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**Narrative and Ideological Entrapment in 24:
Plotting, Framing, and the Ambivalent Viewer**

Monica Michlin
Université Paris-Sorbonne

Although *24* has recently been hailed for having portrayed a black president in David Palmer and thus paved the way for President Barack Obama,¹ the series is more about *entrapment* than new horizons. In a thrilling use of real time, each season traps us in a claustrophobic time-span of 24 hours, under a ticking bomb scenario, as Special Agent Jack Bauer strives to save the USA from terrorists. Although the series allows Jack, as a “field agent” to escape CTU (the fictitious Counter-Terrorist-Unit) and its Los Angeles headquarters, and allows us, as viewers, to escape into subplots, we are unavoidably brought back to CTU, its open space but screen-saturated main floor (but also its corridors, mainframe computer room and stark interrogation cells), just as we are constantly reminded that all subplots must converge. The recurring split screen, which appears before and after each break for commercials and as each episode (or hour) draws to a close, can be perceived as either a window *out* onto subplots, or as a net *within* which both Jack and the viewers are caught. The prop *par excellence* in *24*—Jack Bauer’s cellular phone—functions ambivalently, constantly linking Jack to his allies but also to his foes. Indeed, in a world governed by conspiracy theory, the *web* of information controlled from Jack’s cell phone, from computer screens at CTU or from the viewer’s TV, turns into a web of plotting we find ourselves caught in as the villains attempt to outwit Jack within the diegesis. As it exposes the threats that lie within the places presumed safest (CTU, the family home, the White House), the screen fills with projections, fantasies and fears, clichés

and unexpected twists, in a *mise-en-abyme* of destabilization. But does its post-9/11 paranoia, its real-time conceit and its technological sophistication make *24* groundbreaking in narrative and ideology alike, or do these features simply combine, from one season to the next, to entrap viewers into formula, and into a relentless propaganda machine, masquerading as a cultural phenomenon?

As Daniel Chamberlain and Scott Ruston document, *24* is one of the rare series to have met with both critical and commercial success from its start, because it was simultaneously “stylistically bold, narratively engaging, culturally relevant”.² Although I will be focusing on Season 1 in the discussion of narrative entrapment, I shall be taking all seven seasons so far into account in the analysis of the ideological aspects of *24*.

24's major stylistic and narrative innovation is announced from the very first seconds of the pilot episode, in the visual fireworks of the digital clock that, as Steven Peacock has put it, *brands* the number 24 into our memory:³



The digital clock then seems to advance towards us, then shatters into pieces, as an insert in LCD-like block letters fades in to fill the screen: “THE FOLLOWING TAKES PLACE BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND ONE A.M. ON THE DAY OF THE CALIFORNIA PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY”. Even as it appears, the insert/display is

read out loud in a voice-over, by an as yet anonymous male voice (which will later be revealed to be Jack Bauer's). As the display fades out, seemingly shattering and receding from us at the same time, a second LCD-display fades in and is similarly read in voice-over—"EVENTS OCCUR IN REAL TIME"—before it too, starts to recede, and to shatter while fading out. This introduction sets up a triple form of entrapment: within Jack Bauer's perspective (although the subplots allow us to go where Jack does not), within a "technologically savvy" viewing contract (with an emphasis on shattering/shattered images and on texts-in-motion), and, of course, within the real time format. Within the first 20 minutes of the pilot episode, the threat to national security that is going to occupy Jack for the next 24 hours is established—an assassination attempt on David Palmer, an African-American Senator running for the Democratic Party presidential nomination. From 07:00 onwards, each episode starts with a voice-over by Jack himself that summarizes Season 1's pitch, and ends on "I'm Agent Jack Bauer. And today is going to be the longest day of my life", before the specific recap for the previous episode unfolds.

The illusion that events take place in real time is almost perfect, as critics have noted,⁴ and we are constantly reminded of the countdown by the reappearance of the ticking digital clock. Because broadcasting on such networks as Fox must factor in breaks for commercials, each "hour" lasts some 42 minutes, and the missing minutes are "timed out" by the digital clock before and after each break; as Steven Peacock has pointed out, "there is a sense of the world of 24 carrying on 'behind the veil' of the commercials".⁵ While often, the events that unfold during the commercial breaks are mundane, and conveniently edited by the enforced ellipsis—four and a half minutes of Jack driving from one location to the next, or of a co-worker like Nina or Tony working to decode an encrypted document—these inbuilt ellipses sometimes serve more essential narrative goals.⁶ To ensure that viewers will be back, heightened suspense precedes each break.⁷ The digital clock always appears at the center of the screen, whether surrounded by other frames or not; it is the only frame whose size never changes, emphasizing the centrality of the ticking clock to the series itself.

To create the illusion of "nonstop action" and of the near-continuity of diegetic time, various characters draw our attention to their not having had time to eat⁸ and

to the exertion of staying awake 24 hours—especially since, in Season 1, the countdown starts at midnight—through quips such as “You know what we should do when this is over?”/“Get some sleep?” (Jack and Teri, 05:29, 6.1), or avowals of exhaustion: “I can hardly wait for this thing to be over. I’m waiting for Jack and Kim to arrive and I’ll just have to collapse in a big heap”. (Teri, 21:25, 22.1). When a new head of CTU comes in at 09:33 (10.1) she emphasizes that collapse is *not* an option (“I know most of you have been up more than 24 hours. Too bad. No one so much as yawns until we have accomplished our objective”), conveniently reminding us of the 24-hour-format. Allusions that the story is coming to an end before the 24 hours are up play on our extradiegetic knowledge that this cannot be, for instance when Nina says to Teri and Kim, at 13:18 (14.1), “It was a terrorist conspiracy and you were in the middle of it. But that’s over now”, or when Teri says to Nina “Nina, I know it’s been a really long day for you and I want you to know how much I appreciate your being upfront with me about everything” at 21:25 (22.1), or when Palmer sighs “It’s been a long day” (20:12, 21.1) as he celebrates his victory in the California primary. The real metadiscursive comment is rather what Jack says to a secondary character as we clock to 11:59 (end of 12.1): “Keep *moving!*”

Moving, however, is often made difficult by the entrapment into space. CTU itself is a maze: an open-office ground floor, saturated with and dominated by screens which arrest the eye and provide only virtual windows out, surrounded by labyrinthine corridors that lead to the restrooms, the mainframe computer rooms, the clinic, interrogation cells, and underground parking lot. The upper floor, from which the director of CTU can observe agents working below, is partly see-through glass, which combines with metal railings and frames and vertical blinds to create an austere, oppressive set. Although Jack periodically returns to CTU to be briefed or debriefed, or to bring in suspects, his status as a “field agent” allows him to follow leads and chase suspects outside CTU headquarters; but these many settings—a hospital (6.1), an electric plant (8.1), a luxury hotel (17.1), a shopping mall (18.1), the LA highways, the forest (20.1)—rapidly turn into sites of re-entrapment. To give but one instance, the forest turns out to conceal an underground, classified detention facility—the most claustrophobic location of the entire season.

Physical entrapment is the main feature of the dominant subplot—Jack’s daughter Kim has been kidnapped—which functions along a deliberate repetition of the cycle *breakout/kidnapping/escape/recapture*. A number of critics, from Tara McPherson to Janet McCabe,⁹ have, often sarcastically, decried the sexist stereotypes behind this definition of Kim as “damsel in distress”, “dumb blonde”, and daddy’s little girl, while simultaneously showing how Kim and Teri’s weaknesses advance the plot, much as (in a perfectly symmetrically opposed fashion), the female characters cast as the male hero’s helpers (in this case, Nina, and, in later seasons, Chloe) allow the plot to progress through their technical expertise and (apparent) compliance with Jack’s commands. Although Kim annoyingly falls into every trap set for her, she constantly voices the need for escape, predictably increasing viewers’ frustration: “We need to escape... we could die if we don’t get out of here” (02:21, 3.1). When she does escape, she finds herself disoriented, in an unknown part of town, caught in a labyrinth of dead-ends, locked doors, and hostile locals. Although recaptured, locked into the trunk of a car, and taken to the villains’ remote compound, she remains optimistic: “people break out of prison all the time” (06:07, 7.1). Meanwhile, her mother Teri, who has managed to escape from a first kidnapping, falls prey to a second. Reunited with Kim on the compound, she states the obvious: “We’re stuck in this awful place” (07:35, 8.1). Although Teri and Kim are rescued by Jack (12.1) and removed to a CTU safe house (15.1), the house is attacked in turn (16.1), and although they flee, they are separated by a car accident (17.1). When at the close of the 21.1, with only two hours to go before the day ends, Teri finally receives a phone call from Kim, the reassuring announcement “I’m going to be there in a few minutes” sounds too good to be true. Indeed, in last seconds of the episode, Kim is recaptured—something inset audience Nina reacts to for us: “I don’t believe this!” (21:16, 22.1). Circularity and repetition are thus paradoxically protected by the characters’ own expressions of disbelief. Re-entrapment is acknowledged as the *norm*, as we realize at the beginning of 23.1, when—like Jack—we are forced into a nightmarish time-loop back to the exact double bind he was in at 7 a.m.¹⁰

The ultimate twist in a world governed by conspiracy theory, is that no one can be trusted... not even oneself. This is not what either we, nor Jack, had imagined,

when his superior first informed him of the death threat on Palmer, and of the probable implication of a dirty CTU agent, fifteen minutes into the show: “what I’m about to say doesn’t leave this room... For the next 24 hours, I want you all over this, *don’t trust anybody, not even your own people*” (00:14, 1.1). Initially, we, like Jack, try to identify the mole; all CTU agents become potential suspects; gazes appear somber and shifty; everyone seems to be spying on everyone.



Numerous close-ups deliberately reveal nothing in a character’s gaze or face, as a reminder that proximity is deceptive. Nothing an agent does is transparent to others: higher rank means higher security clearance and fuller access to information; but lower-rank agents hide what they are working on, by setting up bogus screens, using unmonitored equipment outside the surveillance zones, or communicating through secure lines that cannot be traced. Since CTU is an extremely hierarchical world, ruled by constraining protocols, the chain of command creates additional stress. When Nina says to Tony: “This is a military organization. There’s a chain of command. I tell you what I want and you don’t question it.” (01:21, 2.1), it is only a preview of what is to come: at 03:30 (4.1), lockdown—meaning the sealing off of CTU from the outer world—is decreed by the higher-ups in “Division”,¹¹ when the mole Tony and Nina have identified commits suicide to avoid questioning. Desperate for

time, and aware he is about to be cut off from his leads, Jack assaults an agent to escape before CTU closes down on him – thereby officially becoming a rogue agent.

In a reversal characteristic of *24*, CTU then becomes a locus of danger for Jack's allies, Tony and Nina; the first words Alberta Greene, the new director, utters – “Things have been out of control here today. Starting now, they're back in control...” (09:33, 10.1) – subtitle her reducing Tony and Nina to pawns by placing them in detention, separately, in order to break them, to discover Jack's whereabouts, and to bring him in. When the director tells Tony “I'm just trying to help you see the situation clearly” (11:22, 12.1), the words echo Tony's own advice to Jamey, the mole he had unmasked (“telling us everything you know is the only way out of this” (07:32, 8.1). Tony's change of status from interrogating agent to interrogated suspect creates a sickening sensation of *déjà vu*, and increases our feeling that there is no *way out* at all.

Storytelling in *24* relies on the thickening and multiplying of plots: as Chamberlain and Ruston note, while “circumscribed by its own closure”, the series constantly has to open up new narrative storylines:

Complicating this promised closure is the emphasis on narrative openness that propels the story within and across consecutive episodes. In any given season of *24*, the programme is constantly inscribed by the tension between the openness of the two or three driving storylines for the entire season, the two or three ongoing minor storylines which get resolved and replaced every few episodes, the hour-by-hour cliffhangers timed so that multiple events coincide, and the closure promised by the day/season. This opposition of openness and promised closure (how many arcs can be opened when they must be closed by the end of the season?) creates a tension through structure, just as narrative creates a tension through plotting.¹²

One must stress the double, reflexive, meaning of the term “plot” as in *conspiracy* and as in *story*. Each initial plot has a hidden “underbelly”: a second threat, not to David Palmer's life, but to his career, is revealed (his son Keith was involved in a homicide seven years earlier). Although Palmer wants to make a clean breast of things, his

Chief of Staff says he has seen “far worse stories kept under wraps”. When Sherry agrees—“Don’t you think it’s smarter to let things lie?”, David Palmer proves defiant: “I think it’s smarter to know everybody’s motives” (08:31, 9.1). He quickly realizes that his financial backers are ready to go to any length to prevent him from telling the truth to the American public, something both his Chief of Staff (“I think you’re being paranoid” [11:10, 12.1]) and his wife Sherry (“You know your problem, David? You think everyone’s conspiring against you, when in fact we’re just trying to help” [22:19, 23.1]) claim to be his imagination running wild. Increasingly, the very mention of the word “trust” carries the seeds of betrayal or of some other irony. Palmer’s question to Sherry—“are you sure that *you’re* not the one who’s feeding me stories?” (05:15, 6.1) highlights the form of entrapment spun by the *villainesses* within the story: manipulation through storytelling.¹³

Narrative entrapment for the viewer functions as a generalized *mise-en-abyme* of doubt, and of suspicion as to who is manipulating whom. When Mike Novick says: “I’m White House Chief of Staff. I shouldn’t be kept out of anything” (05:25, 6.1), he expresses the ambiguities of his position and ours: believing we are *in the loop* sets us up for a number of twists. The feeling of being trapped in plots within plots is produced by the very structure of the narrative: the cliffhanger at 03:59 (4.1) amazingly reveals that the subplot involving Kim is not so much a *subplot* as half of the plot to kill Palmer, that the political and the domestic are closely intertwined, in an enactment, as one character will put it in Season 7, that “You can’t be paranoid enough”.¹⁴ The hallmark split screen that allows us to follow several storylines simultaneously must thus not be seen as “split”, but rather as a *web* of images, *connected* rather than *separated* by the “lines” that crisscross the TV screen. What might have appeared as centrifugal—windows opening onto another story—turns centripetal, and brings us back to Jack.¹⁵



As Steven Peacock points out in his article “24: Status and Style”, the split-screen technique “does more than contribute to the *rush* of the story: it *is* the story”.¹⁶ Because it allows the series to “connect different spaces, places, and characters in the same frame, at the same time”, it not only allows 24 to play on the sense of the “scenarios’ simultaneity”, but on the “assumed liveness” of broadcast on television – as if “all these events [were] [...] happening *now*”.¹⁷ Michael Allen, in “Divided Interests: Split-Screen Aesthetics in 24” also insists on the features used by 24 that “could be seen as mimicking the televisual format closest to its own subject matter: twenty-four hour rolling news reportage”.¹⁸

We are, in effect, being taught how to read a screen all over again. While the multiple screen is a reflection of TV network control rooms, as other critics have pointed out, Allen also perceptively connects it to other traditions of multiple-frame reading, from the medieval polyptych to comic books. One remarkable feature is that the split screen is often split not into two or four images, but into as many as five or six. Sometimes, one of the frames is dark, suggesting a metafilmic image for our being “kept in the dark”; sometimes, two of the frames display the same scene, but with a difference of scale, as a means to draw attention to a particularly dramatic development.



This technique seems to reflexively comment on the need for distance and perspective; and reminds us that we “zoom” in and out of this or that subplot as the narrative unfolds, the zoom being, within the general architecture of the series, a “narrative” close-up. The multiple frames, visible even as we watch, also draw our attention to framing and “setting up” in the other, conspiracy-related meaning of the term. Indeed, as Michael Allen points out, the use of the multiple-screen as the series shows the digital clock after a break to commercial is often misleading:

through this strategy, the programme is perhaps consciously unsettling us, by repeatedly confounding our anticipation of which narrative will be picked up and developed at any one point. This is especially true when none of the panels involved in an advert-break-return display proves to be the one that initiates the next section of single-image narrative.¹⁹

Allen also invites us to scrutinize not just the images in the split screen, but the space between the various frames shown, pointing to the significance of the size of this gap—which, drawing on Scott McCloud’s analyses of comic strips, Allen calls the “gutter”—as also being significant, and as indicating either spatial or emotional distance, as well as other symbolic meanings that the “dividing” space can encode.



Within the series' own narrative context, I would argue that this is once again an encoded image of ellipsis, and of missing pieces within the "mosaic" or "puzzle" the split-screen creates. Likewise, the choice of the horizontally split screen, rather than the more widespread vertically split one seems to point to a "layering" of stories and truths as we advance in the depths of *24*. The alternating horizontal or vertical frames point to destabilization and disorientation, while highlighting that we are literally being taught to "see" or "watch" images as perhaps never before on television.

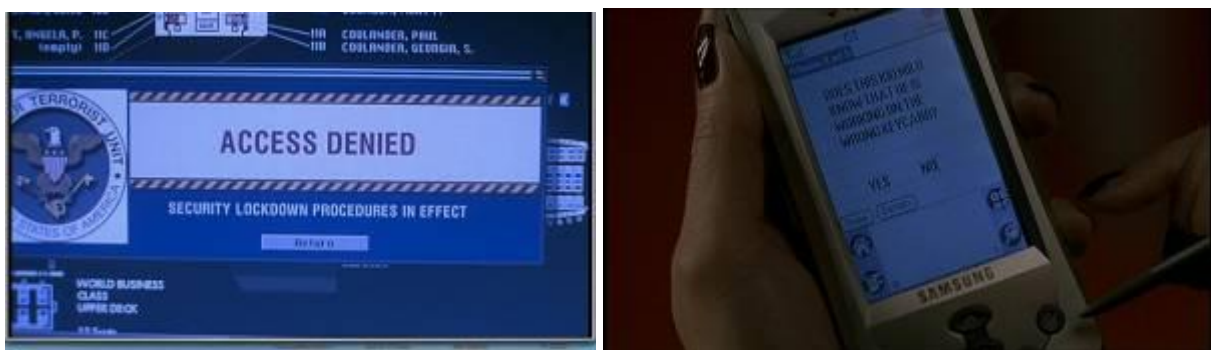


Indeed, if *24* "encourages the viewer, moment to moment, to pay close attention to all details on display, placed across the split-screens"²⁰ as Peacock points out, it is to turn on its head the claim that "television as a medium [...] requires only a

'glance' in contrast to the gaze necessitated by cinema".²¹ Deborah Jermyn, like Peacock, analyzes the way the series forces a "*heightened* attention span":

It has been argued that the multiple-image screen, familiar to us too now from computer screens, digital television, websites and video games, speaks of our inability to maintain a focused gaze or lengthy attention span in the multimedia age. Indeed, these technologies have been conceptualized as belonging to a wider "glimpse-culture" [...] In *24*, the split-screen does quite the reverse. Instead, it invites the viewers to embrace the act of editing for themselves.²²

This is, of course, organically connected to the series' systematic exploration—both diegetic and narrative—of surveillance and monitoring. As Michael Allen puts it, "the split-screen aesthetic of *24* can be seen to simply be echoing the media-rich, technological world of the show itself, in which everyone is making use of multiple window imaging systems to keep track of everyone else".²³ The series is indeed characterized by the uninterrupted and highly reflexive staging of cellular phones, computer screens, PDAs and other high-tech equipment that allow communications, monitoring and surveillance at a remove.



The narrative can only move forward and cohere thanks to the numerous phone calls between Jack and Teri, Jack and his colleagues at CTU, and the uploading or downloading of information, including satellite pictures, security recordings, and other digital info. For instance, at 01:18 (2.1), Nina sends the entry code and blueprint of a building to Jack's cell phone: when Jack confirms "I'm in", a new maze, both literal and figurative—a new development of the story—opens up,

thanks to the cellular link. The phone ring at CTU²⁴ may have become a trademark of the series itself, but the cell phone, like the computer screen, function as icons of our “listening in” as viewers/voyeurs, just as the computer screen functions as a reflection of our own “scanning for information” and “surveillance” of what unfolds before our eyes. The lingo of the field operative—“patch her through” (09:07, 10.1), “pull up the visuals”, “get a backtrace”, “the satellite link’s up”, “copy that” — immerses us in the (fantasy) world of CTU, while reminding us that information is as necessary as gun power in this contemporary spin on the western and spy genres, revolving around the rugged male hero.²⁵

The information highway, however, works both ways. The very technology that allows Jack and his allies at CTU to track enemies is often reversed to outmaneuver them: computers have backdoors, and the servers at CTU are threatened with sabotage or viruses that destroy the database before an agent’s very eyes. Nina voices the need to control physical environments as much as possible—“We’re just not as contained as we’d like to be” (13:39, 14.1) and to control all the information passing through CTU—“Monitor everything and send it to me” (Nina to Tony, 22:27, 23.1). Sometimes, to monitor means, literally, to control: as Jack waits in a public hospital waiting room, the villain who holds Kim hostage phones him to tell him he is tracking his every move through the hospital security network: “That’s right, I’m watching you”. (05:30, 6.1). As he speaks, we see through his eyes, on his monitor, the split-screen images of Jack in grainy grey-blue.



The difference in color in this split-screen image “translates” the ethical difference in surveillance, as carried out by the villain or the hero. The villain does not merely watch Jack, but takes over the role of “acting director” – one of the official ranks at CTU, that relevantly puns on “acting” and “directing” as I will later develop – forcing Jack to get rid of his cell phone to break all communication with CTU, and to wear an earpiece to obey him instead.

But to think that monitoring can always be equated with control is another trap, as episode 17.1 illustrates: when Jack asks Elizabeth, an aide to Palmer, to keep her date with a paid assassin so as to ensnare him, it seems she does not have the stomach for the role and will give herself away. On Jack’s signal “we are a go” – the field op’s equivalent of the director’s “action” – the exact opposite happens: in a *coup de theatre*, she suddenly deviates from the script established with Jack and ... kills the villain, and the main *lead* in the investigation so far. The ensuing dialogue between Jack and Mason highlights the shock effect in typical CTU understatement:

Jack: “We misjudged her emotional state”

Mason “WE didn’t, YOU did”

Jack: “It was an unexpected outcome for everyone” (16:39).

The “unexpected outcome” is, indeed, the series’ objective, and few viewers can claim to have predicted the end of Season 1. In hindsight, there *are* clues. At the beginning of the episode 10.1, Jamey is wheeled away unconscious from the interrogation room at CTU. As the image of her is doubled in split screen and in close-up, we assume that this emphasis is purely dramatic: if she dies, the only lead to the investigation dies. Only at the very end of the season do we understand that this “stuttering” split screen emphasized a “missing” window, and that the screen was literally “screening” or hiding information that had been doctored: at 23:33 (24.1), Jack discovers the real surveillance tapes behind the cover-up, which show not Jamey slitting her own wrists, but another agent executing her and staging the “suicide”. The entire season hinges on this revelation: only at the close of 23.1 do we find that there is a “Yelena” collaborating with the enemy – and as the camera moves back from an extreme close-up that did not allow identification, we discover... Nina.

The very technique emphasizes the narrative paradox: we were so close to Nina that we could not see her for what she was. Indeed, although originally suspected by Jack, Nina has long been *cleared* by her behavior as the most faithful of allies. The additional knowledge that she and Jack had an affair has also prompted us to believe that she is protecting him out of lingering feelings of love. The few moments that draw our attention to her being an accomplished liar (in the first hour), or to her withholding information, are always contextualized in such a way that we clear Nina ourselves.²⁶ To see Nina playing an entirely different part—killing in cold blood and methodically planning her escape at the 23rd hour—retrospectively makes us aware that; although we have been watching our TV screen relentlessly, much has been taking place outside the frame, under our radar.

This brings us to how the series plays on the act of viewing as being a *mise-en-abyme* of surveillance. The menu screen on the DVDs shows a “grid”; as we choose our language setup, the commands “cracking outer shell”, or “refining search zone” appear, as if we ourselves were CTU agents zooming in on a suspect.



At the beginning of 3.1, the images of a satellite repositioning itself around our planet remind us that we too are caught on satellite (Echelon or Carnivore) wherever we are. During the set-up of the 09:00 episode, one of the villains’ lines “That’s right, we’re watching you” can be heard, suddenly applying to us as viewers too. In episode 17, when Jack explains: “Fiber optic cameras are tiny cameras. They’re almost impossible to see, even if you know where to look” (16:20), we are reminded

that someone may be capturing us on such cameras too. The reflexive puns on *agents* as *actors* (both words stem from the same root) or as Jack as “director” of operations are often worked into the script, as we have seen; and the dialogue frequently points to the fact that we are watching a show: “How do you want to play this?” Jack asks Mason (04:13, 5.1). In 18.1, an agent who has a grudge against Jack harasses him during a surveillance operation and makes the metafilmic comment “It’s your show... I’d hate one of the good guys go down by mistake”. These puns are constant in the Palmer subplot too. When Palmer wants to go public with the scandal that might destroy his career, his Chief of Staff immediately objects: “Even if you’re right, this is the absolute wrong way to play it” (11:30, 12.1). Sherry is more scathing still:

Do you really think people want a President who acts like some guest on a bad afternoon talk show, confessing his sins publicly? [...] You need to make an impression, not phone calls. [...] I hope that all this weakness you’ve shown today is because you missed a night’s sleep and you’ll be back on your game tomorrow. Otherwise we will be buried before this election even *happens*. (22.1)

Sherry’s allusion to the 24-hour span is part of a number of metafilmic allusions characters make to the format – allusions that sometimes border on metalepsis. Some refer to the show as entertainment, for instance, when Jack’s superior, Mason, playfully quips “You’re having quite a night here, aren’t you, Jack?” (00:46, 1.1), or “I gotta tell you Jack, it never gets dull with you” (18:14, 19.1). Others point to our being caught, much like the characters, within something much bigger than us, for instance, when Palmer warns a blackmailer “The D.A.’s waiting for me to tell a story. It’s *over*”, and the latter replies “And I think it’s just getting *started*... the whole thing is one big machine” (12:39, 13.1). This metafilmic image recurs from season to season: in Season 7, a character warns: “it’s not over. I’m just a small cog in a large machine” (7.7).

As viewers, however, our stepping into the world of *24* remains a choice, and one which entraps us within a world which is ambiguous at best, and fascistic at worst.²⁷ This was not true in Season 1 (the only one to have been scripted before 9/11) which was groundbreaking in portraying a Democratic African-American

presidential candidate, whom, we understand, has high chances of winning the election (he goes on to be President in Season 2).²⁸ In Season 7, screenwriters on *24* belatedly jumped onto the *Commander-in-Chief* (2005) and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009) bandwagon, to portray a woman president who is as far removed from the glamour of Geena Davis in *Commander-in-Chief* as possible, in what was no longer quite so bold a move. The fact that there is an attempt on David Palmer's life as the cliffhanger to Season 2, and that he dies assassinated in a later season still, can be read in conflicting ideological ways – either as realistic,²⁹ given recent US History, or as conservative. The same ambiguities and the same entrapment through the manipulation of viewer expectations characterize the finale of Season 1 of *24* where Jack's family is concerned.

Indeed, throughout the 24 hours, the emphasis on family reunion has set us up for the compulsory happy ending: Teri (despite having been raped) promises Kim “We’re going to be a family again. You and me and Dad are going to have our lives back” (8:28, 9.1), and Jack reinforces this expectation: “I love you more anything in the whole world and I promise that I’m going to get you both out of there”; “We’re a family. We’re going to get through this like a family? OK?” (09:19, 10.1). While we might read a warning in the cut to Nina and Tony's grim faces as they listen in on this conversation, and in one villain's sarcastic rejoinder – “This whole rescue act, do you really think it's going to make up for how you screwed up your marriage, Jack?” (11:10) – by 11:18 (12.1), all three are indeed reunited and hugging and Teri exclaims “it feels good, doesn't it? Not being afraid any more” (14:23, 15.1). Although separation and tribulations then intervene, we continue to expect a happy end albeit postponed to the final ten minutes of the day. But in the very last minutes, Nina shoots Teri dead. In a dramatic irony, Jack (who knows nothing of this) shows up in time to prevent Nina's getaway and lets Mason persuade him not to kill her, lured by the promise of the happy end (“Come and be with your family”) that has just become impossible. The irony is reinforced by Jack's embracing Kim with the words “It's all over, baby. No one's going to hurt you”, before he realizes Teri is missing, and races down the dark underground corridors of CTU, calling out her name like a modern-day Orpheus. When he finds her body and holds her, wailing in grief, the screen

splits to display, on the right-hand side, the single flashback of the series, in black and white, as we return to the very first hour, and the exchange between Jack and Teri just before he was called in to CTU. We are then reminded of one character's expression of remorse at 6.1, "I'd do anything to turn back the clock" (Rick, 05:18), and, as Jack whispers "I'm so sorry", the recap we have repeatedly heard on these 24 hours being the "longest day of [his] life" takes on another meaning, that of the final goodbye and a long day's journey into night. The digital clock returns against a darkened screen, but, in an exception to the rule, *silently* clocks out the remaining seconds as the series ends on this obvious note of mourning.³⁰



This finale, if it functions as a perfect form of narrative entrapment, is ideologically ambiguous, and reflects the hybrid nature of the series, which combines many genres, as critics have stressed. In Janet McCabe's view, Season 1 is built around Jack as "heterosexual über-male and narrative power-center"³¹, making Teri dispensable as the clueless reader of a narrative she does not understand:

Teri's downfall stems from her inability to understand protocol, acquire relevant information, read the narrative clues, impose meaning without male assistance—and [from] wandering into a narrative terrain unaided by Bauer.³²

Joke Hermes underlines that the hero's family being killed is a starting point in a number of westerns, and that the ending of Season 1 thus sets the stage for

subsequent seasons,³³ but stresses that while Jack is typecast as an “urban cowboy”, he is also characterized as “caring father” and suggests that the series be read as a soap opera: “As soap, 24 suggests that Jack Bauer be understood in terms of male mothering”.³⁴ The anxieties associated, for the producers and for male viewers, with the soap opera as a feminine genre can, of course, prompt us to reread, as Tara McPherson invites us to in “Techno-Soap: 24, Masculinity and Hybrid Form”, the use of technology and real-time as a way of downplaying 24’s “feminine” characteristics:

In fact, we might read the series’ aggressive production techniques – including its split-screen showiness and its conceit of running in real-time – as attempts to distance the show from its debased and feminised narrative form. Thus, its trope of liveness and its technological fetishism come together to function as a prophylaxis against the debased form of the soap while also shoring television up against the incursions of new digital forms like the Internet into domestic spaces that were once the near-exclusive domain of television.³⁵

The true ideological core of the series might paradoxically be its expression of “masculine melodramas”:

Finally, we can read this multifaceted ambivalence as a manifestation of (and perhaps a latent critique of) a broad cultural and individual sense of having lost control: of information, of time, of technology, of gender boundaries, of the comforts of genre, of our work lives, of our government. While the series does not articulate a progressive agenda, we might see beneath its high-tech surfaces and multiplying screens, the contours of a desire to challenge the relentless pace of life and create new circuits of meaning for masculinity that can navigate the demands of both home and family.³⁶

While this is a particularly original reading of the series, it can only function *under the radar* – male viewers, unless they are watching the series satirically, probably do not consciously perceive it. All viewers, however, are alert to the two dangers that obviously threaten the series after Season 1: formulaic repetition, and ideological entrapment within a pro-surveillance and pro-torture propaganda machine.

On the first issue, the series seems to have escaped entrapment within repetition quite imaginatively, since new threats are constantly imagined – a nuclear bomb, a deadly virus, a hacker attack on essential computer systems – and new romantic interests can be found for Jack, while Kim remains a prominent secondary character (reinforcing readings of the series as *soap*). The clever solution to prevent viewers from the *blasé* feeling they have been there, seen that, is to deliberately *use* the repetition of motifs (Jack's new girlfriend will be kidnapped, just as Teri had been for instance), to create a shared impression of *déjà vu* they thus share with the hero; rather than boredom, then, repetition taps into trauma, and triggers paranoid expectations, thus feeding into the core of the series itself. The other antidote to prevent a dulling of attention is the crescendo use of violence: in subsequent seasons, things that were taboo in Season 1 happen before our very eyes: CTU itself is bombed and near-destroyed; Jack executes a superior in cold blood on a terrorist's orders; major characters die in each season, including those whom Jack has saved again and again; a nuclear bomb *does* explode in L.A.... The narrative and the ideological message is that any sense of security is false: one is never safe, including the viewer.

The series' staging of a perpetual state of emergency, and its depiction of torture as necessary to thwart terrorist attacks, have become central to any discussion of it. Although Season 1 is pre-*War on Terror*, allusions to interrogation methods incompatible with the Constitution are brought up. When Jack reminds a woman he holds hostage that he is dangerous: "I have killed two men since midnight. I have not slept in 24 hours. So maybe, maybe, you should be more afraid of me than you are right now" (9.1), this is no bluff. In 11.1, he interrogates a villain who asks "and if I say no?". Answer: "We'll find out how good you really are at withstanding some pain". Because characters we identify with are dying like flies throughout the season, we are conditioned into seeing Jack's violence as legitimate. The ambiguity of "justified" killing is however not brushed under the carpet: when Jack confronts Nina in the closing minutes of the season and cries "I *trusted* you [...] How many people that trusted you lost their life [sic] today because you were doing your job?

Walsh. Jamey. Ellis. How many others?", Nina aptly retorts: "How many died because of *you*, Jack? (23:37, 24.1).

From this vantage point, the next seasons of *24* are much harder to stomach. Season 2 actually opens on a horrific torture scene, which is carried out for the US government and "justified" by the information thus obtained: "There is a nuclear device, under terrorist control, on US soil". Jack's first action on being called in for duty is to shoot a witness in cold blood; when the director of CTU protests in horror, Jack calls him a hypocrite: "People like you, George, you want results but you don't want to get your hands dirty" (08:45, 9.1). Douglas L. Howard's essay "You're Going to Tell Me Everything You Know: Torture and Morality in Fox's *24*" enumerates all of the forms of torture used in the first five seasons, and points to the fact that interpretations of this repeated motif vary, but that even Executive Producer Howard Gordon acknowledges that the show taps into the public's "fear-based wish-fulfillment" for having such protectors as Jack.³⁷ Those who defend such principles as *habeas corpus* or civil liberties are portrayed as bleeding hearts, hypocrites, traitors, or any combination thereof—or, like President Palmer in Season 2, and the female FBI agent in Season 7, come to be converted to Jack's methods, even when, in principle, they absolutely condemn them (as one imagines all viewers do).

It, therefore, comes as no surprise that in numerous articles, from Christian Salmon's "La Jurisprudence Jack Bauer", to Anne Caldwell and Samuel A. Chambers' "24 after 9/11: The American State of Exception", or Torin Monahan's "Just-In-Time Security: Permanent Exceptions and Neoliberal Orders", much of the discussion is brought to bear on this issue. Almost all refer to Giorgio Agamben's critique of the "state of exception", and to Slavoj Žižek's contention that the normalization of torture is inherent to *24*, precisely because real-time creates a perpetual state of emergency justifying "dirty methods".³⁸ There is, of course, no "neutral" viewer of *24*: the issue hinges on viewer reception. Salmon's article "La Jurisprudence Jack Bauer" informs us that Jack's actions in *24* were cited by US Supreme Court Justice Anthony Scalia as a justification for the Bush administration's policies, in a delirious reversal of fiction and reality. But this tells us more about Justice Scalia's "respect" for the very Constitution that he is supposed to be the

guardian of, than it does about the impact of *24* on viewers in general. Given Fox Network's close connection to the Bush administration,³⁹ it is no surprise that the series stepped up its defense of torture as the Abu Ghraib scandal erupted, which raises the question of the series as a mere propaganda machine (and a vehicle for Fox's self-promotion).⁴⁰ This, in turn, raises another: does each individual viewer, in watching this series, condone torture? Is fiction "prescriptive",⁴¹ as Salmon puts it?

Although there is no doubt that *24* is often a mouthpiece for reactionary and even fascist policies, and *can* be read as the right-wing macho underbelly of the obviously highbrow and left-leaning series *West Wing*, surely anyone who invokes the series as an *excuse* to torture displays as much bad faith as anyone claiming to have killed because they had seen a vigilante film. One might conversely argue that *24*'s excesses force viewers to stop and think, even if the screenwriters did not intend this *Yes Men*-like effect. Can a CTU agent diligently resume work at her desk, after having been wrongfully suspected and tortured by her co-workers in Season 5? Are the screenwriters brainwashing us, or (involuntarily?) provoking us into resistance through self-parodic excess? The French daily *Libération* treats Jack's adventures as comedy in its review of Season 7, dated September 10, 2009, "Jack reprend du service"⁴² (a pun on Jack serving at the President's pleasure yet again, and on the season being all about torture yet again); and compares watching the Season with being hooked on Nutella (a hazelnut spread most of us ate in childhood), in an obvious allusion to the regressive pleasure associated with the series, but also, as a way of underlining that it is the adult equivalent of children's play.

In defense of *24*, even as it turns its focus to Islamic terrorists in Season 2, it subverts a number of stereotypes in its choice of villains, playing on viewers' tendency to "racial profiling" to entrap them. Similarly, despite its heavy-handed portrayal of terrorists as Jihadists or as Eastern European enemies of the USA, *24* often raises the question of the manipulation of terror and of the threat of terror, by those who would benefit from the US's going to war. Conspiracies in the White House are often the work of rich white men⁴³... some of whom turn out to be extremely close to Jack himself, in an Oedipal form of entrapment that one might expect, given the series' emphasis on country and family.⁴⁴ This explains why some

of the critics who have studied *24* do not condemn the series as univocally: Howard concludes that if the series forces us to debate these issues and confront the darker reality surrounding us, “it is a guilty pleasure worth the time”;⁴⁵ Caldwell and Chambers argue that, in staging the “state of exception”, “*24* expands the democratic imagination” by forcing us to question the state of things both within and outside the fictional frame. Simply judging from the number of interviews—including one of Bill Clinton—posted on the internet concerning Jack Bauer and torture, that much is true.⁴⁶

To conclude, while it necessarily bears some relation to other series—like *West Wing*, it takes us into the wings of the White House; like *Sleeper Cell* it plays on the fear of terrorists on American soil; like *Damages*, it keeps us guessing at who is manipulating whom—*24* creates a paranoid narrative world of its own, that seven seasons on, has managed to survive being killed by its own formula, by defining itself as constantly breaking the rules, from a narrative and an ideological point of view alike. The staging of Jack’s respect/disrespect for authority, of the use/abuse of power at the White House, creates a ticking-clock universe where plotting takes on its double meaning of conspiracy and storytelling. The adrenalin rush creates entrapment for the viewers; hooked on the 24-hour format, on the storytelling itself, they stay riveted by the (split)-screen, even in ambivalence. For ambivalence is what the series portrays and brings out, even in its casting of the “not-conventionally handsome”⁴⁷ Kiefer Sutherland, whose physique long typecast him in villainous roles that ghost his performance in *24* for some of us.⁴⁸ Perhaps the series’ split-screens, in which small frames within bigger frames feature people framing others, also reflect being split by ambivalence; this applies to Jack as the self-loathing hero/antihero, but also, to the more ambivalent viewer. The main danger the series runs, then, seems to me, like the technology it exhibitionistically displays, or like Jack himself, is that it get old. The day the majority of viewers find the series to be less slick than cheesy, it will have terminated itself—and to illustrate the point, I will end on this clock-out, with the hope that reading this has not been the longest half-hour of your life: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLIRgpZ3oqc&feature=related>

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NOTES

¹ See Emilio Pacull's documentary *Mr. President* (2008) for a synthesis of representations of presidents on screen, and particularly in TV series, in the lead-up to the November 2008 election.

² See Chamberlain and Ruston, p. 12. For a list of 24's more recent ratings and awards, updates can be found on Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/24_\(TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/24_(TV_series))

³ See Peacock, "It's About Time", p. 1-4, for an excellent close reading of the "opening" of Season 1. And, to see the "pyrotechnic" digital clock, in its dazzling first appearance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcvU2QQQY84>

⁴ See Chamberlain and Ruston, p. 17; Furby, p. 63.

⁵ Peacock, "24: Status and Style", p. 29.

⁶ To the author's very perceptive analysis of how in 9.1, Jack's wife Teri is raped during a commercial break one might add obvious ideological reasons for this ellipsis: it would weaken Jack as a hero for us to witness the scene. It is to be noted, though, that Teri's heroic self-sacrifice – she offers herself up to protect her daughter Kim – cannot suffice and is compounded by the discovery, a few hours later, that she was already pregnant by Jack! The ideological dilemma then becomes acute. Which of two conservative and inherently sexist discourses – 1) Teri must live to carry Jack's child, 2) she must die because it would irreparably stain the male hero to resume a relationship with his raped spouse and for his child to have been "sullied" by the rape – is to prevail? In male-hero narratives, the solution is generally that the woman die in the hero's chaste embrace, and that he feel redeemed (or

not) (see Tony Scott's adaptation of Jim Harrison's *Revenge* [1990], for an emblematic example).

⁷ Viewers who watch the show as it is broadcast "live" experience entrapment in the form of suspense; those who watch it on DVD can actually experience 24 "as Jack would", in claustrophobic immersion in real time (just under 17 hours of consecutive running time).

⁸⁸ Realistic details include Jack or Kim, who have not eaten since their dinner the night before, eating ravenously – Jack when waiting for debriefing at CTU (14.1), or Kim at the safe-house, commenting "it feels like I haven't eaten in years" (15.1).

⁹ See Hermes, p. 169, McPherson, note 4, p. 189, and McCabe, p. 149-152.

¹⁰ Either shoot Palmer if he wants to see Kim again, or sacrifice Kim.

¹¹ Although "Division" merely refers to the division of CTU higher up in the chain of command, the term subtly reflects the series' central visual ploy of the split screen, and symbolically echoes both the tensions between characters, and the allegorical split portrait we are given of Jack as hero and anti-hero simultaneously.

¹² Chamberlain and Ruston, p. 20-21.

¹³ Similarly, in the Teri-and-Kim subplot, when Teri is lost in amnesia after a car accident (episode 17.1), and a psychiatrist claiming to be a friend comes to her rescue, we are as unable as she is to determine if we should trust him. When Mason tells Nina that his superiors have just turned down the deal that might save Jack, we doubt he ever made the phone call, since we do not see him place it. When he cynically concludes "end of story", Nina speaks for us when she incredulously counters "that's it, we all go back to work and let Jack die?" (21:09, 22.1).

¹⁴ Season 7, episode 6.

¹⁵ Other techniques such as the developing of parallels or symmetrical *motifs* (Palmer's son Keith as pouty teenager, at the end of the 13th hour, comes across as a male version of Kim; women in both families have been raped) or visual effects – at 11:10, the seamless segue from the limousine driving Palmer, to the one Jack is driving, highlight this "merging" of subplots.

¹⁶ Peacock, "24: Status and Style", p. 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26-27.

¹⁸ Allen, p. 36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44. One should, however, also take into account Tara McPherson's more pragmatic reading, that these multiple-screen effects are "added in post-production, like a special effect", p. 178.

²⁰ Peacock, "24: Status and Style", p. 31.

²¹ Jermyn, p. 51.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Allen, p. 31.

²⁴ To hear the phone ring: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryIqLgAoAPE>

²⁵ One staple of the James Bond film, the car chase, is more often than not replaced by the tactical evasion of roadblocks, once again drawing our attention to entrapment being the major risk Jack runs – for instance, when Nina guides him through traffic from her computer screen and warns: "we're going to hit gridlock in about 2 miles" (09:29, 10.1).

²⁶ When Mason perceptively states: "It seems to me that Nina Myers is a big part of the problem. She covers for everyone that doesn't follow code. And anyone that doesn't follow code covers for her", we suspect *him*, while agreeing with Teri:

Teri: - Nina... I want you to know that I have nothing but respect for you... And I think all three of us owe you our lives.

Nina: - That's a bit of an overstatement, but...

Teri: - Actually, no, it's kind of an understatement. (22:38, 23.1)

²⁷ Žižek is unambiguous: the January 10, 2006 column he wrote for *The Guardian* is entitled "The Depraved Heroes of 24 Are the Himmlers of Hollywood". It may be read at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/jan/10/usnews.comment>

²⁸ When Barack Obama was elected last November (2008), the press gave considerable coverage to the way the American collective subconscious had been prepared for this change through representations of black presidents on screen, and Dennis Haysbert as David Palmer was invariably quoted alongside Morgan Freeman in Mimi Leder's *Deep Impact* (1998). There is no doubt that Obama's chief strategists noted the series' casting of Palmer as statesmanlike senator, but also as a black candidate "beyond race". On one hand, race is central: when David Palmer visits an elementary school at the end of episode 10.1, a little black boy tells him "my daddy says there will never be a black president" and Palmer answers "tell your daddy I understand where he's coming from, but I'm going to prove him wrong". The historic aspect of the primary is stressed by Sherry as she scolds her son: "When will you get it through your head that your father is running for President of the United States! A black man!" (18:11, 19.1). But on the other hand, within the storyline, race has nothing to do with the plot: as Palmer himself muses: "What I can't get over is this has nothing to do with my running for president, with this primary, or with my being black" (14:27, 15.1).

²⁹ The storywriters deliberately set up the parallel with the Kennedys' tragic deaths as a form of viewer entrapment: first, we are reminded by Sherry that Palmer that is "the Democratic Party's presidential candidate" (17:08, 18.1); then, when Palmer walks through the hotel kitchen to his press conference on the night of his victory (18:25, 19.1), this instantly calls up memories of Bobby Kennedy's death on the night of the 1968 California primary; and finally, when we are told, in the aftermath of his victory, that Palmer is to fly to Dallas the next day, we can only think of the assassination of JFK. When he steps out onto the balcony as he celebrates his victory, viewers fear he might die shot there, like Martin Luther King on the balcony of his Memphis hotel in 1968.

³⁰ Although there is an alternate (happy) ending on DVD, it is so obviously weak in comparison that test audiences certainly voted for the dark one.

³¹ McCabe, p. 154.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³³ Hermes, p. 167.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

³⁵ McPherson, p. 175.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³⁷ Howard, p. 143.

³⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/jan/10/usnews.comment>

³⁹ Robert Greenwald's excellent documentary *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism* (2004) amply demonstrates this.

⁴⁰ For instance, when Palmer's Chief of Staff comments: "Fox News just did an instant poll. 83% approve the way you handled the situation" (21.1).

⁴¹ "La question est bien là dans le caractère prescriptif des fictions hollywoodiennes et de leur fonction de légitimation d'actes anticonstitutionnels ou tout simplement immoraux. L'invention d'un modèle de société dans lequel les agents fédéraux, réels ou fictifs, doivent disposer d'une autonomie d'action suffisante pour protéger efficacement la population n'est rien d'autre que l'instauration d'un état d'exception permanent qui, ne trouvant plus sa légitimité dans le droit et la Constitution, la cherche et la trouve dans la fiction.

S'il en fallait une preuve, Antonin Scalia, juge à la Cour suprême des États-Unis et donc chargé du respect de la Constitution, l'a apportée en juin 2007, lors d'un colloque de juristes

à Ottawa : il a alors justifié l'usage de la torture en se fondant non pas sur l'analyse de textes juridiques, mais sur l'exemple de... Jack Bauer ! Évoquant la deuxième saison de la série, au cours de laquelle on voit le héros sauver la Californie d'une attaque nucléaire grâce à des informations obtenues au cours d'interrogatoires musclés, il n'a pas craint d'affirmer : 'Jack Bauer a sauvé Los Angeles, il a sauvé des centaines de milliers de vies. Allez-vous condamner Jack Bauer ? Dire que le droit pénal est contre lui ? Est-ce qu'un jury va condamner Jack Bauer ? Je ne le pense pas. Ainsi la question est vraiment de savoir si nous croyons en ces absolus. Et nous devons y croire'. Qu'un juge éminent de la Cour suprême, l'institution qui est en principe le garant de la constitutionnalité des lois et des actes de l'exécutif, prétende se fonder sur une série télévisée pour juger de la validité de pratiques de torture condamnées par le droit international, instaurant ce qu'il faut bien appeler une 'jurisprudence Jack Bauer', indique à quel point en est arrivée la dérive institutionnelle de l'administration Bush. Cette 'jurisprudence Jack Bauer' fait sentir ses effets, comme on va le voir, jusqu'au sommet de l'État, où la puissance de l'entreprise américaine de mise en fiction du réel permet le triomphe des préjugés sur la morale la plus élémentaire, la négation du réel par la toute-puissance des représentations qui prétendent le transformer." (Salmon, p. 168-169).

⁴² <http://www.liberation.fr/medias/0101589910-jack-reprend-du-sevice>

For a similar satirical reading, see *The Boneyard* website, "24 Hours, More Torture Than You Can Count", which includes the quip "If they took the torture out of 24 they'd have to call it 15": <http://www.triptychcryptic.com/boneyard/20050424.html>

⁴³ See Paul Woolf's article on the ambiguities of Season 2.

⁴⁴ The most obvious Oedipal pattern is Jack's relationship with Kim. In Season 3, she is actually his co-worker at CTU, and dates a young male agent who works in the field with him. Jack is furious when he finds this out, but after 24 hours of shared hardship, comes to recognize that Chase is a man of valor. In an interesting Freudian twist, Jack has to save Chase from certain death by amputating his arm. (This is all the more interesting since one of Kim's boyfriends in Season 2 had lost a leg... though not to Jack). The daddy-daughter *motif* finds a double in Season 4, since Jack's girlfriend is particularly close to her father, who is Secretary of Defense, and the series casts them as competing for her affections. Kim's Electra syndrome is interesting to compare with the father-daughter dynamic in *Alias*, which stages an evil father as well as a benevolent one, both working within the same agency as Sydney.

⁴⁵ Howard, p. 144.

⁴⁶ See "Bill Clinton On Jack Bauer and Torture":

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvoFmV1ug>

and "How Hollywood Gets It Wrong On Torture And Interrogation":

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmjEH0-sqv8>

⁴⁷ See McPherson, p. 184-187, on Bauer as "not exactly hyper-masculine", but quite clearly the opposite of a "metrosexual" – to allow middle-aged, heterosexual males to identify (more than they ever could with any of the *James Bonds*).

⁴⁸ Viewers of Matthew Bright's *Freeway* (1996), for instance, remember him as Wolverton, the pedophile/killer, in this variation on *Little Red Riding Hood*.