

both the television narrative and the accompanying communicative practices (cf. 5). In other words, the TV show generates structures allowing it to read itself and to unleash a script that grants its readers to do what the narrative concedes them to do (cf. 27) – it has a serial agency that keeps *The Wire* “structurally geared toward its own return and multiplication” (29).

Kelleter’s crisp and stimulative prose shows an intelligent audience in a further step how American media studies become a part of the series’ multiplication. For the sake of his argument, Kelleter repeatedly targets Tiffany Potter and C.W. Marshall’s edited volume *The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television* (2009) and the 2009 Leeds conference “*The Wire* as Social Science Fiction” to elucidate “the narrative dimension of sociological knowledge production itself” (36). Here, Kelleter succeeds in showing the trappings of academic criticism if it is bracketing out the productive aspects of American culture. In this way, the hetero-descriptions passed on by various academic disciplines can be read as “agents of continuation” that help to disseminate, formalize and accelerate “*The Wire*’s cultural work” (58).

Having established the agencies of both the TV series and academic criticism, Kelleter focuses in a strongly essayistic manner on an American Studies analysis of the cultural self-enactment these agencies are involved in (62). On his final pages, the author cannot dodge pathos completely or even avoid *The Wire*’s auto-referential topoi when employing Dickensian allusion to *A Tale of Two Cities* (69) and comparisons to *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007; another standard in the reception of *The Wire*) in order to explicate the show’s and its readers’ project of national reproduction.

After 180 footnotes and 80 pages of dense but highly accessible remonstrations and rectifications of “proper” academic discourse, the author is to be congratulated on his achievements in this volume. Not only does he manage to formulate a critical fable for the academic public that might still be teaching and studying *The Wire*. But also Kelleter succeeds in schematically framing his vision of American Studies in a feedback economy-driven, post-industrial, and digital age. In addition, these pages most painfully remind its academic readers of how to approach popular cultural narrative texts. Next to training scholars in the possible pitfalls of *The Wire* in the university classroom, the reader might occasionally miss what the book is keen on in criticizing in its sources: an awareness about its own status as actant and

therefore yet as another eponymous reader of *The Wire*. But apart from this, *Serial Agencies* is a key textbook that should be found on any syllabus of yet another university course on serial narration or *The Wire* per se.

Marcel Hartwig, Siegen

Sarah Schaschek, **Pornography and Seriality: The Culture of Producing Pleasure**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 232 pp., hb., £62.00.

Over and over and over again. The same spare dialogues, the same flat characters, the same movements, settings, facial expressions and sounds, culminating in cum shot after cum shot. Repetition is one, if not *the*, central means of pornography, with the ever returning money shot as its ultimate epitome. *Pornography and Seriality* takes a closer look at this all too obvious but still easily overlooked feature. Focusing on audiovisual pornography, Berlin-based cultural scholar and journalist Sarah Schaschek scrutinizes the relationship between seriality and pornographic pleasure. In so doing, one of her central questions is how something so highly repetitive, and thus bare of surprise, can still be arousing. With the aim to “reload the discourse” (6), Schaschek has chosen a vantage point she finds unjustly neglected within the field of porn studies: “I will approach pornography from the perspective of its form,” she announces (3) – that is, its serial formulas.

The book consists of five chapters, which are, though obviously intertwined with one another, self-contained and cover a wide range of different aspects. After the 25-page “Foreplay,” which arouses readers’ desire for answers and gets them in the mood for things to come, the first chapter tackles pornography from the perspective of genre. While emphasizing the difficulties of finding its proper place in the genre system, Schaschek – following Linda Williams – finally puts porn on the shelf tagged *body genre*, which is characterized by both the display of and effect on the body. The chapter makes a convincing case for incorporating the affective dimension of pornography into discussions about its structure. Bodily arousal, Schaschek proposes, is not only created through the material actually looked at but also through the memory of previously consumed pornography – a phenomenon she calls *the serial feedback loop* (cf 66 ff.).

Zooming further in, the second chapter explores the aspect of mechanical sex in pornography. It discusses both actual human-machine sexual encounters – as exhibited on the website *FuckingMachines* – as well as more general notions of porn performers as seemingly automatized pleasure machines. In this way, Schaschek exposes the fears about the mechanization of sexuality triggered by pornography as essentially being fears about modernity. Using the example of the movie *Dana DeArmond Does the Internet* (Dana DeArmond, 2006), the third chapter demonstrates how documentary-style porn movies blur the line between the on-screen porn star persona and the actual off-screen person. Again, this merging is presented as part of a larger development. In our Web 2.0 society, Schaschek argues, anonymity and intimacy can no longer be considered separate categories but are often just a click apart.

The fourth and fifth chapters then focus on two more specific phenomena. Chapter 4 investigates the narrative significance of the money shot as a signifier of both closure and, at the same time, endlessness. Schaschek, strongly drawing on Susan Sontag and with reference to the website *Beautiful Agony*, here discusses the trope of orgasm as death and positions pornography within the discourse of trauma. Adding another twist, chapter 5 is particularly interested in how heterosexual pornoscripts are imitated and rewritten for queer porn. Schaschek argues that the structural and aesthetic formulas outlined in the book's previous episodes can also be found in queer pornography, as exemplified by the movie *Nostalgia* (Courtney Trouble, 2009), which is a remake of the porn classic *Deep Throat* (Gerard Damiano, 1972). Detecting these parallels and re-reading queer-specific elements, such as the strap-on dildo, the chapter challenges the clear-cut line between mainstream and alternative porn.

While each chapter sheds light on a different aspect of the topic, they are united by the “attempt to question various dominant assumptions about pornography” (3). In a field that not only works with highly-charged material but is itself still met with prejudice, this is of particular relevance. *Pornography and Seriality* works towards overcoming remaining academic bias and demonstrates the analyzability of pornographic artefacts. Similarly, Schaschek successfully presents the concept of seriality as a prolific and dynamic analytical tool. Even if the connection at times becomes a bit loose, the two fields prove to be mutually enlightening. Not only does the book look at porn in novel

ways but it also rethinks seriality through the lens of pornography. Overall, what began “as a vague idea of postfeminist engagement with pornography” (xi) has grown into a valuable contribution to the still emerging field of porn studies and promises to open up fertile ground for further reflection in that it not only answers many questions but also asks new ones that remain to be explored.

*Madita Oeming, Göttingen*

Rob Allen and Thijs van den Berg (eds.), **Serialization in Popular Culture**. London: Routledge, 2014. 210 pp, hb., £ 85.00.

Initially, much of the research on the serial production and consumption of popular narratives was centered on the novel, with Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* (1836) and Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-1843) respectively launching the Victorian genre of the serial novel and the French genre of the *roman feuilleton*, both by now well-researched and widely recognized fields of literary scholarship. Of course, research on serial forms and their cultural functions has broadened over the years, with various publications highlighting the significance of serial storytelling as a broader cultural phenomenon in story papers and literary magazines, dime novels, comic strips, soap operas and other television formats, including ‘quality TV.’ What is more, recent monographs such as Ruth Mayer's *Serial Fu Manchu: The Chinese Supervillain and the Spread of Yellow Peril Ideology* (2013) and Frank Kelleter's *Serial Agencies: The Wire and Its Readers* (2014) as well as essay collections such as *Populäre Serialität: Narration – Evolution – Distinktion* (ed. Frank Kelleter, 2012) suggest that the study of popular serial storytelling, or popular seriality, is coming into its own as a field of critical inquiry.<sup>1</sup>

*Serialization in Popular Culture*, edited by Rob Allen and Thijs van den Berg and published as part of the Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies series, is a welcome addition to this growing field. The volume contains twelve essays spread across four sections (Victorian Serials, Serialization on Screen, Serialization in Comic Books and Graphic

1 All of these publications emerge from the interdisciplinary DFG Research Unit “Popular Seriality – Aesthetics and Practice” ([www.popularseriality.de/en/](http://www.popularseriality.de/en/)).