The art of staying tuned in real-time. Remediation in *24*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines and discusses current media strategies in *24 Hours*. Elements from interface design, computer games, canonized TV-series, reality-TV, on-line multiplayer games, fandom on the web, etc. are all part of the implicit as well as explicit familiarity and subject matter of *24*. Thus, *24* becomes a unique case in point of present day remediation and transmediation. While the former plots the actualisation of historic media into contemporary hybrid genres and expressions, the latter paws the way for media forms that continuously and rapidly communicate with each other. Hereby, the study of *24* calls for new and flexible analytical tools and readings of cultural consumption. In addition, the article investigates how such apparently abstract concepts like contingency, conspiracy, and temporality are dramatized in Fox Network's *24*.

Key words. Remediation, real-time TV, fandom culture.

RESUMO

Esse artigo examina e discute estratégias atuais da mídia na série de TV *24 Horas*, do Canal Fox. Elementos de design de interface, jogos de computadores, séries de tv canonizadas, reality TV, jogos multiplayers on-line, fandom na web, etc. são todos parte de uma familiaridade tanto implícita como explícita e assunto de *24*. Portanto, *24*

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torna-se um único caso relevante da atual remediação e transmediação. Enquanto o primeiro conspira a atualização da mídia histórica nos gêneros e expressões híbridos contemporâneos, o último escarva a maneira para as formas da mídia que contínua e rapidamente comunicam-se entre si. Aqui, o estudo de *24* pede ferramentas e leituras analíticas flexíveis do consumo cultural. Além disso, o artigo investiga como conceitos aparentemente abstratos, como contingência, conspiração e temporalidade são drama-tizados na série *24 Horas.* .

Palavras-chave: Remediação, Real Time TV, cultura fandom.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine et discute les stratégies médiatiques présentes dans la série télévisive 24 Heures Chrono. Des éléments originaires de l'interface de conception, des jeux vidéo, des séries de télévision consacrées, de la téléréalité, des jeux multijoueurs en ligne, du fandom sur le WEB, etc. sont tous une partie de la familiarité à la fois implicite et explicite et des thèmes de 24. Donc, 24 devient, à l'heure actuelle, un cas unique en ce qui concerne la remédiatisation et la transmédiatisation. Tandis que celle-ci planifie l'actualisation des médias historiques aux genres et aux expressions hybrides contemporains, celle-là prépare la voie pour les médias qui, continuellement et rapidement, communiquent les unes avec les autres. Ainsi, l'analyse de 24 exige des outils nouveaux et flexibles et des lectures de consommation culturelle. En outre, cet article investigue comment des concepts apparemment abstraits, telle que la contingence, la conspiration et la temporalité, sont dramatisés dans 24 Heures Chrono de la Fox Network.

Mots-clés: Remédiatisation; télé en temps réel; culture fandom.

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina y discute las estrategias actuales de los medios en *24 Horas.* Elementos de *design* de interface, juegos de computadores, series de TV canoni-zadas, realidad de la televisión, juegos multiplicadores *on line,* fandom en la web, etc., son todos parte de una familiaridad tanto implícita como explícita, y son asunto de *24.* Por lo tanto, *24* es el único caso relevante de la actual remediación y transmediación. Mientras el primero conspira la actualización de los medios históricos en los géneros y expresiones híbridos contemporáneos, el último escarba en la manera para las formas de los medios que contínua y rápidamente se comunican entre sí. Aquí, el estudio de *24* pide herramientas y lecturas analíticas flexibles del consumo cultural. Además, el artí-culo investiga cómo conceptos aparentemente abstractos, como contingencia, conspiración y temporalidad son dramatizados en *24 Horas,* de la Fox Network

Introduction

From 2002 and onwards special agent Jack Bauer from the US state organization Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU) has been given the role of saving the world from an all-seeing or 'Panoptic' evilness. In the first twenty-four episodes wealthy and mad exiles from Bosnia threaten to snuff out the presidential candidate Robert Palmer. Second cycle of *24* reveals for us the city of Los Angeles in a state of silent panic due to secure sources of intelligence having caught the message that a nuclear bomb is about to explode – within twenty-four hours, of course. Unless, that is, Jack deals with matters. He has done so before; yet, this time stakes are even higher and risks even more fatal. By the time of reading Jack has completed his mission and a new one is on its way.

The fact that Jack is an individual capable of shutting down a nuclear as well as a political crisis of global proportions seems already proved by his name. 'Jack is back' was the motto on banners everywhere long before kick-off of the show's second round. The slogan signals with undersized means that not only is Jack up for a day and night's toil of post-traumatic death syndromes and heightened stress; he has also returned in order to regain his Schwarzenegger'ish risk management profile, harsher and more determined than the previous version as he is now facing the existential noise of his teenage daughter Kimberley and the loss of wife Terri.

So, Jack's the all-American brand. 'Jack' stands for the handling of conspiracy and the aptitude to operate in split seconds. 'Bauer' is a German word, which translates into 'builder' or 'craftsman', maybe even a 'bridge-builder', who avoids collapsing in the array of tight spots and who is able to glue together the disparate sides of international power interests. As such, Jack Bauer is a thinking machine, a blend of Dirty Harry and Fox Mulder, a vehicle for constant motion and the intelligent acceptance of challenges. In order to document that time further proceeds in the hiatus between first and second year of the series, Jack has been equipped with a dozes of metaphysical fatigue – his wife was murdered at the end of first round – and, to begin with, a rather slack attitude. But already in the first forty-five minutes of the 2003 sequel his beard is shaved off, his hairdo is altered into anti-terror fashion, and the slightly descending gaze is replaced

by a look that gawks dangers right in the eye – Jack is back. His number one weapon, by the way, is a cellular phone which was popularized as a narrative thingamajig in *X-Files*. When Jack's mobile is malfunctioning we know for sure that something bad has happened and is about to occur. In adjusting to the median of numerous pop cultural fictions Jack wrestles with a handful of reconciliation demands: The nation must be saved from pandemonium; his family needs to revert to a harmonious state in the aftermath of ordeals instigated by recent marriage separation and mother-daughter quarrels; and, finally, Jack's own identity must be resuscitated from the dark forces that even a specially taught terror fighter possesses. Whether or not the multiple projects bear fruit is not the most important issue here. Rather, it is the representations – the *interfaces* – of these fracases that call for closer inspection.

24 Hours – or simply the catchy *24* – by Stephen Hopkins, director of films such as *Lost in Space* and *Predator 2*, has already been celebrated and premiered for its innovative interpretation of its genre. Traditionally, TV-series belong to the more conservative vicinity of the media spectrum, notwithstanding cult programs like *Twin Peaks* and especially *X-Files* which has proven a major source of inspiration for *24*. Cruising the genre landscape, *24* observably borrows a great number of themes as well as cinematic protocols from *The Fugitive*, the chartbuster of TV history that confirmed the chosen imperative of the episodic thriller: End all entertainment with a hazardous cliff-hanger. Besides, *24* solicits from reality programs with documentary profiles, e.g. the immensely popular *L.A.P.D.* which impressionistically monitors cops, car chases, and rescue missions in the streets and ghettos of Los Angeles. *24* is thus the upshot of more than one generation's development of documentary and fiction style although it also offers something wholly new to the viewers of which I shall return briefly.

On the opening day of the series' second year *24* attracted nearly 14 million American viewers. Actually, the statistics is not awe-inspiring, but one has to take into account that Fox Network is a laggard among the media leviathans and that *24* initially was drafted for the offbeat audience. Kiefer Sutherland who plays Jack Bauer and prior hereto starred in a number of B-movies is conspicuously 'right' in his portrait of a character that both exhibits valiant dispositions and human weaknesses such as second thought,

a lust for vengeance, covetousness, and weariness. Jack is not a middling man, but his credentials are not that peculiar, so to speak, when one ponders his job outline. Some of us write articles and papers, and others, like Jack, look after the nation and shoot terrorists. In the following I shall enquire more deeply into Jack's techniques, remediation, and style.

Techniques

"The following takes place between 2 pm and 3 pm" (or any other fraction within the twenty-four hour range) a voice-over by Sutherland reports in the intro to each episode. We are already familiar with the real-time theme from computer games where the only time one can interact with, as a player, is the here-and-now time. Often time in traditional cinema and television is compressed; it leaps back and forth while obeying the model of Hollywood's preferred Continuity Editing. But time can furthermore be lengthened, which usually happens when relief from excitement is joined with the building of suspense in which case the viewers in identifying with the hero or heroine is left with panicky guesswork: Does the hero succeed in his plans? Does he make it out alive? This is the very quintessence of the cliff-hanger. A short shufti at the highlights of the action thriller *The Sum of All Fears* (2002) reveals this elasticity of fictitious time. Near the end of the film there is a minute-long count-down to the launch of American nuclear missiles, and the 30 seconds given to CIA-analyst Ryan (Ben Affleck) in his attempt to persuade the president Robert Fowler and the Russian 'hawk' Alexander Nemerow of a vast set-up controlled by European neo-nazists and trans-national nuclear bomb thieves – indeed, those seconds probably last a couple of minutes in GNT. Malleable time that can be bended, packed together, and stretched out simply does not exist in *24*. 'The Time You See Is The Time You Get" could be its adage. When CTU-boss Robert Mason announces an urgent phone call ten minutes away we may easily set the timer and await the total congruence of time told and time represented to go off, while Bauer, in the meantime, pierces deeper into the audacious loop-holes of present LA.

In computer games a wide-ranging 'law' informs us that a player can not interact with a cliff-hanger that has *already* taken place, and in a

similar fashion a player is barred from interfering with a cliff-hanger whose *future* whereabouts one is aware of in advance. Technically, this could of course be done effortlessly; however, in terms of story and suspense it would lose all interest and enthralment. In the first case the intensity vaporizes because the story has exposed its effects, and in the second case it is overtly not cool to pretend that one does not know, for instance, that one is about to fall into an abyss. The catch-22 resembles the effort in trying hard to be impulsive. It always fails. Humour and thriller share a primary code: the moment of catharsis (the shooting, the flight, the punch line) must be delivered at an exact instant. Cartoon films have a long and proud history of turning the suspense code of the cliff-hanger into irony: Countless are the incidents where Daffy Duck freezes in mid-air right until he, with a stuttering sigh, stumbles head-down.

The art of *24*, then, is to be at one with causality – real situations have real consequences – and to thrust in an over-arching story. The latter denotes that there is a controlling figure behind the characters and the state of affairs they encounter, while the former indicates that the viewer (or player) is forced to share a certain mode of knowledge with the main character. What does this imply for *24*? The series must have a noticeable structure which is logical, causally functioning, and trustworthy, yet at the same time it acquires a storyline that persistently creates an *unremitting conflict of contingency*. Dissimilar to other kinds of fiction time can not be restored and used as a tool for gluing together the skirmish of *24* since by doing so it would disrupt the real-time effect. If the time of telling and the time told are transparent to each other, then every scene and every jiffy of the episodes are experienced as contingent moments in a sea of indeterminacy. Should Jack do A, shoot B, call C, or perhaps run to D? Notwithstanding the fact that few of us wrestle with the disarming of A-bombs and the unveiling of delicate conspiracies, the contingency model of *24* runs pretty much parallel to the practice of everyday life, as the title of Michel de Certeau's fable on modern living reads. Hence, the series' success; it is and is not life as we know it. *24* offers formula of contingency; it radicalises the excess of coping with the endless complexity of contemporary network society.

The use of real-time in *24* is mirrored in one of the key obstacles that Jack Bauer faces. Already from the very first breathless minutes of the

2002 episodes Jack is troubled by the difficult choice of either saving the president or nursing his daughter Kimberley who is partying wildly with a friend and a couple of bad youngsters. At that time Jack is naturally not aware that the Palmer track and the Kimberley discourse are tightly interwoven, so while seconds tick away we see Jack rushing up to communicate by cell-phone with the president's men while squeezing calls for wife and daughter in between. Here, the bona fide hero is the personified information age, the communication system that ties everything together. Where would Jack be – where would we all be – were it not for cell-phones, Global Positioning Satellites, and removable hard drives?

Sometimes the viewer gains more insight than Jack. The audience may follow the side story – e.g. Kimberley's escapades – while Jack is out assassinating terrorists elsewhere. However, if the real-time representation manifests to what extent Jack tackles conflicts in one location, then time unavoidably scuttles on in another. Thus, *24* constitutes suspense, among other things by interrupting the sub-stories right before culmination. It is vital that we may occasionally see the events A and B as simultaneous occurrences in a consistent story disposition – Palmer in one screen corner and Kimberley in another – but we never monitor the events from an elevated position, as a narratological 'God'. The series teases us by providing us with a glimpse of action B while we are lost in action A, hence establishing a 'Jack's eye point of view' or, as it were, a *first person shooter* gaze. At other times we are Jack's fraught mind whenever Kimberley is out on the loose, and the president's staffs are plotting against us.

A second technical trait of *24* is the *split-screen* format. Frequently the TV screen is divided into multiple sub-windows in which we can tag along the stories as they proceed in real-time. The split-screen works to present the characters and actors that fit into the credentials of each episode, and furthermore it renders the "previously on *24*" hereby aiding new viewers in fiddling with the image norm of the series. Film director Brian de Palma uses split-screen as a dramatic prop in *Snake Eyes* (1999) to keep track of a dual line of sequences that eventually cross around a central bifurcation point. In *Rules of Attraction* (2003) the dissected screen signifies the character's profound distance to each other.

In Hopkin's logic the TV surface becomes rather a computer interface, so that it in addition mimics the news portal of CNN with its profiling of hosts, images, texts, banners, and graphics. On the one hand the effect of the split-screen mode in *24* is an intensified narrative transparency that encourages the viewers to see 'through' the narration in an undeviating and ostensibly un-mediated viewpoint. We see everything – or, rather, everything is shown to us – as if the traditional filters of cinematic illusion – cameras, perspectives, montages – were gone. On the other hand, *24* thematizes its own form of representation hereby demonstrating the strategy of what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their book on remediation terms "hypermediacy" (Bolter and Grusin 1999). The very aesthetics of the split-screen configuration becomes a basic and enduring trademark or signature of television. Not only does it give us access to story and characters; it becomes a piece of narration and layout in its own right. The split-screen design can be said to block the power to individuate and segment the television drama – as in John Fiske's "reverse panopticon" (Fiske 1993: 85) – in exchange for its multiple angles and 'windowed' chic. Consequently, the style of *24* desires visibility and inaccessibility, the marked and the masked, at once. Indeed, one could claim that the split-screen becomes the master trope of *24*; the *prosopopeia* that lends a voice as well as a face to the otherwise 'mute' screen.

The effectiveness of this porous network of screens and sub-screens is clearly verified in the beginning and finale of an episode. When the plot thickens, and the digital watch approaches full hour, we are reminded each week that Jack has more than a few calamities to take care of. Compared to the computer game interface the split-screen mode locates somewhere between first person shooters and real-time strategy games. Repeatedly the camera is placed extremely close to the 'body' of Jack's point of view so that we experience the events from his position in space. This is an example of *internal focalisation*, i.e. a spatial modus operandi that enables the viewer/player to perceive space 'from within' analogous to computer games like *Quake*, *Doom*, and *Unreal Tournament*.

However, the screen is also designed in such a way that we may concurrently access different layers of information and embark upon story trajectories similar to strategy and role playing games (e.g. *Baldur's Gate*

and *Starcraft*). This spatial technique is called *external focalisation*. This logic is further epitomized in *24*'s frequent shots of computer screens as props and gadgets within the story. CTU has of course lots of them, but Jack also employs a choice of palmtops, PDA's, GPS systems, and much more. All these devices including the allusion to shooters and strategy games are part and parcel of the intrinsic tension between logistics and structure on one side and chaotic density on the other. And since the audience can not rise above the visual representation of real-time – that would acquire flash backs, switching between time sections, etc. – the characters of *24* do the job for us. They provide overviews, get hold of status reports, sneak up reliable intelligences, and download intelligible crime topographies.

Remediation

Apart from the large amount of import from thrillers, action movies, and crime cinema in *24*, Hopkins' narrative can be construed as a crossbreed of different TV genres, old and new. Let us inspect these more closely.

Reality TV: Two elements from reality TV are adjacent to *24*. First of all, there is the broad use of a 'quivering' *camera style*. Second, we must not fail to notice the recurring *realism* with which the characters tackle state of affairs. The latter trait of *24* should of course be coupled with the series' real-time norm and the split-screen format, both of which have a clear resemblance to *Big Brother*. We see what the characters do not see; but we see it here-and-now. As spectators we seem to drag preferences from the gist and air of reality-TV into *24*'s cosmos. This is particularly true of the 'roofed' mood that signifies the constant testing of the characters vis-à-vis social and everyday-like dynamics and interpersonal risks witnessed, for instance, by Jack's nerve-racking contact with higher ranking institutional members, his ties to the family, his disputes with former lover Nina Myers, etc. But the 'real-ness' of *24* also shows itself in its clear-cut game show quality: Jack is incessantly tested; he gathers points, he embarks on dangerous missions that only lead to further sub-missions, etc.

The camera holds a complex pose as a carrier of perspective and as a delineation of space in *24 Hours*. When we are inside the locations of CTU, it is always dim and gritty in a way that unmistakably performs a contrast to Jack's work in the field. At CTU the computer screens and the mock high tech lights illumine the space. Here, there is a sensation of 'un-real-ness', which may signal that CTU is the locus of surveillance and central command ('OC'; Operation Centre) and, furthermore, that it is a mental as well as an organizational space without exits. Even CTU is infected by conspiracies, double identities, and renegades; it is a site where strings are tied and where the at once enlightened and mystified power has its impenetrable centre.

In *24* viewpoints should not be disturbing. Or, rather, the reality is troublesome in its own right, and the camera is there to record it. When something explodes – CTU is blown up in year 2003 – the camera wobbles as it is so close to the scene. When Jack enters burning buildings (or when his SWAT team is in the process of eliminating opponents) the camera follows in a fast, unedited, and – seemingly – realistic mise-en-scene. The camera is constantly moving. Furthermore, steady-cams rapport from the heat of action thus making the recordings intentionally trashy and amateurish.

However, not everything in *24* is realistic. Not least the intermittent close-up's of Jack and Kimberley and the total shots of Palmer and his staff are 'delicious'. They are not necessarily shallow and void; rather they are kept in colours and set within stylish interiors that gratify a contemporary gaze. Similarly, the camera may wonder about in flickering waves. But *24* also cleaves to a controlling optics: the images – as well as architectures and spaces – are clustered into distinct assemblages so that we, the viewers, can keep track of the manifold actions.

The episodic thriller: To put it bluntly: *24* could not have made it without direct pre-ancestors like the TV-series *The Fugitive* and *The X-Files*. The former premiered in 1963 on the American broadcasting company ABC, and the producer Quinn Martin had fashioned an idea that, in principle, could run forever. An innocent husband and medical doctor, Richard Kimble, is seen having a fight with his wife and leaves home in anger. As he cools down and returns to his house he discovers the

wife murdered; he calls the police, but no one believes his story. Kimble is sentenced to death. However, shortly thereafter Kimble manages to flee from the prisoner's transport on its way to Indiana State Prison. The police inspector Sam Gerard embarks upon a regular manhunt in which Kimble is always on the verge of being caught. ABC aired 120 episodes in total until the famous Thursday August 29th 1967 where the narrator William Conrad told of "the day the great flight was brought to an end". In 1993 *The Fugitive* was re-cast for the cinema screen with Harrison Ford and Tommy Lee Jones as stars, and the set-up with fugitive and stalker was further repeated in 1998 with the motion picture *U.S. Marshall* in which Tommy Lee Jones plays the role of Gerard next to Wesley Snipes as speed-talking, Afro-American Kimble-clone.

At that time, in the sixties, the audience learned to trust two effects: suspense and believe in a mission. The mishmash of the two helped to sustain the drive of the series; for even though Kimble, portrayed by David Jannsen, seemed to settle once again and was sporadically on the brink of loosing touch with his role as a runner, the series never fled away from its fundamental centre. An innocent man is on the run, and the man of the Law is out to get him.

If *The Fugitive* is the engine that propels forward an engagement towards suspense and forking plotlines in *24*, then *X-Files* delivers an irresistible tale of truth (and lies) and grand conspiracy. Chris Carter's story of the two action-packed intellectuals, Mulder and Scully, which swept across the nation for the first time in autumn 1993 as a modest proposal from Twentieth Century Fox, dwells intensively on the enduring plot and the dedicated thrust needed to track down the truth "out there". *X-Files* confronts the viewers with a split story line: One is the so-called *story arc*, i.e. the tale of the magnificent secret held by The Syndicate of its alleged agreements with extra-terrestrial beings; another consists of the weekly episodes that display all sorts of paranormal activity and crime. *24* inherits not only the claustrophobic stratagem and the main story's enormous elongation from *X-Files*, but, in addition, a whole array of image- and compositing codes: the filming of esoteric case files; the never fulfilled, erotic tease; the depiction of external expeditions which are nothing less than internal voyages into the labyrinthine soul. Together,

The Fugitive and *X-Files* create in *24* the recipe for suspense, conspiracy, and image.

Docu-soaps like *Crime Watch*, *Cops*, *Airport*, *Rescue 911*, and, not least, *L.A.P.D.* place themselves in terms of genre in a hybrid between the docu-soap and the reality magazine. They do so because they both portray "ordinary" people and act as journalistic observations of more extravagant crime chronicles. At the same time these series mark in their tempo, their import of realism, as well as in their fast-paced marketing the upshot of a mounting rivalry among public service channels and independent, commercial TV stations (Bondebjerg 2002: 170). Since its start in 1984 BBC's *Crime Watch* has had in average approximately 30 percent of the primetime viewers (Dovey 2000: 133). *L.A.P.D.*, which apparently profits from the "Rodney King effect" and, moreover, builds upon solid fictions like *District Hill Street* and *New York Blues*, operates in a field of tension between real footage, i.e. reality based recordings in real-time, and reconstructions based on actual events. The docu- and reality-soap clearly exhibit a formatting of the everyday hero – the fireman, the doctor at the rescue centre, the police squad in depraved Los Angeles – and the mode of action is produced after a model in which sudden, yet realistic, catastrophes – often in neighbouring environments – are held off. Thus, the series become, as noted by Ib Bondebjerg, very morally inclined, because they show us how order can be re-established, and because they demonstrate to what extent ordinary subjects contribute to the production of meaning in a complex, media-driven, contemporary society.

It seems that Jack Bauer, as a figure of omission, does not share qualities with the daily male protagonist that saves the community from tragedy. However, *24* does not solely portray Jack as a one-dimensional hero but, in addition, Hopkins endows with him with a personal life, private feud (he wants, after all, to kill Nina Myers in 2003), and fragile conflict themes. In *24* stories of everyday life and geopolitical risks are intimately associated.

Other members of the series also live such a binary life as part time super-human beings, part time reality-heroes. Paula, one of the new personas in *24*'s 2003 gallery, is transformed from a rather quiet role as

an average employee at CTU to earning a central place amidst the rescue work – transferral of vital computer files and passwords – caused by the bombing of CTU. Mason, boss at CTU, is exposed to radio active material in one of the first episodes of the 2003 round, and later on his son all of a sudden appears and shed tears over this otherwise cynical character. And, last but not least, there is Kimberley: Apart from Jack, she is the one who is always in the eye of the hurricane; but opposite Jack she holds a licence to perform desperate choices, engulf in sheer panic, and call dad's mobile.

Style: time and conflict

From questions of genre and cinematic techniques we can now take a closer look of what governs the series' fascination. I will point at two elements that are closely related to the already mentioned aspects. The first is time, and the second is the mobile conflict.

In *24* time itself – or speed, *dromos* – activates a plot. Thus, time, which usually is a highly abstract concept, becomes a figure of identification and absorption placed at the extreme fore of the world of fiction. One could assert that time is anthropomorphised. Time is dressed in a human subject's clothes. Time further bifurcates into two pathways each of which espouses the dynamics of the series; first, there is a *contingency track*, and second there is a *conspiracy track*.

Theories of contingency and conspiracy are innately oppositional. That does not, however, exclude the fact that they are amalgamated in a common nucleus, i.e. an impulse to fabricate mechanisms of regulation dealing also with the conduct of conflicts. Slavoj Zizek depicts the tension between contingency and conspiracy as a "traumatic antagonism" in which the positions each tries to "heal its wound via the imposition of a balanced symbolic circuit" (Zizek 1994: 26). In a *Newsweek* column Jonathan Atler notes on the all-encompassing conspiracy theme in *X-Files*: "Communism is dead, capitalism a given. That leaves conspiracism as the civic faith of the moment – a tidy, curiously comforting way to view the universe. At least someone's in control, even if he's evil" (Atler 1998: 76). Conspiracism looks for intentions, causal, and sometimes riotously exaggerated

explanations and motives that link and thus give meaning to each node in a network. Contrary to this level of hermeneutics, theories of contingency exactly tell us that history could have been different, that causal explanations are not sufficient, and that any view upon historical circumstances might be naturally capricious. Habitually, however, arbitrariness spawns momentous consequences. George Will has a fine anecdote on this when he invokes the story of the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo 1914; incidents that, as we know, initiated World War One:

> On June 28, 1914, six young men were poised in Sarajevo, Bosnia, to throw bombs at the car of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Five of them, intimidated by the crowds or unwilling to hurt the archduke's wife, did nothing. However, one asked a policeman which car was the archduke's, the policeman identified it and the boy threw his bomb, which bounced off the archduke's car and exploded under the following car. One of the others, Gavrilo Princip, went off disconsolately for coffee at a corner café, where he loitered. Later, the Archduke, going to a museum, decided to visit the people injured by the bomb. His driver, confused about the route to the hospital, stopped in front of the café where the astonished Princip sat. Princip leapt up and shot the Archduke and his wife, thereby lightning Europe's fuse (Will 1994: 168f.).

Atler once more: "In fact, the history of secret government agencies, from botched coup attempts in the 1950s to botched monitoring of nuclear testing in the 1990s, is about screw-ups". And a little later: "You wanna talk conspiracies? Nowadays, the U.S. government can't cover up *anything*" (Atler, ibid.).

What controls the Story in *24*'s model of history? Is it contingency, i.e. randomness and "screw-ups"; or is it conspiracy, that is, motivated determinisms inflicted by evil wills? The answer is both. It seems to be a fundamental element of the thriller genre that it favours conspiracy – often structured around the so-called 'lone gunman' model. The hero is on the *verge* of something; all and sundry is seemingly *chasing* him; power is *branching*; the plot *thickens*. Occasionally the conspiracy threatens to de-rationalise the judgment of Jack Bauer who, in turn, evokes a paranoid sense of the world; or, on the contrary, it is fuel for an essentially 'healthy', i.e. rational, urge for explanation personified by the hero. Jack is such a hero. He embodies a sound scepticism in a boiled up race against time that often leads him into dark paths. He also must act in a universe inhabited by contra espionage, double communicating coalition partners, and cunning turncoats.

Yet, *24* is furthermore attentive to the contingency track which is, once again, neatly related to the representation of time. The series never escapes the possibility that Jack's mission impossible infrequently imperils into utter chance and blind leads. The continual collision of told time and the time of telling – the real-time scheme – thus manifests a double treatment of narrativity in *24*: On the one hand the series entails a model of conspirational reconciliation characterised by a logical composition typical of the thriller genre. All things eventually merge into settlement, that is, an inauguration of the huge conspiracy and its most unique parts. On the other hand *24* illustrates a contingent flow of experience that – exactly because we can not 'rewind' time in the midst of real-time's irreversibility – blocks the causal conditions otherwise established by the series in its logical composition. In *24* causality is deconstructed in the same pace with which the events progress; but, simultaneously, the logic of this stubborn drive for reconciliation is persistently reconstructed.

24 Hours dramatises what I would prefer to call *the mobile conflict*. The series constantly balances between showing the invariable string of events and sub-events in real-time while, at the same time, it requires to amputate these stories when focus is relocated from one to the other. *24* solves this problem by creating mobile conflicts. The characters in *24* move a lot. They are seen in cars, running, aboard helicopters or aircrafts, moving from one place to another, from one emergency situation to the next, leaping back and forth between nodes in the network of actions. However, if nothing happened at some stage in all this transportation, the series would immediately loose its instinctive suspense appeal. There is simply no time to exceed time. Otherwise, the series would be stuck in its contingency track and thus loose sight of the conspiracy track. So, the conflict has been mobilised; it is instead a central part of the story's own transport spaces. Building from these spaces the characters communicate with each other – Jack and Nina, Jack and Kim, Jack and Tony Almeida, and so on. Why this responsiveness towards mobility and (electronic) communication exchange? First of all, these conversations, which are often threatening and abrupt, keep the story going. Second, the communication connects the windows on the screen. It is 'left lower corner' that dialogues with 'the upper right corner'. In addition, it is in the transportation spaces

that crises are dealt with and new ones arise and awake again. In conclusion, one can say that transportation in *24* not only marks the affinity between sites of conflict; rather, transportation in itself becomes the scene of interest. Transportation is not merely passages but places.

Fundamentally *24* encloses four prototypical elements that are important at a both narrative and spatial level: *transportation*, *communication*, *crisis management*, and *multiplication of risk*. That *24* uses all of them in an orbital composition that are layered on top of the series' foundational rationality (find the bomb, save LA, shoot the terrorists, dissolve the conspiracy, etc.) is illustrated in the figure below:
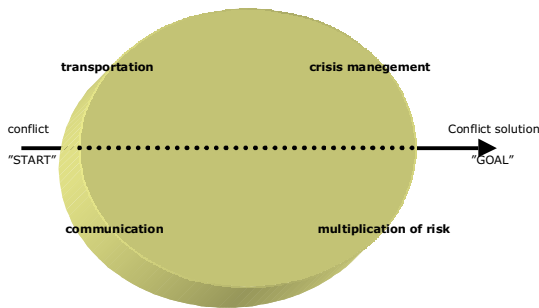

Fig. 1: Prototypical elements and the arrow of conflict in *24*.

A further advantage of depicting the narrative make-up of *24* as above is the possibility of 'plotting' – i.e. abstractly visualising – the multiple conflict situations within the series. One event takes place in the area of 'transportation' in the near vicinity of 'crisis management'; another occurs in the spot between 'communication' and 'multiplication of risk'; a third one in the exact centre of all categories, and so on.

One example of this plotting of narrative tension in *24* can be taken from the 2003 episodes: Together with the renegade Nina Myers Jack is onboard a plane from Los Angeles to Vasalia. After 2002 we thought, however, that Nina was dead, but now she is in the show once more and it turns out that she has strong ties to Arabic terrorists. Inside the plane we find also the assumed terrorist, Fahin, a couple of CTU agents, while Jack

is constantly contacting CTU headquarters by radio so that the unfamiliar messages exchanged by Nina and Fahin can be deciphered. In the meantime, Kim is trying together with her boyfriend to get away from LA. However, she is seized by the police and is now heading back to LA. As always, Kim calls her father to lament her despair.

Here are the plot-headlines in brute, chronological facts:

• Transportation (by plane)

• Communication 1: CTU real-time translations and ongoing exchange of commands

• Communication 2: General noise onboard the plane (the 'fog of war')

• Communication 3: Kim shows up on the line, and Jack is forced to toggle between two equally important inputs

• Multiplication of risk: Nina manages to murder Fahin right before a potential confession (one of the major tricks in *24* is the incessant 'elimination of clues')

• Crisis management, i.e. tackling of contingency: Should Jack move on to the next destination; or should he rather return to LA, CTU, and Kim?
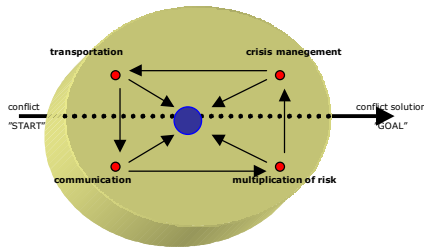

Fig. 2: The events are plotted at *24*'s conflict map. The circle in the middle of the illustration marks the core of the cliff-hanger. Most often, this is where a single episode ends.

Exactly because of the real-time strategy, though, *24* never seems to entirely abandon the chief conflict (illustrated in fig. 1 and 2 as the arrow of conflict). The tackling of contingency (shown as the centre square in fig. 2) therefore never erodes from the ground axis of the narration (the arrow from 'start' to 'goal'). Still, it can be close to or far away from the conflict solution. This is illustrated in the rather messy fig. 3:
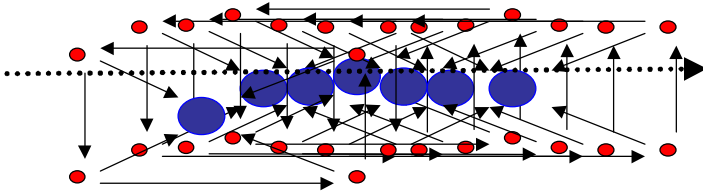
Fig. 3: Handling of contingency and conflict arrow in *24*. The direction from left to right points to the series' development in time, i.e. its movement towards a) multiplication of risk, and b) the closure of conspiracy.

Fandom and Media Dynamics

What do "Jack's desktop", "The White House", "Kimberley's phone", and "Community" have in common? They're all menus and hyperlinks on *24*'s predestined website. By juxtaposing the modes of representation in the TV series with the interface design of the Internet pages it becomes obvious that *24* not only fully benefits from the potentials of a culture of media convergence, but, in addition, that it labours in an explicit grey zone between facts and fiction, reality and staging. The web user is drawn into the universe of the series as the message "You've got mail" under "Jack's desktop" flickers across the computer screen; or the editors blend factual knowledge of American history with scenes from the Palmer inner circle. All you have to do is click "The White House".

This method of mixing reality and fiction rests on clear role models. One of the most attention-grabbing of these is the online and multi player game *Majestic* which was launched by Electronic Arts (EA) on July 30th 2001. With captions such as "It plays you" the game attracted in total 71.200 active users that eagerly explored a world crammed with conspiracies, bizarre motives, and complex stories. EA deliberately confused 'authentic' information and 'staged' information, for instance through the design of several websites that operated as knowledge resources. Furthermore, *Majestic* utilized a number of online messenger systems, search robots, and chat rooms whilst elevating the game world experience from the computer interface to the physical reality. It was part of the game that the player in his hunt for truth – the grand conspiracy – received

outlandish telephone calls, e-mails, and fax letters. However, political correctness paraded on September 11th 2001, and the following statement landed in the users' inbox:"EA has temporarily suspended service on Majestic. Given the recent national tragedy, we feel that some of the fictional elements in the game may not be appropriate at this time. We will contact you again concerning resumption of the game."

Comparable to the convoluted cyber architecture of *Majestic*, *24*'s website is evidently a piece of fan culture and can be probed accordingly as an ingredient within a larger and more compound socio-cultural horizon. Also, the codes, with which the web runs its machinery, are attached to a sub-cultural agenda which seems to promote users; not the ones who look for insight (they have that already) but, instead, those who wish for *even more* insight. The ultimate surfer may be he or she who happens to be wedged by the seducing imagery on the site; but first and foremost the production and reception of meaning is held in reserve for the *aficionados*, the true connoisseurs, who simply can not resist piling up yet more info relating to their favourite relaxation.

Importantly, the website also indicates that no medium in the present day can be defined as a self-sufficient application based on partial groupings. On the contrary, the junction of TV and Internet *pace 24* is rather a nice instance of how media commune in circular forms. They carry information, entertainment, games, role portraying, and handling of contingency in a non-stop circuit of jointly coupled citations and codes of consumption that can be swiftly attuned and functionally altered. Thus, the *spin* of this media circularity comes to resemble the kind of consumer and life style culture that Pierre Bourdieu coined "habitus":"Life-styles are thus the systematic products of habitus, which, perceived in their mutual relations through the schemes of the habitus, become sign systems that are socially qualified (as "distinguished", "vulgar", etc.) (cf. Elmer in press)."

In a certain sense it is these *habita*, everyday practices, and socio-cultural interpretation schemes that are dramatised in *24*. If everyday man is rapt, then, in addition, a whole range of both elements of normality and tendencies toward resistance and objectivity are similarly subjugated. It is exactly this inscription of the subversive in the 'pedestrian' life form that Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, discovered in his

analyses of the everyday subject and its trajectory through – not least – the modern urban space. Furthermore, it is these passages leading into political, economical, and cultural spaces which, at the same time, denote strategies for commercial methods of expenditure. Hence, there may be a good point in looking closer into how TV series like *24* remediate the representations of reality that some demolish as banal hocus-pocus and others celebrate as channels of democratic communication. Maybe everyday man as such does not exist – especially not in any aprioric sense; there is however little doubt that the *representation* of this individual – or this idea – thrives on all levels.

Wrapping up, the dynamics of *24*'s media strategies can be expressed by the following three concepts:

• **Remediation**: *24 Hours* re-actualises and reshapes a number of traditional, already established and often canonised media content and brands of representation. The custom of remediation is therefore to a large degree *diachronic*, i.e. it points backwards in history.

• **Transmediation**: Texts, images, films, etc. wander from one format to the next in cyclical exchanges. Thus, a manifold of narrative codes are recognized which give the audience access to information across media forms and media platforms. Such media practice is *synchronic*, i.e. it fosters a 'real-time space' for the interaction with and the exchange of available media.

• **Intermediation**: Finally, the concept of intermediation must be understood as a process oriented reconfiguration of the above mentioned media policies. Intermediation is the user's or the viewer's 'optics'. It is a concept for the formula – "habita" – whereby media content communicate diachronic as well as synchronic and thus creates still new observation codes and paradigms of interpretation.

The inter-reliant dynamics of remediation, transmediation, and intermediation are displayed. (figure 4)

The aspect of process oriented mediation supports not merely the installation of media, TV, and web that 'talk with one another'; it also concerns the principally infinite amount of information – horizontally and vertically – that is constantly obtainable. *24* expresses a world which is always transforming itself, and whose horizon is regularly expanding.

Correspondingly, de Certeau notes that the phenomena and narratives of everyday life form a *bricolage*, a continuously dynamic elucidation of 'texts' made up of cities, books, films, and mass media. In fact, one can even claim that Jack saves us – not from fictive terrorism – but, rather, the information overload of contemporary society.
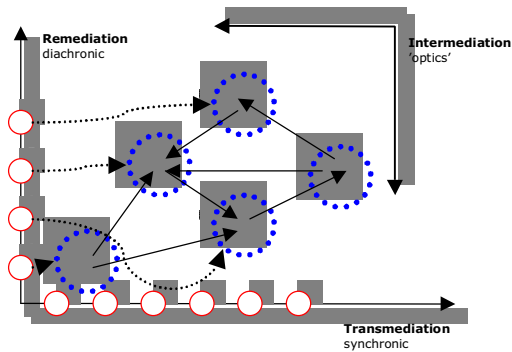

Fig. 4: Remediation, transmediation, and intermediation.

In its very interaction design the Net refers to the mobility and the logic of temporality that television shows us once a week every week. Likewise, these scores of observations – and guidelines for observation – generate an aspiration for 'supplementary', an interpenetration of the fiction and the – real as well as unreal – dynamisms that lie underneath. And then we go surfing on the web to fulfil our needs. Reality is, as I have shown, incorporated in *24* in many ways, and thus an effect of closeness, proximity, and presence, is constituted which 'pure', fictive representations can not render the same way. Finally, it is, as Stig Hjarvard remarks elsewhere, precisely the force of fiction to enable dramatisations that reality TV seldom are capable of. Except, perhaps, from *24 Hours*.

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