo is found dead, a surprising consequence of plans and actions that have taken place off-screen. The important plot points of the episode are ulti-mately also points of functional interaction between plots: Bubbles and Johnny's scheme, initially unrelated, intersects at first with D'Angelo's arc, and consequentially with Kima's arc and the investigation when Bubbles offers his help. Furthermore, most of the developments in the episode belong to differ-ent strings of consequences of the murder trial and of the conversation be-tween McNulty and Phelan. These strings converge again in the installation of the detail and when the body of the witness is found, which is a shock not only to McNulty and his colleague Bunk but also to D'Angelo. At the same time, this moment creates curiosity about the schemes of the Barksdale organization, an arc that has so far been hidden from knowledge. Overall, the episode to a degree resembles the macro-structural movement of the *House* episode dis-cussed above. Both introduce a problem in the first act to which new plots are added, which intersect towards the end of the episode. Yet different from an episodic series like *House*, the serial *The Wire* does not reduce this complexity of parallel plots at the end of the episode. Rather, it introduces multiple arcs that are closely interconnected and not clearly separable, related to personal and collective problems and goals, and stresses their continuity beyond episodic bounds.

As even more story material is added in the following episodes, this also leads to more complex and less formulaic episodes. Nevertheless, the discus-sion could demonstrate that a vocabulary geared to goal progression and for-mulaic plot models can even give insight to the 'procedural logic' of a strikingly nonconformist production. On a micro-level of narrative logic, the instruments

used in the plotting of *The Wire* and *House* are not fundamentally different, but could be said to belong to the same professional tool set. However, they are employed in different methods of story composition, to vastly different effects. In their movement toward somewhat impactful plot points in their second halves and impactful tags that often establish narrative enigmata, even the open episodes of *The Wire* are characterized by a degree of aesthetic regularity and unity that correspond to schemata of episodic structure that viewers may bring to the show. The differences between the formulaic procedural and "what might be television's only example of a serialized procedural" (Mittell 2009, 435) lie in the way their local structures relate to the global logic evoked by the works as a whole. *House*'s formula relates micro-level events to a stable, global template or idiosyncratic *narrational stereotype* that is actualized and enjoyed time and again. This is complemented by a number of arcs to create a moderately complex dimension of long-term continuity. *The Wire* builds toward a dynamic systemic logic which only emerges after several episodes and is reinvented or expanded in each subsequent season (cf. ibid.). This leads to a more demanding but also potentially more rewarding experience of engagement with the show's characters as well as its systemic logic. Although it is true that the characters are ultimately limited to and hampered by their institutional functions (cf. Mittell 2009, 430 f.; and section 1 of this paper), this does not mean that they offer less potential for affective engagement. To the contrary, the complex social dynamics arising from conflicting procedures (legal, investigative, political, and criminal) lends a credibility to *The Wire*'s textual universe that is lacking in *House*'s predictive microcosm. This ultimately makes the show's characters more effective as tragic figures, evoking the plot model of tragedy (as discussed by Simon, cf. Ethridge 2008) and corresponding local-level emotions. In this light, it is not despite but because of their futile struggle to overcome their institutional roles that they become emotionally compelling characters.

Last but not least, the comparison between *House* and *The Wire* leads to an ironic contradiction about procedures and procedurals. On the one hand, *House* is clearly more procedural. The medical drama is shaped by screenwriting procedures, which produce steps of intradiegetic procedures that tightly relate to a formulaic act structure. Ultimately, this turns the procedures into ritualistic patterns appreciated for their regularity and for the way they make room for quirky behavior. In these terms, *The Wire* is not a procedural. However, it is really *about* procedures when it explores the interactions between different procedures, codes of conduct, or 'games,' and the social dynamics they produce. The analytic perspective defended in this paper, a view that appreciates the micro-structural organization of serial texts in the light of canonical, generic, and idiosyncratic storytelling conventions, can help to see how both effects are achieved by different means of arranging similar narrative elements to engage viewers both locally and globally.

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[1] It has become somewhat of a commonplace to refer to this transition from 'normal' to 'quality' television. For notable discussions, see e.g. Feuer et al. 1984; Caldwell 1995; R. Thompson 1997; Nelson 1997; 2007; Alvey 2004; Dunleavy 2009.

[2] Cf. Miller 2008, who writes "[HBO's] *modus operandi* became common across the medium" (Miller 2008, ix; emphasis in the original); and Newman 2006, who writes about the "prime-time serial" and avoids the positively discriminating term "quality television." The claim has been made much earlier by Richard Thompson who wrote that "all of the innovative elements that have come to define 'Quality TV', even its unpredictability, have become more and more predictable" (R. Thompson 1997, 16).

[3] This interest is reflected in Blanchet et al. 2011; and the University of Göttingen's research group on *Popular Seriality*, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

[4] Newman and Levine discuss such disassociations as strategies of *Legitimating Television* (2012).

[5] The drafts to most chapters of Mittell's *Complex TV* have been published in 2012 for "open-review" under http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/mcpress/complextelevision, the final version of the book is forthcoming at NYU press. *Complex TV* is hence referred to as Mittell 2012, with references to chapter title and paragraph number as published on-line.

[6] Specifically, Mittell discusses video games' ability to simulate complex systems, e.g. in simulations such as *SimCity* and links the determinism of institutional structures on *The Wire*'s characters to the constraints imposed on the player by a game's code. In my view, this interesting analogy neglects the teleology to win inscribed in many video games, which gives at least an ideologically constrained illusion of empowerment and freedom denied to the protagonists of *The Wire*. Ultimately, the show's pessimistic, deterministic perspective on contemporary urban society should not be attributed to a particular medium's representational capabilities, but to the politically and aesthetically motivated, authorial choice expressed by Simon when he compares *The Wire* to a Greek tragedy, where urban institutions play the role of the Gods that oppose the fortunes of the characters (cf. Ethridge 2008).

[7] See "procedure, *n*." *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/151775 (accessed February 14, 2013).

[8] Bordwell refers to the mental superstructure responsible for the interpretation of narratives as a "procedural schema" (1985, 36; with reference to Hastie 1981, 40 f). This struc-

ture/process invokes more specific schemata deemed helpful for the interpretation of the incoming data in light of the information already available. This seems structurally equivalent to the procedures represented in television procedurals (or procedures *per se*), where professionals invoke particular methods of investigation based on the available evidence.

[9] See section 2 for a definition of *beat*.

[10] Mittell does address the process of narrative comprehension in other publications (2006; 2012). Thus, it is not my intent to criticize his view in general but rather to complement the particular interpretation provided in Mittell 2009.

[11] I owe this impulse to Jean-Marie Schaeffer's keynote "From Narrativity to Narrative Art" at the third conference of the European Narratology Network (ENN), *Emerging Vectors of Narratology: Toward Consolidation or Diversification?* held in Paris, March 29-30, 2013.

[12] As an intrinsic property of narrative, *experientiality* is stressed by Herman (2009, Ch. 6), and Fludernik (1996).

[13] These terms, as well as the transition from a series/serial dichotomy to hybrid forms, are described throughout the literature, e.g. in Feuer et al. 1984; Nelson 1997; R. Thompson 1997; K. Thompson 2003; Dunleavy 2009.

[14] See previous note.

[15] See part 3 and note 23 for a theoretical discussion of the terms plot and arc.

[16] In some productions (e.g. *Nashville*, ABC 2012-), the sequence leading up to the show's title may be as long as a whole act.

[17] For a more detailed discussion of this structure and the episode discussed below, see Armbrust 2012.

[18] In over eight seasons, with a total of 177 episodes, there are, of course, variations to this pattern and special episodes that explicitly deviate from the template. Furthermore, the production becomes increasingly self-referential with regard to its operational aesthetics: The teasers start to play with the audience's expectations about who will fall sick at the end of the scene, and House's transgressions of ethics and social norms become increasingly outrageous, in a dynamics that can be described with Mittell's notion of the "narrative special effect" (2006) and Andreas Jahn-Sudmann's concept of "outbidding" (forthcoming).

[19] Most of these traits are references to the master detective Sherlock Holmes who served as an inspiration for Gregory House (cf. Jackman 2010). I have explored his relationship to medical ethics and medical drama genre conventions with Bittner et al 2012 and in Armbrust 2013.

[20] Since no exact criteria are given for the discrimination between B and C plots, I will hence distinguish only main or 'A-plots' from 'side plots'.

[21] Enabling/empowering factors are also an important element in classical plot models. Cf. the *magical agent* the hero has to acquire in Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (function XIV), or function F in Kafalenos (2006, 7).

[22] The epistemological function of narrating is also central to theories of oral/conversational storytelling, which is seen as a "way of using language […] to imbue life events with a temporal and logical order, to demystify them and establish coherence across past, present, and as yet unrealized experience" (Ochs/Capps 2001).

[23] There is no elaborate theoretical definition of *arc*. The common use of the term is compatible with my definition of plot as a problem-and-goal-related logic creating coherence between a set of events but applies only to plots created across episodes. See Newman's use of *arc* (2006); see also the entry "Story Arc" in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Lunenfeld 2005).

[24] I draw upon the definitions of suspense and curiosity discussed by Todorov (1966), and Sternberg (2001) who also addresses surprise. Sternberg's definitions are applied to the analysis of film and complex television by Bordwell (1985, 37 f.) and Mittell (2012, "Comprehension").

[25] Cf. Eder 2008, esp. Ch. 10, for a thorough discussion of parameters for character analysis (also summarized in Eder 2010).

[26] How characters' contributions affect their characterization is explored in more detail by Culpeper and McIntyre (2010), who evaluate contributions in light of expected and/or acceptable behavior in specific situations, i.e. according to knowledge structures discussed as "scripts" or "scenes."

[27] According to screenwriting manuals for film based on a three act restorative structure (cf. Eder 1999 for a review), a film's second act has twice the length of the first and third acts. This practically results in a division into quarters: The *exposition* occupies the first quarter of a film, the *confrontation* occupies quarters two and three, often marked by a prominent "mid-point," while the *resolution* occupies the film's last quarter (cf. Field 1984, Ch. 12).