

The art of speed: The ludification of cinematic television – the case of 24

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Abstract

This paper is a theoretically informed reading of the television series *24*, which we argue to be a prominent and instructive example of *ludification*, i.e. the use of game design elements in non-game contexts with a special emphasis on ‘ludifying’ story objects and story structures residing in the threshold between (non-linear) games and (linear) stories. The analysis of *24* focuses on how a fictional character increasingly transforms into avatar, notably by becoming the very physical personification of the abstract notion (and sensation) of ‘speed’. We argue that there is a close connection between this ‘applied dromology’ and the ‘levelled’ actions of Jack Bauer as well as the various methods with which he tackles and deploys speed. In conjunction, we discuss how Fox’ television series alters the architecture of narrative into a ludified system obsessed with modes of representing speed and controlling territories of aggression and danger.

Keywords¹

Ludification, ludology, theory, cinematic television, new media studies

1. Introduction

Nowadays, video games influence surrounding media, motion pictures, television series, commercials, web content, even journalism and social media communication [1, 2]. This influence is called *ludification*. However, ludification should not be confused with boosting incentives or optimizing goal-oriented behavior by utilizing game components, i.e. what we now know as gamification [3, 4, 5, 6]. Instead, ludification refers to the way that media *tell stories* shaped by the structural design and appeal of computer games. The challenge with attempting a universal explanation of ludification is that it should at one and the same time be hard to vary (Popper) and applicable to particular ‘content’. Thus, we define ludification very formally as *the use of game design elements in non-game contexts with a special emphasis on ‘ludifying’ story objects*

and story structures residing in the threshold between (non-linear) games and (linear) stories [7].

Likewise, *ludo-interpretation* (ibid.) is our term for the methodical readings that pay close attention to the ludic foundations of contemporary media stories, such as *24* (Fox 2001-2010, 2014), a prominent and instructive example of ludic storytelling.

With regards to the development of the science of ludification, our paper contributes on three levels: 1) *Theoretically*, by broadening the scope and subject of ludification by distancing the term from gamification, which is very much focused on feedback and motivation in respect to learning; and furthermore to produce a specific vocabulary for the kind of gamified [8] ‘storytelling’ (ludification) – both in cinema and on television – that adopts various techniques from computer games. 2) *Methodologically*, by show-

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ing how ludo-interpretation systematically operate when critically applied to a media text (the case of *24*). 3) And, finally, *analytically*, by tentatively paving the way for other readings and/or adaptations of playful [9, 10, 11], ludified media in a more practical context [12].

Although ludification ties in with both gamification and the concept and practice of trans-media [13, 14, 15] it possesses unique characteristics and qualities of its own, primarily evolving around playful ways of creating and interacting with stories. We consider a deep understanding of ludification vital for any ‘applied’ uses of the concept, i.e., ludo-interpretations. Overall, ludification can be viewed as a larger trend that sees a rising importance of play in, while gamification is a subset of it, the strategy aiming at making non-game phenomena more similar to games. However, in this case we consider ‘ludification’ to be a formal term for what could be coined a ‘ludic narrativization’ of new media, e.g., television series. Thus, a ludification of storytelling – a ludification across media and platforms – emerges at the intersection between convergence culture and gamification and *24* is a perfect example of such dynamic.

Games have enjoyed astonishing popularity from the industrial triteness of *Pong* (Atari 1972) to the polished triple-A production of *Assassins Creed* (Ubisoft 2007-). Economic and cultural impact are on an unremitting upward trajectory and has placed play, games and media at the heart of a dispersed ecology of practice ranging from local identity creation to global cultural production and usage as well as a heightened sense of imagination and manifestation of imagery [2]. In cultural studies there is a growing study of how the introduction of elements of playfulness into our lives and culture shape processes of medialization and the formation of participatory cultures [13, 16].

The result of all this spirited media convergence (which is a far cry from only being sub-culture) is a complex tie-in between the game industry and big budget contemporary films and television [17].

A few examples: *True Detective* (HBO 2014-) with all its Lovecraftian twists and weird mythology is also a reference to the split between avatar, the represented character, and ‘narrator’, who knows the system and the plot from the inside. The fiction presents characters who experience traumatic events. But afterwards, when they narrate to the viewers (and fellow detectives) what really happened, they lie. Who (or what) are

we to thrust? Images (experience) or words (narrative)? Indeed, this split between what happens, and how it is told or represented, is a basic trait of playing games: I am and am not the character I play [18]. At the heart of gaming lies a ritualized mode of ‘schizophrenia’ – and a lie. HBO’s acclaimed series *True Detective* is all about lies, and it can be viewed as an allegory of the unreliability of how stories progress. Who is the ‘true detective’? One answer would be the user who knows her way around games and musters all the collective intelligence of the information age, Amazon, Reddit, and YouTube included, to execute the interrogatory task of unravelling the real crime of a ‘story’. This can of course only be hinted at here, but the disparity between protagonist and narrator is elevated to both meta-fictional and ‘meta-ludic’ prominence (and sarcasm) in the first-person exploration game *The Stanley Parable*, a (Galactic Cafe 2011).

The surprise hit series *Dark* (Netflix 2017-) – German underdog and now a major Netflix installment – extends the intricacies of time travel and time paradoxes to a point where spectators thrillingly lose their footing, very similar to game players losing sight of direction in complex mazes. The chaos cinema [19] of the *Mission Impossible* franchise (Paramount Pictures 1996-) comes out as a highly regulated play world with capture the flag game features and an inbuilt inventory list. *Lost* (2004-2010) owed its success to *Myst* (Broderbound 1993-2010), Robyn and Rand Miller’s graphical, interactive fiction from 1993 that triggered a fast forward evolution in high polygon rendering and complex storytelling in games.

In Fox’ television series *24* (2001-2014) we follow Jack Bauer, played by Kiefer Sutherland, a pro-Bush, strike-first Rambo 2.0 armed with a smartphone and high-tech SUV’s. It is not too far to say that *24* fashioned a new visual generation of cinematic television dressed up as video games: In reality, *24* is an action game without a controller.

The following reading investigates how a fictional character increasingly transforms into avatar, notably by becoming the very physical personification of the abstract notion (and sensation) of ‘speed’. Thus, we claim that there is a close connection between the ‘levelled’ actions of Jack Bauer and the various methods with which he tackles and deploys speed, and furthermore how the television series itself alters the architecture of narrative into a ludified system obsessed with

modes of representing speed and controlling territories of aggression and danger.

The avatar of Kiefer Sutherland's Jack Bauer, in the television series *24*, is not playable in the traditional, physio-ontological sense, using a controller and a gaming interface [20]; but the series nevertheless performs as a kind of 'televised', recorded gameplay [7] within a game world based on game rules. It is the game structure overlain on top of the fictional construction that brings forth certain types of quasi-physical interactions, and therefore one may ask: How far can cinematic media venture in their desire to 'ludify' themselves? As we shall see in the reading of *24* this question is very much tied up with Arabs, daughters, and game mechanics of firearms and cars loaded with smart technology.

Our paper is structured the following way: Taking off from a list of game elements in *24*, we look closer at how the organization of screens, viewpoints, and representation of information become not only means to piece the narrative of *24* together, but further how they together contribute to the 'ludified' look and feel of the series. A discussion of the 'territorialization' using vectors of speed and power – and the various moving vehicles of Bauer – follows next along with readings of how this territorialization contributes to the representation of *24* as a game world with game rules [21, 22, 23, 24] and a corresponding gameplay. The paper ends with a tentative conclusion and some theoretical thoughts on the confines and limits of ludo-interpretation.

2. Who's looking at who?

There is a scene in *24* where Jack Bauer, exhausted, stripped of all his American prerogatives, stares into the camera. Intuitively (at least from a scholar's point of view), the scene seems to invoke the tradition of puncturing the fourth wall of storytelling, turning this rather banal scene into a sign of self-referential cognizance, or 'meta'. Or, as it were, 'art'. But this is not the case. Bauer does not gaze into the camera as if to question his own fictional partaking. He is not some stupid action hero—well, some might think he is—scooped by imprudent rules that keep him trapped inside fancy vehicles and a fast-paced movie. Jack looks into a monitor that belongs to the sophisticated telecommunication gear of CTU, no more no less. If there is any classiness in his frantic stare it does not stem from a reproduction of the spectator gaze. Rather, it refers to

the omnipresence of the kind of televised equipment necessary for regional dominance and control of power: people watching Jack while Jack watches others. Jack Bauer is a playable gamer: we play him while he plays the game. This is almost like watching games brought to life on Twitch [25]; or cheering on one's favorite YouTuber, say, Pewdiepie, to make it to the next level [26]. However, Jack is neither supposed to know that he is playing a game (and that we are playing a game with him in it), nor detect references to a wider world of commercial games and gaming communities. Essentially, he becomes the *Fix-It* character in the animation movie *Wreck-It Ralph* (Walt Disney Studios 2012). Or, more to the point, he is a tragic embodiment of Mario who in his blissful ignorance constantly tries to salvage Peach, in Nintendo's never-ending entertainment installment, but of course with real guns and real blood instead of mushrooms and lucky coins.

24 is a symptomatic, albeit 'historical', evidence of a growing trend in cinema and television: the ludification of story objects and story structures. *24* is an example of how a traditional, Aristotelian story with a beginning, middle, and an end, has become ludified and which therefore calls for a type of enquiry – a ludo-interpretation – rooted in computer game theory (ludology).

3. 24: The Game

We propose the following list of game (or ludified) elements in *24*. Note, that the list is deliberately made up of standard industry terms; features that occur in almost any commercial game.

Main character/avatar/gamer: Speed aka Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland).

Core NPC's: The Bauer-car, the Daughter, the 'Arab'; all of whom are ludic devices set within a confined game world with game mechanics and obeying game rules.

Goal of NPC's (their AI): Potential destructors of Bauer's seamless transportation and navigation through spaces or levels.

Core action against NPC's: Keep car stable and operational. Shut down Daughter's annoyance. Kill Arabs.

Setting (game world): Los Angeles (or New York or London).

Rules for transgressing game world: Travel to China, get captured and tortured; return with a full beard. This only happens between seasons. As does potential divorce(s), drug addiction and recovery, and aging.

Core mechanics: Special use of weapons, Armor, Catch-Up, increase/decrease of Class, general XP and HP.

Time: Real-time, 24 hours (minus commercials).

Cutscenes: Presidential orders, rogue instructions, Daughter's annoyance, military trained Arabs (potentially all of them). Can be combined using split-screen.

Sites on the game board: 1) Officiary facilities, 2) Abandoned ('Arabic') warehouses; 3) Military terrain, each equipped with core mechanics and a symmetrical amount of AI to keep Bauer busy.

Game Balance: Constant asymmetry between Jack's skills and the volume of conflicts provided by NPC's.

Goal: Save the world.

Save game: Every 24 hours. Micro-save during commercial breaks.

4. How to save the world

The TV series *24* first aired on the American Fox Channel in November 2001, problematically close to the events of 9-11 [27]. Eight and a half seasons or 204 episodes later it closed down July 14th, 2014. Although we shall primarily dive into some of the rather abstract claims about the inherent game character of *24*, it will be helpful to quickly provide the highlights of the plot and scope of the series limiting ourselves to the first three seasons or 'Days' in Jack Bauer's hectic *modus vivendi*.

The first twenty-four episodes take place on the day of the Presidential primary in Los Angeles, where Jack Bauer, chief field agent at the Los Angeles-based CTU (Counter Terrorist Unit), and his distinguished team of men and women uncover a plot to gun down Presidential contender David Palmer. With only 24 hours to detect the killer and save Palmer's life, Jack must also deal with his stressful marriage and the unexpected disappearance of his troubled teenage daughter. This juxtaposition of big-time political conflicts and micro-sociological issues becomes an enduring theme of the narrative from this point on. In Season Two, now-President David Palmer reaches out to Jack, who is called upon to stop another terrorist plot with global implications. A nuclear bomb is set to go off sometime that day in Los Angeles. Of course, Jack is the only one who can stop it. Three years later (in fiction time), in Season Three, Jack captures and detains a powerful drug lord named Ramon Salazar. Salazar's brother arranges to blackmail the US Government with the threat of releasing a virus that will kill millions if they do not set him free. Palmer seeks re-election for a second term,

together with a crooked chief of staff, and a girlfriend who may not be telling him all he needs to know.

5. Different levels of speed

Interestingly, *24* can be viewed as a massive commentary on and use of *dromology*, or speed [28]. *Dromos* is the Ancient Greek noun for race or racetrack. On one level, speed signifies the upbeat tempo that is personified by Jack Bauer and laid out in the series' swift succession of images and contemporary styles. On another level, speed works as an underlying code that the viewers need to adopt and adapt to in order to gradually unlock the many game-like scenarios and qualities of *24*. Speed is not just something that the series is about; speed is also, and more decisively, the code necessary for the production of meaning in *24* as a whole.

Paul Virilio argues that the role of speed has previously been overlooked in accounts of the organization of civilizations and their politics, and that speed is crucial to the production of wealth and power [28]. According to Virilio, speed is a measure of a triumphant dominance over and control of space. Speed, moreover, is a variable of how information is carried over distances, as attested by Manuel Castells [29]. Resolutely rejecting the forms of economic determinism that have been associated with Marxism, Virilio's *dromology* focuses on those instruments that accelerate and intensify speed, and which augment the wealth and power of those groups who control them. In his vision, the military comes to control speed, thus becoming a governing power in society that affects all layers of a differentiated society. This way, speed signifies not just transportation but also the mechanisms of networks – synchronicity becoming the ultimate standard.

And, after all, there's never enough time in *24* [30]. As evidenced in the following quote from Jack right after he is briefed from CTU headquarters that an aiding SWAT team is twenty minutes away from the scene:

Jack: Dammit. That doesn't give us enough time. We need to intercept now, before they move the nuke.

Later on, we shall see how Jack uses the art of *dromology* to his advantage in the pursuit of saving the world, mastering the mechanics of the fiction he is placed within – and winning the game.

6. Screens and viewpoints

24 was one of the first major TV shows to present its story across several platforms; television, web, PC games, and websites, constantly overstepping the demarcations that used to define the specificity of media and their contents [31].

An enduring trademark of the *24* brand is the porous network of screens and sub-screens. The effectiveness of this technological stamp is verified in the beginning and finale of an episode. When the plot thickens, and the digital watch approaches full hour, we are reminded each week that Jack has more than a few calamities to take care of [32]. Compared to the computer game interface the split-screen mode locates between first person shooters and real-time strategy games. Repeatedly the camera is placed extremely close to the body of Jack's point of view so that we experience the events from his position in space. This is an example of internal focalization, a spatial *modus operandi* that enables the viewer to perceive space from within analogous to classic first-person shooters like *Quake-series* (id Software 1996-), *Doom-series* (id Software 1993-), and *Unreal Tournament-series* (Epic Games 1998-).

However, the screen is also designed so that we may concurrently access different layers of information and embark upon story trajectories similar to strategy and role-playing games (e.g. *Baldur's Gate 1-2* Black Isle Studios), *StarCraft-series* (Blizzard Entertainment 1998-), and *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004-). This spatial technique is called external focalization that feeds from *24*'s frequent shots of computer screen as props and gadgets within the story. CTU headquarters has of course lots of them, but Jack himself also employs a choice of palmtops, PDA's, GPS systems, and much more. All these devices including the allusion to shooters and strategy games are part and parcel of the intrinsic tension between logistics and structure on one side and chaotic density on the other. And since the audience cannot rise above the visual representation of real-time—that would acquire flash backs, switching time sections, etc.—the characters of *24* do the job for us. They provide overviews, get hold of status reports, sneak up reliable intelligences, and download intelligible crime topographies.

7. Vectorization

As already mentioned, *dromology* operates on the basis of speed and paths through terrains. Both relate to the spaces that the characters inhabit and pass through, for instance, the urban space or military facilities [28].

In the article 'Inertia and interiority: *24* as a case study of the televisual metropolis' Christopher Hight claims that Jack Bauer uses transportation and telecommunication equipment to move through zones of war and conflict where each scenario seems to seamlessly trigger the next [33]. Almost as if Jack was placed upon a conveyor belt. Jack uses vehicles, mobile phones, and heat maps from the ludified inventory that functions as 'vectors of transmission', as Hight calls them – to slide through scenarios fully equipped and armed. In ludic terms this is the avatar-character in a constant state of alert progressively unlocking mechanics and flawlessly gaining access to ever new sites of conflict. In a more traditional cinematic sense, the style and visuals of this action-on-a-conveyor-belt allude to the 'tunnel-like' shifts in locations, theatrically displayed in movies like Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* (20th Century Fox 2001) and *The Great Gatsby* (Warner Bros Pictures 2013). Joe Wright's reinterpretation of *Anna Karenina* (Universal Pictures) from 2012 also springs to mind.

In light of this, and instead of treating Jack's prime vehicle, the Chevy Suburban SUV, as a literary sign rife with allegorical and ideological meaning, the communication and transportation devices in Jack's possession transform into deterritorializing vectors: forces that pose as threats to a territory. The kind of vectors that Jack possesses must be mobile, which is fitting for a special agent always on the move; they must be fast, and operationally efficient. However, all these props also serve the imminent conflict and unbalance of Jack's quest. At all times they may destabilize his path, knock him down from the belt or otherwise interfere with the seamless trajectory.

In *24*, vector quantities are equally or perhaps more important than speed itself. While speed (50 miles per hour) is a scalar, and the same goes for distance, velocity (60 miles per hour south) is a vector. Vectorization implies both the magnitude and the direction of an object, such as driving Jack's car swiftly from point A to point B. Vectorization transforms an open territorial space, a space that can be negotiated (a play-space) into a closed and structured space (a game-space) [34]. When vectors operate in a territory, especially as means to defend against de-

territorialization, ‘the game’ becomes a matter of controlling the borders of a (region of) space by structuring the possibilities of movements within this (region of) space.

Vectorization happens within territories, thus serving as bridges connecting Jack’s mechanics and those of the non-player characters (the NPC’s). Jack always defends a certain region of the world. His actions are constrained similar to a game with fixed rules, quantifiable outcome, and a semantic of winning or losing. The structuring of this area and its topographical nodes dog his measures. From a political and military perspective, territory is a space to be defended and secured, and to be invaded and colonized [35]. Within modern societies, such territory was defined and occasionally defied by the nation-state. In the contemporary world that *24* depicts—the site of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*—the city in which Bauer operates has been displaced by a machinery of speed and power [36]. ‘Los Angeles’ comes in handy, with its massive, apocalyptic allusions and disorientation: the city is, simultaneously, the desert, and the desert can easily be mistaken for the city [37]. LA is merely a synonym for game-space, the game board or game world. At any range, instantaneous military violence can be launched from hidden spaces, such as airplanes, nuclear submarines, missiles, and biochemical sources.

Ultimately, *24* can be put on a formula:

Momentum + direction = mission.

It embodies the oldest mode of storytelling – questing – with an in-built drive towards the *raison d’être* of real-time [38]. The invariable tasks that Jack Bauer must undertake throughout the seasons do not merely follow from the abiding narrative and the unyielding plot. Rather, they should be seen as the bundles of activities which trigger the gamified errands of Bauer.

These errands can be grouped into three: 1) The task of *24*’s protagonist is to locate nodes within a network—in which case Jack is a ‘surfer’. 2) The mission is to map a semantic space—so that Jack is further a skilled ‘interpreter’. The fact that he is able to do exactly this, as time rushes by, and he gets wounded more and more, is a testimony to his enduring professionalism. 3) Finally, Jack must pursue focal points within a topographical space. This latter activity positions Jack as a ‘gamer’ who is constantly on the lookout for new levels, access points, and

passages leading from one region of space to another. The frenzied pace of unlocking new levels and running through the ‘wormholes’ that link local sites to each other in *24*’s grand geography appears cynical: He has already been there; he has already done that; floating on top of the conveyor belt. At other times, however, there is a sense of novelty and fresh panic invested in the many hidden, disorienting, and vulnerable areas of Los Angeles and its vicinity. The vectorization of speed suggests that the unfolding of space is important, not only in the obvious sense that it participates in the conventional extrication of the plot and its structures, but also because the unfolding is set here within a networked, abstract space in which qualities of surfing, interpreting, and gaming are vital.

8. On top of the conveyor belt

Jack’s mission is closely related to a game-play: the formalized interaction that occurs when a player follows the rules of a game and experiences its system through play [34]. In the midst of Jack’s incessant running and torturing, the physical rules of *24*’s fictional world (‘physics’) very often get confused with the mission rules. Sometimes, Jack pauses and tries to understand the rules of the world that demand a certain outcome of him and dictates a specific position on the ‘board’. And yet, due to the real-time scheme of things, which translate to the physical and pragmatic environment, there rarely seems time enough to question neither the nature of the underlying frame of fiction or the superficial game missions. Jack rarely if at all verbalizes the stress that comes with such a double bind. He shares this trait with Jason Bourne who cannot – and must not – reflect on his fighting mechanics while caught in the actual (boss) fight. Both of them just keep going, on top of their conveyor belts.

The narrative commotion in the opening *Jason Bourne* movie (Universal Pictures 2002) circles around Bourne’s amazing fighting skills and advanced strategic capabilities. The character, played by Matt Damon, is not aware, to begin with, that he even has such potential. The kind of action that Bourne performs, kickboxing, taking down multiple enemies at once, using complicated, semi-automatic rifles, climbing down rooftops, seems transgressive, somehow outside his realm. And yet the viewers know exactly that these features firmly connect to the game Bourne

is playing [39]. In fact, this double token of the playful, franchised, modern day action hero is equally the tie-in to games and the reference to mythologized story scenarios: The hero thinks he is deploying transgressive forces, while spectators are acutely aware that the former is simply using immanent skills; much the same way that a prince believes his voyaging into mysterious, dangerous territory (preferably by crossing a bridge) is unique. But, of course, it's not. It happens in just about every fairytale. Jason Bourne may contemplate, inside the fiction, that he is trying to figure out – or remember – the outline of a game he does not quite comprehend. We, the audience who know better, understand that this excursion towards clarification and the subsequent operationalization of said clarity is part and parcel of the character driven game.

Just like the Bourne universe *24* encompasses a game world, game rules, and game mechanics. The fictional world (made up of finite territories) is commonly the city of Los Angeles (later on New York and London). Rules address the attempt to secure a territory (think the map 'de_dust' in *Counter-Strike* (Valve Software 1999), disentangle a conspiracy (as in the video game *Deus Ex* (Eidos Interactive 2000), and prevent a catastrophe from happening. The most obvious parallel, however, is to the *Grand Theft Auto* game franchise (Rockstar Games 1997-). Notably *GTA San Andreas* (2004), which happens to take place in an LA-like urban environment stigmatized with discrete boundaries between both hostile and friendly sites, and which like *24* channels the action through speed, motion and the use of violent and de-territorializing conveyor belts.

Mechanics, in *24*, apply to the adjustable, usually movable, damageable, and, to a certain extent, modifiable 'objects' within the game world. To put this in Virilio and Lotringer's terms from *Pure War*, game mechanics involve those instruments that accelerate and intensify speed [40]. Movements in urban space bring out an order that is depicted in terms of a contingency of actions and an intention to control such movements by locating those military and political technologies that will be able to master them.

9. Musings of a ludified action hero

As a character Jack Bauer continues the tradition of the Hollywood action hero. The typical

action hero can be grasped as a cultural commodity and a composite made of game parts. The hero typically comes with three pre-installed features.

- 1) He or she are modifiable to the extent that they are a Class, they have XP's and a certain skill set.
- 2) They are location-based, implying that they simply have to stick to the confines of the game board.
- 3) And, finally, they are vehicles of (speedy) accomplishment. Very often, they are forced to take control of their own vehicle (a car, their own bodies, weapons); and equally often someone or something else takes control of *them* and uses them as a vehicle. Heroes always act as the result of a conflict, they're on a mission (sometimes from God, in *Blues Brothers* (Universal Pictures 1980), and they always drive themselves toward a goal. In fact, they are the ultimate, cliché ridden God of structuralist poetics, the visual quintessence of Joseph Campbell's 'hero with a thousand faces' [41]. Although they maneuver within a narrow and very controlled world sealed off by strict (game) rules, they are also designed to be flexible. They are toys [11], assemblages that can be pulled apart and reassembled in the wider context of consumption. The 'being' of these action heroes does not relate to their ethos or other such moral or psychological constitution. Instead they owe their existence to a mode of elasticity enabling each and one of us, the consumers and interpreters, to fuse Jack Bauer's gun with the footwork of John Wick and perhaps teaming up with the semi-ironical and very British brutality of Jason Statham's bricolage of action characters. In short: Action heroes are one-dimensional, yet flexible things.

Jack follows rules. Not just by doing what he is told by the President or other superior figures but by subjugating his will to that of the game. If he (or we) does not abide to the absolute, non-negotiable rules of the game there is no game. He moves (fast) within the confines of the board and its parametrical edges. As such, the way that Jack acts out the mission equally combines narrative, space, and gaming.

- 1) In the narrative regime by fulfilling one quest after the other of the plot.
- 2) Spatially by securing and regaining power of a territory under siege.
- 3) And in terms of the game he is playing by combining cartographic and networking knacks with those that allow him to interpret the various deceptions as means to steer effectively through the game and follow it right to the end of the line.

It goes without saying, that were he to overstep this line, he would essentially, and literally, fall off the game board. Not by 'falling out of

character', by some quasi postmodern, Tarantino way of thinking, but in the overtly pragmatic sense of aborting the game. If he goes to China, for instance, this happens between seasons, or as a kind of preparation for (the next) gameplay. Is he a toy? Sure, Jack can be treated like a toy, much the same way as the iconic action heroes James Bond, Jason Bourne and John Wick. When fans use 'real' Google Maps to depict the whereabouts of the fictional Bauer they may be playing with him, because they activate the hero's toy-like attributes and free him from his platform, aka the television series. But still they duplicate exactly the board of Greater Los Angeles (now on the real Google Maps) thus echoing what Jack Bauer fundamentally does best: Play by the rules = stick to the board. In many ways, Bauer is the last of the dead serious action heroes; there's not a shred of irony or self-referentiality in him. As such, he is the quintessence and reference point of ludification.

10. The limits of ludo-interpretation

In the attempt to read *24* as a ludic fiction, we should not confuse the installment of weapons, telecommunication, and transportation devices with understated signifiers of geopolitical, urban worry. There is a tendency to treat such devices, guns, phones, and cars, as either parts of a narratological framework, repeated over and over in movies and television series, or as food for allegorical thought. A car is not just a 'car' in *24*. On the contrary, one could imagine a hermeneutician insist, it is a symbol of modern struggle, a subtext revealing the complex interaction of control and territorial dominance, on the one hand, and alienation and territorial threat, on the other. But what if this rich container of significance and allegorical prominence was deliberately emptied? Intro ludo-interpretation, at least in its bleakest, purest and most cynical form.

What is left, then, is simply the 'car' as a moving vector; the car as an amalgamation of velocity and momentum; the car as an enclosed space within which and upon which Jack Bauer, our hero, plays out his game and defeats his enemies, one by one. The trick is to think of something that enables a move from A to B, the action that this movement involves, rather than the sumptuous meaning and socio-cultural concern it brings with it. Actually, this is Goethe's teaching of literary style in the age of computer games. Sym-

bolically, a car is a car is a car. It is not a subtextual 'car', Schillers car one might add, that one has to figure out before one can observe the real truth about this car. The same thing would happen if one were to ask a Freudian scholar armed with an analytical apparatus of suspicion to stop treating dream scenarios as symbolic significations. This would be almost impossible. In ludo-interpretation, ideally a train is a train is a train and not a token of sexual intercourse. A car in *24* is a car, a vehicle, a vector, and a game mechanic. It obeys certain rules, and that's the thrill of it. Bauer's daughter, in a similar fashion, does not owe her functionality in the show to a commitment to the ethos of Jack Bauer, as character and dramaturgical cliché. Instead, Kimberley (Elisha Kushbert) is merely a non-playing character, an NPG, that has to be collared and eliminated, effectively 'killed', so that the game can proceed without too much damage, and without overtly inflating Bauer's 'experience points' and 'health points', XP and HP.

Ludo-interpretation thus becomes a strategy of hermeneutical negation. Its sufficiency is equivalent to the ruling out (rather than the taking in) of socio-cultural, political, and narratological signs in order to arrive at the ludic nucleus of the story-game. In this paper we have tried to unravel the bits and pieces of this nucleus and at the same time demonstrated what ludification is and is all about.

11. Concluding remarks

Viewed from a materialistic, and ontological, understanding of linear media, a television series can never count as a truly interactive form. However, as we have explained through our *dromos* infused case study of *24*, it is the epistemological markers of game-like qualities (speed, weapons, conveyor belt, NPC's, etc.) that not only question the more general claim that computer games represent a new, spatial mode of storytelling – but also dictates a methodological rethinking of the factual elements we see on television. The danger is of course that such a methodology, and a fitting case, end up becoming a rhetoric attempt to use game metalanguage to describe a TV series. In this paper we have tried the exact opposite: to read *24* as a stone-faced, epistemological game.

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Ludography

Assassins Creed (Ubisoft 2007-)
Baldur's Gate 1-2 (Black Isle Studios 1996-)
Counter-Strike (Valve Software 1999)
Deus Ex (Eidos Interactive 2000)
Doom series (id Software 1993-)
Myst (Broderbound 1993-2010)
Pong (Atari 1972)
Quake series (id Software, 1996-)
StarCraft 1-2 (Blizzard Entertainment 1998-)
The Stanley Parable (Galactic Cafe 2011)
Unreal Tournament (Epic Games, 1998-)
World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment 2004-).

Movies and TV series

24 (Fox 2001-2010, 2014)
Anna Karenina (Universal Pictures, 2012)
Dark (Netflix, 2017-)
Lost (ABC, 2004-2010)
Mission Impossible (Paramount Pictures, 1996-)
Moulin Rouge (20th Century Fox, 2001)
Blues Brothers (Universal Pictures 1980)
The Bourne Identity (Universal Pictures 2002)
The Great Gatsby (Warner Bros Pictures, 2013)
True Detectives (HBO, 2014-)
Wreck-It Ralph (Walt Disney Studios 2012)