How to Rule a TV Show? Narration in *24*

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Abstract. In my paper I examine *24* (2001–2010, Fox), a contemporary TV show, which gained high critical and public attention thanks to its narration technique. In my view, this technique has its roots in classical television narration, so the discussion starts with an introduction, in which the rules of traditional television narratives are summarised. After discussing the most important terms, such as series/serials, narration, schedule, flow, etc. the concept of the *host* is introduced. It is the narrator of documentaries and news, but some TV shows have hosts as well. Traditionally, the presence of such an on screen and/or voice-over narrator leads to disbelief, because it points out the fictional character of the story. Each episode of *24* can be divided into two parts: the recap with its homodiegetic voice-over host/narrator (the protagonist, Jack Bauer), who updates the viewer; and the show itself which is transmitted from another, invisible narration level. Why does this discrepancy not affect our trust in the presented possible word? How can the show unite former distinct categories? What could have been the secret of *24*'s rise and failure? What is the role of Jack? These questions will be examined in my essay.

24: An Introduction

With its 8 seasons *24* (2001–2010, Fox) has received significant critical and public attention, and it is highly possible that its success lies partly in the provocative plotting of the show, namely in the evocation of the terrorist threat. Aired shortly after the catastrophe of WTC, the serial mirrors the deepest frustrations and fears of our time, which rise from the shock of America becoming a target of a successful terror attack. *24* recalls the latest buzzwords of headlines like 'the enemy is among us,' 'everybody can be a victim' and the idea that there must be a government conspiracy in the background. In every season the focal point of the events is a terrorist threat inside the US, which has to be countered by the Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU), a fictional agency.

The serial is also famous for its narrative structure, and it is probably the first show the title of which refers to its narration technique. Each season of the programme represents the events of a single day, so the running time of the episodes is one hour, and each season contains 24 episodes. "The defining idea of the show – strict unity of time – demands that the 24 hours of season one constitute a single narrative" (Birk and Birk 2005, 48). In contrast, there is a huge narration gap between the events of the seasons, and it is never completely explained what happened in the meantime. So the viewer meets the characters mainly in one situation: during work – as if their civil life were unimportant.

This is also true for the main character, Jack Bauer (played by Kiefer Sutherland). He is one of the field agents of CTU, a former special force soldier. He is a stubborn and aggressive character, who always follows his own instincts instead of the official orders, and that is why in the course of the day he is forced to work alone or with the help of just a few co-workers. He is not idealised, often makes mistakes, his wrong decisions even cost him the life of his wife, and sometimes he is driven by his vindictiveness (this aspect reaches its climax in the 8th season, after Rene Walker has been killed). Each season starts with Bauer just regaining his mental / physical / emotional equilibrium, which is completely destroyed until the end of the day. In spite of this, he never gives up putting things right from one season to another, and he is always willing to start another fight against terrorists. Little by little he is becoming depressed, and he is slowly losing all of his loved ones in the fight for the 'American dream.'

All in all, he never learns from his own mistakes, which is very strange, because the other characters of the show change a lot: Chloe, for example, was introduced in the third season as an antisocial weird geek, and becomes more and more 'normal'. She becomes a reliable helper of Jack and will even have a family and a child. Similarly, the directors of CTU (Ryan Chapelle, George Mason, Bill Buchanan, Erin Driscoll and Karen Hayes) are at their first appearance strict and they stick to the rules, but sooner or later they realise that bureaucracy has to be ignored in favour of stopping terrorist attacks. The three men even sacrifice their lives for this case, which testifies to their significant change. Some characters are capable of developing within just a few episodes, like Linn McGill who at first sets back the work of the agency with his exactitude, but when the office itself becomes the target of a nerve gas attack because of his fault he restarts the air circulatory of the building which costs him his life.

Change – or in the terms of television studies 'twist' – is characteristic of the show in a number of other ways: people, intentions, targets can change, for

example the interrogator becomes the suspect and thus interrogated, or moles are uncovered at the agency. Furthermore, a lot of deals are made, which for instance help terrorists start new lives in exchange for important information. This lack of stability requests high attention from the viewer to be able to understand the events, and pushes the show towards the serial format, in contrast to series.

But in spite of these rapid changes of relations, in most cases the viewer knows who to trust – Jack is undoubtedly the most stable point in the world of *24*, and even when he becomes suspicious in the eyes of the senior colleagues or co-workers, we are (and we *can be*) sure that he is reliable and serves the 'greater good.' It is not just because of the fact that he plays the leading role, but the show uses well-tried as well as rewritten narrative strategies to convince the audience that he is right. In my paper, I will discuss these techniques by comparing them with the traditional forms of TV narration.

Narration on TV: Another Introduction

It is a cliché that we are surrounded by narratives. Our everyday life is accompanied by novels, movies, tales, and jokes, and in some ways billboards as well, as a huge number of other types of printed advertisement also challenge us to develop a story. However, I will argue that nowadays television is the main source of narratives. Surveys have shown that in most households TV is a kind of family member, people switch it on as soon as they arrive home, and it works until late in the evening. Furthermore, TV has even overcome radio in some workplaces. This phenomenon led John Fiske and John Hartley to speak about the 'bardic' function of television (Fiske and Hartley 2003).

The very concept of television lies in storytelling: films, news, advertisements, reality shows, etc. – except for a few talk shows and game shows we can hardly mention a programme or a sequence which is non-narrative. What is more, "narrative structure is, to a large extent, the portal or grid through which even nonnarrative television must pass" (Kozloff 1992, 53). But the most interesting narration technique used most of all by television is serialised narration which Seiter calls the "television's definitive form" (1992, 33). Serialised narration means on the first level that the viewer cannot watch the whole story at once, but is forced to follow the rhythm set by the broadcasting company (Allen 1992b; Allrath, Gymnich and Surkamp 2005).

Although serialised narration has its roots in older media, such as books, newspapers, and radio, and it was the main cause of these media becoming

mass media, the appearance of new media forced television to try to gain back audience's attention by using serialised narration. This attempt brought the flourishing of this technique, which can be observed from the late 90's (Kozloff 1992). Not only series and serials which use the same characters and places from episode to episode can be mentioned as an example for serialised narration, but – as a number of theorists argue – also the news and other programmes (advertisements, reality shows, etc.) which develop a narrative in a longer period (Allen 1992b; Allrath, Gymnich and Surkamp 2005; Ellis 1992; Kozloff 1992).

Although the division of fictional series and serials is not as strict nowadays as it was when serialised stories appeared, both terms can be helpful in analysing contemporary fictional shows. While series contain episodes which are connected only by topic, characters and places, serials develop a story during weeks, months or even seasons. But the two categories are not discrete ones; shows can be put on a scale which starts with programmes with the extremist types of closure episodes (*The Simpsons* [1989–, Fox] as well as most of the situation comedies for instance) and reaches soap operas, in which everything is in connection with everything, so an action of a character can rewrite the relationships of a number of others (see for example *Dallas* [1978–1991, CBS] or *The Shield* [2002–2008, FX Networks]) (Allen 1992b; Allrath, Gymnich and Surkamp 2005). The most important difference between the two types for the present analysis is that while series can be seen and understood even by an occasional viewer, serials can only be enjoyed with some kind of prior knowledge. In short, the method of building the narrative significantly differs in these cases, which influences the attitude of the audience towards them.

But there is a number of other factors in the interpretation of TV narratives which determine the audience's relationship to the programmes. In her work on television narration, Sarah Kozloff virtually divides TV narratives into story, discourse and schedule (Kozloff 1992). The first two categories, which answer the question of what is told and how it is told, can be familiar from other theories on classic narration, but schedule is something that has to be explained, because it is unique for television as an audiovisual medium. As Kozloff argues, this term means that TV programmes not only have to be coherent on their own, but must also fit in the profile of the channel on which they are running. What is more, each station has a special concept about what would be the most popular programme among their viewers in a given time, which leads Kozloff to assume the working of a so called 'supernarrator' behind each station. John Ellis argues that "scheduling is the means by which a day's broadcasting is arranged so that particular programmes coincide

with particular supposed events in the life of the family. Scheduling provides a regular, week by week, slot in which the repetition of particular series formats can take place" (1992, 116). In short, we can say that the façade of a channel is basically established by its schedule, which is available on the Internet and in newspapers, thus it can introduce the channel for viewers in advance.

Schedule produces the phenomenon that Raymond Williams calls 'flow:' the uninterrupted line of programmes and advertisements running on TV (Williams 2003). It is not just a list of programmes, but it also has to be coherent in itself, because TV companies do not only want to catch viewers' attention, but they also try to make them watch the given channel as long and as frequently as possible, besides raising the level of attention. That is why the items of the flow build on each other: news refers to series, serials refer to each other, etc. This effort is based on the assumption that a high number of viewers, who switch to a channel for a specific programme, can be convinced to stay for the next programme; but when it is not interesting enough, the viewer will switch to another station just after a few minutes. In the discourse on television it is a commonsense that audience vote for or against a show with the remote control, so the product of television is more likely the flow than the distinct programme.

In short, the flow specifies the broadcast time of programmes, and can be changed just under extraordinary circumstances (for example in case of an inland catastrophe). It means that time in connection with television programmes has more layers than in films or novels: "there are really three time schemes operating: the time of the told, the time of the telling, and the time of the broadcasting"[1] (Kozloff 1992, 69). What makes the situation more complicated is that television is the most common audiovisual medium which is able to broadcast events live, when the above mentioned three time layers become one. But in most cases there are distinctions between them, although a lot of 'canned' (which means recorded and edited in advance) programmes just like talk shows, reality shows or films try to use the codes of live broadcast, thus creating a sense of spontaneity and reality in order to heighten suspense.

The aim of the effort to make viewers stay is very simple – the programmes of commercial channels are nothing but by-products, as they live on advertising revenue. The advertisers pay per 20 seconds in the break or for product placement, and for their money they have to be sure that the message reaches as many people

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[1]   Kozloff starts from Christian Metz's idea: "[t]here is the time of the thing told and the time of the telling [...] One of the functions of narrative is to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme." (Kozloff 1992, 65; Metz 1974, 21.)

as possible. In consequence, stations have to broadcast popular programmes, thus producing high views to be able to sell the time of the break for the highest price possible. The more popular a channel and a specific programme is, the more the advertiser is willing to pay for advertising time and product placement (compare the enormous prices of the advertisement time in the break of the *Lost* [2004–2010, ABC] final episodes). From this point of view, television can be recognised as an economic project to engage the highest possible number of the viewers to maximise their income, rather than as "free" entertainment as viewers may feel (Allen 1992a; 1992b). This feature is the most recognisable in connection with commercial television; this is what determines its programme structure in the first place. This is especially true for America, where the concept of state-owned television is not an important phenomenon, and the TV companies have far less duty as in Europe – for example, they do not have to inform the public and the time and the frequency of the advertisement breaks is unlimited.

Channels in the competition for viewers develop more and more sophisticated techniques to grab and hold people's attention. To this end, as Kozloff argues, they put great emphasis on narration, which she defines as a set of events that are connected by temporality or causality. As she puts it: "television, like all other narrative forms, takes advantage of the viewer's almost unquenchable habit of inferring causality from succession" (1992, 54). In spite of this, one can argue that television series – as well as other programmes – are highly formulaic, which means that for a regular viewer events are predictable well in advance. For instance, the main character of a serial never dies, 'good' people usually survive and 'bad' people get caught. But this limited suspense – which originates from the effort to serve the viewer with familiar stories – can be raised, as Kozloff's analysis about the docudrama series *Rescue 911* (1989–1996, CBS) shows. She lists three reasons: 1. self-contained episodes, which means that the places and the characters change from episode to episode, so there is not a protagonist who joins the season and thus can be seen as guideline, 2. the series borrows a huge amount of unforeseeable events from real life, which suggests that no screenwriters had worked on the show, 3. real life events have their unpredictability, so in series based on true stories there is a bigger chance of an unhappy end – at least as viewers feel it, because for example fatal accidents are never adapted in the mentioned series.

As it can be seen, the narrating agency – which is a construction, not a living person – tries to compensate the audience for the restricted suspense in a number of ways. Fictional series and serials also frequently simulate the feeling of live broadcast, but they also use a number of other techniques. One of the most

important of these is multiple storytelling during which not only one storyline is developed in an episode, but there are up to 6-7 ongoing lines, which in many cases interfere with one another and cross each other. This technique raises the viewer's curiosity for the development of the story, in contrast to the events – as Kozloff writes: "television stories generally displace audience interest from the syntagmatic axis to the paradigmatic" (1992, 58).

Because of the above mentioned regularity and the process of programme production in the case of television, we cannot talk about an author in the same meaning as in films or novels (Allrath, Gymnich and Surkamp 2005). However, in some programmes which are more experimental and contain some novelty, an implied author can be detected who addresses the audience (for instance *Lost* or *The Shield*); but in other cases the show is so formulaic that such an attempt is unreasonable – the story and the narration follow well-tried rules (this can be observed in most daily soaps) (Allen 1992a).

To wake viewers' attention some shows try to personalise the narrating agency by giving face and voice for it and to address the audience: the so-called 'host' can be the commentator of documentary series, the showman of a quiz or a reality show and so on (Allen 1992b; Kozloff 1992). Fictional series and serials tend to use some kind of host as well,[2] consider for example Dexter, the popular serial killer of Showtime, who presents his own story (*Dexter*, 2006–, Showtime). He is not only the main character of the serial, but he also narrates the onscreen events from his own point of view (homodiegetic narrator with the term of Genette), thus guiding the viewer in the world of the show. Mary Alice Young from *Desperate Housewives* (2004–, ABC) can be regarded as a similar voice-over narrator: her death is the starting event of the series, thus the narration is 'post-mortem.' So she is a very special example of heterodiegetic character narrators who unites her own and an omniscient viewpoint, which enables her to see events with a special kind of irony. Thus with her reflections she as a host bridges the story world with the world of the audience.

These kinds of hosting have a lot of benefits: the voice of the narrator can summarise the events for the viewer and thus s/he puts them in another light, s/he can even reflect on the events happened some episodes earlier, unfold motivations, uncover discrepancies, etc. which extends suspense and helps

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2   The phenomenon may go back to the anthology series, in which the episodes did not have a common story, and even used different characters from episode to episode – only the atmosphere of the series remained the same. The host's appearing before the show makes clear the connection between the parts, thus helps the viewer recognise the similarities (Kozloff 1992).

the audience identify with the narrator. Traditionally these hosts – just like their antecedents in documentaries, quiz shows, and other programmes – are trustworthy because, as Ellis argues, one of its first tasks is helping the viewer to follow the events even when s/he can just listen without watching, so the audience can put their faith in them without any fear of being misled (in contrast to the character narration in cinema, which in many cases turns out to be misleading, see for example Hitchcock's *Stage fright* [1950]) (Ellis 1992). This repetition between image and sound is typical on television, and leads critics to the conclusion that TV programmes have a low artistic value (Seiter 1992).

However, primarily in the case of contemporary series and serials, an exciting paradox can be observed: although the role of the character narrator is to help us understand the onscreen story, it does not simplify the interpretation itself, because the viewer can note discrepancy and sameness between the narration and the events, s/he can discover another possible interpretation, or detect signs which the narrator did not mention or does not even know about (Allrath, Gymnich and Surkamp 2005). It is a frequent occasion in the case of non-omniscient character narrations (see for example *Dexter*), which can even produce the classic type of suspense in case of which tension comes from the larger knowledge of the viewer. Thus the viewer is involved in putting together the story, and because of this activity (and of course the above mentioned identification) his/her commitment to the show rises.

Of course the presence of the character narrator weakens the reality effect in the case of fictional series and serials, because it uncovers the 'fictional contract' (term from Genette), which means that fictional narratives try to pass themselves off as non-fictional, and also the interpreter sees them that way. The voice-over of the characters expresses the distance between the story and the narrator, which can be found in time (see *Dexter* and *Sex and The City* [1998–2004, HBO]) or on level of discourse (see *Desperate Housewives*), so it points out that the plot is constructed – these shows can be regarded thus as self-conscious. However, the degree of their self-consciousness can vary on a long scale, which is in connection with their relation to the story they tell (Kozloff 1992). It is not accidental that fictional shows, which would like to preserve the illusion of reality, do not use character narration in this way, but try to hide the presence of the narrator – see for example the *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000–, CBS) and its spin offs, *X-Files* (1993–2002, Fox), *The Shield*, etc.. To make it possible, they mostly use strict chronological order; they avoid repetition of certain stories and motives; and try to diminish the difference between discourse time and story time.

On the other hand, the host in non-fictional programmes (for example in news) can function as the presenter of the viewer, thus create authenticity (Seiter 1992); what is more, it can address him or her directly which is called the 'rhetorical mode of television' (Allen's term 1992b). In the first case, the host's attention and questions represent that of the audience, for instance by asking a correspondent. In the latter, the host turns directly to the viewer and – as a number of television theorists argue – this gesture restricts the six elements of the classic narration theories (author, implied author, on screen narrator, narratee, implied viewer, and viewer) to two (the first three and the last three) (Kozloff 1992). "Although theoretically there is always a distinction between these roles, the distinction in such cases is nearly indiscernible" – as Kozloff highlights (1992, 62). As Allen puts it: "rather than pretending the viewer isn't there, the rhetorical mode simulates the face-to-face encounter by directly addressing the viewer and, what is more important, acknowledging both the performer's role as addresser and the viewer's role as addressee" (1992b, 89). It is because this action mimics the interpersonal communication, thus overshadows the role of media and mediation. This technique is especially effective in the case of live broadcasts, but advertisements and recorded shows (talk shows for example) tend to use it also, because television can reach the highest level of intimacy in this way.

Narration in *24*

In my opinion *24* can be seen as a paradigmatic show, because it uses and also renews the above mentioned narration techniques, which dominate classic television narration. With its simulated real time format it tries to come near to news, especially to 24-hour news channels like CNN, on which the viewer is kept in the illusion of omniscience. These channels, with the almost exclusive use of live broadcasts supplemented with news feeds, would like to make us feel that we never miss any important event and we learn crucial information in time. As Kozloff argues "'live' broadcasts offer a simulation of traditional oral storytelling, in which the audience hears the tale at the moment that the storyteller speaks it" (1992, 68).

In *24* the split screen (which is a special form of parallel montage borrowed from comics) is partly used to replace the written text of the news feeds, thus to update us on the parallel events. So besides acting as an authentic source of knowledge, the show tries to cancel the discrepancy between the discourse time and the story time, thus mimic the unpredictability of real life. These techniques are very close to that used in the above mentioned *Rescue 911*: the status of the supporting actors is very unstable (usually the viewer cannot predict who will survive, or who will appear

in the following season, because the show frequently eliminates also 'good' people) and there are closed lines of events, which are self-contained (Kozloff 1992).

It means that *24* uses a unique technique to combine serial and series format. At first glance the show is almost clearly serial, but if we have a closer look, two crucial differences can be observed. On the one hand, many parallel storylines can be regarded as the follower of episodic structure. So *24* uses multiple storytelling to heighten suspense, and every storyline is in connection with the others – although these connections are not always clear by the time they are introduced. However, these lines are not closed in a single episode but are stretched for 3-4, their function is similar to the episodes of the series: new members of the audience can catch up easier and understand more than they would in the case of a pure serial-like structure. Evidently this closure can be found at the level of the events, but the concept of a conspiracy is stretched in the background of more seasons. This technique was developed gradually – the first season can be regarded as a serial, its structure (as well as its motivation network) does not radically differ from that of soap operas; but in the following seasons more and more closed lines are used.[3] In the middle of the 7th season, there is even a point at which it would be easy to end all the storylines, the only – referential – sign of continuing for the audience is the knowledge that the show has to reach 24 episodes, thus cannot end after the 13th.

On the other hand, there is a significant difference in the degree of closure of the seasons and that of the episodes. Each season can be regarded as self-contained; usually very few references on the previous events are made – although not all the storylines are finished during seasons they start in. However it is not a unique technique (for example *Dexter* or *Desperate Housewives* are very similar from this aspect), in this case the contrast between the structure of the seasons and the episodes is much more radical, which goes back to the presented diegetic world: the episodes of the seasons are meant to be successive, while there are huge ellipses between the seasons.

In my opinion the introduction of these new techniques has crucial role in the success of the show. Namely, *24* is a so-called water cooler programme that refers to its role as topic of workplace chats.[4] After leaving out a few episodes one cannot participate in the discussion of the show, because s/he does not know anything about the new storyline, and this will motivate him or her to catch up. Besides,

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3   I do not agree with Elisabeth and Hanne Birk, who analyse only the first season of the show, "since the formal characteristics remain largely the same in the later seasons" (2005, 48).

4   Allen argues that speaking about the soaps in the break is nearly as important for the viewer as the watching itself. (Allen 1992b)

for the new viewer who starts watching during the season (or starts viewing not with the first season) it is easier to follow the events than in the case of serials. But with the use of the open end in episodes (borrowed from serials) the show engages the members of the audience. The closure of the seasons has also benefits: in each season the staff can create a brand new storyline without using the rules of the previous seasons, and the audience can observe in each season how the discourse is built up. So this is also a kind of repetition which is – as mentioned before – one of the most important features of television. In short: this special mixture of series and serials format is able to catch viewers' attention no matter when they start watching, and also to maintain the attention of former audiences.

This structure – together with the illusion of live broadcast – is especially important in the fight against time shifting. Nowadays the phenomenon of time shifting has become more and more defining in the TV viewing habits, which means that a notable amount of the audience do not watch programmes at the time indicated by the schedule, but record them to see it in a more convenient time (thus the definition of serialised narration above no longer works, or at least not in the same way). Of course it is not too favourable from the aspect of the advertiser, because it allows viewers to skip the advertisements; what is more, the new DV-recorders do not even record them. The only case in which time shifting is not a choice for the great majority of the audience is live broadcast, most likely because of the so called 'aura' of reality (Csigó 2009). *24* copies the codes of being lifelike to persuade the audience to watch the programme on TV when it is broadcasted, thus making it more attractive in the eyes of advertisers. Moreover, the high suspense is not only favourable for product placement, but also lasts for the breaks.

Besides copying the news channels, authenticity and intimacy are also generated in another way. As mentioned before, the host helps the viewer feel more comfortable in the represented possible world. But, on the other hand, character narration weakens the reality effect, because it refers to the onscreen events from a distance. *24* solves this problem in a very elegant way: the show itself tries to be as real as possible, but in the recaps Jack Bauer navigates the viewer. He says the sentences: 'Previously on *24*…' before the sequence, and 'The following takes place between this and that,' and – if it is said – 'Events occur in real time.' If we add that in the first season he also summarises the plot,[5] it seems obvious that he rules these sequences, he is the one who informs

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5   He says: "Right now terrorists are planning to assassinate the presidential candidate. My wife and daughter have been kidnapped. And people that I work with may be involved in both. I'm federal agent Jack Bauer. Today is going to be the longest day of my life." The future tense he uses is especially strange, and contributes largely to the

the audience what has happened before. And although we cannot establish his connection to the shown pictures in time and space (when, where and to whom he speaks), he never misleads us – like the great majority of hosts and character narrators in television. According to Birk and Birk, Jack's voice-over "serves primarily to privilege Jack's voice. Jack seems to 'host' the show and thus can be seen as a character-focaliser, though not in the literal (perceptual) sense, but on the 'ideological' level" (Birk and Birk 2005, 55). I think – besides highlighting Bauer's main role and promoting Kiefer Sutherland's celebrity – the trust Jack gained with this reliability is crucial in understanding his role in the serial. That is the main cause why we trust him, even when he becomes suspicious from the viewpoint of other characters.

It is evident, however, that he is not a character narrator who tells the episodes. His function only concerns the previous events; the episode itself is presented by another narration level, which – again – tries to eliminate the differences between the time of told, the time of telling and the time of broadcasting. As Birk and Birk put it: "the 'camera' acts largely as an extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrating agency" (2005, 54). This technique is brought to the extreme in *24* with the help of the digital clock's frequent appearance on the screen and with the strict chronological order. This way the show gets as close to the form of live broadcasts as possible for a serialised narrative. On the other hand, the use of the split screen foregrounds the presence of the narrator who guides the viewer between the storylines according to its intention: creating suspense, unfolding parallel events, showing different camera angles, etc.

The use of the host in the recaps and the use of the omniscient narration techniques in the episodes do not generate unreliability as we might think, because of the unfitting of the parts. Yet the show provides audience the feeling of safety (in the sense that we always know who to trust) while maintains a high level of suspense and intimacy. Furthermore, as Kozloff puts it, "the decision to use an actor as a narrating figurehead (either on screen or in voice-over) is always a move toward foregrounding the discourse" (1992, 64). Therefore we can say that the recaps are self-conscious, and do not try to hide their constructed nature from the viewer.

But one can also argue that a certain degree of self-consciousness can be observed in the show itself. Firstly, the 24-hours long, lifelike serial aired in weekly portion is so paradoxical that it points out one of the defining features of

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uncertain position of the character narrator. In spite of this, I am not sure, that we can accept the idea that the whole first season was the flashback of Jack (Birk and Birk 2005). What is more, this idea is obviously wrong in the case of the other seasons.

television, namely that it can broadcast live events as well as taped live events, and the two cases can only be distinguished referentially[6] – in contrast to cinema, where present is the normal tense and past should be constructed if necessary (Allen 1992b; Kozloff 1992). Secondly, as mentioned before, break means an important feature in the case of television (Allen 1992b; Kozloff 1992), and *24* highlights it by including the time of the break in its own story time: the digital clock (which shows the story time) can be seen before as well as after the break. Thus "[a]s the story time in *24* is supposed to continue while the discourse time is zero, the commercial breaks seem to constitute a kind of 'ellipsis' rather than a 'pause'" (Birk and Birk 2005, 51). This technique wakes the audience's curiosity and generates tension with the threat of missing something – although it is hard to mention any event that happened in the meantime (except for the raping of Teri in the first season) (Birk and Birk 2005). This high degree of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity allows us to assume that the lifelikeness is only necessary because of the 'race against time' narrative.

To sum up, I regard *24* as an experimental primetime show that is highly aware of the conventions of storytelling in television, but breaks up with them in order to maximize viewers' attention and convince them to stand by also for the break. It mixes previous distinct categories like self-reflexivity and the illusion of being lifelike, episodic and serialised narration, character narrator and omniscient narrating agency, etc. But the introduction of a characteristic protagonist who significantly differs from the other characters preserves the coherence of the show, while fully incorporating the viewer in the presented possible world, thus depriving him/her of the distance to the show. This fact, together with the rapid changes of relations, has two major consequences: firstly, the viewer cannot have an objective point of view on the show, so s/he cannot note the heterogeneity of the used techniques. Secondly, while the show causes so called 'chips syndrome,' which means it is addictive, at the end of the season it is hard to recall the events of the story – even if we have seen the whole season at once (on DVD, for example). I am not convinced that this kind of narration as a whole has a future (the original show also ended last year, since it did not produce high enough rating), but parts of it, as well as its results, could be important sources for further series and serials.

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6   Furthermore, the production of one season of the show lasted one and a half month.

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