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TVNM

Running in Cyberspace

O. J. Simpson Web Sites and the (De)Construction of Crime Knowledge

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This article considers numerous web sites devoted to the O. J. Simpson case. Reviewing the literature on crime news production, the author argues that there is a dynamic that exists among law enforcement, journalists, and the public. The technology of the internet provided a cyberspace in which individual authors could review and analyze evidence and media discourse to support various claims about the case. While acknowledging that the internet is not a utopian democratic landscape, the author does claim that some decentering of the forces of knowledge production is possible, as evidenced from the web pages that present counterinformation.

Keywords: *O. J. Simpson case; internet; crime; newsmaking criminology; cybertrials*

The O. J. Simpson case was one of the most pervasive stories in the United States media landscape from the first week the story broke until at least the final verdict of the civil trial was announced simultaneously with President Bill Clinton's State of the Union address. The case has produced nearly one hundred books ranging from quickie "O. J. biographies" culled from earlier source material, memoirs of the participants' experiences (written by prosecutors, defense attorneys, jurors, police detectives, journalists, pundits, and novelists, not to mention the defendant himself), academic anthologies and studies, and humor books. "O. J." became a complex media phenomenon, not a media event in the sense described by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992)—though some aspect of the ceremonial was part of the criminal court procedure—but a dense, multigeneric televisual spectacle that became a focal point for many Americans (and more than a few Europeans) to declare, this is the lowest we can go—referring to the media, the lawyers (especially those who "distorted the

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truth" by "playing the race card"), and the judicial process. The murders of Simpson's ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ron Goldman, were ugly—her head was almost decapitated—and the O. J. phenomenon was even uglier.

The Simpson case has produced a discourse containing many arguments for me to assert, fascinated as I was from early on, discussing the case in a rather odd location: on a cruise ship in Alaska, talking with strangers about O. J. and watching the Bronco chase on CNN (our cabin's only channel) and hearing Larry King contemplate with district attorney Gil Garcetti about the possible execution of Simpson should Garcetti seek the death penalty and the jury convict. My general argument is that the massive coverage and media discourse about the case has generated a potential awareness for the constructed nature of news, and in particular, news about crime and the criminal justice system, allowing for a greater investigation (by scholars, but, I also hope, by the public) into the mechanisms of economic and cultural power that produce public crime knowledge. This article will first briefly review the ways that knowledge production about crime has been analyzed. That law enforcement agencies exercise great control of crime news is not at all surprising. What happens in the Simpson case is that the massive coverage—spurred by Simpson's celebrity—prevents the Los Angeles Police Department and district attorney's office from successfully managing that information. While I will make passing references to Simpson's own "Dream Team" and its spinning of information and to tabloid media, my chief focus here will be on the internet, where hundreds of web pages devoted to the case appeared in what has been called the first cybertrial, a trial discussed and debated by millions of Americans (and others worldwide) communicating via computer (Greek 1996). I see the internet discourse surrounding the case as an illustration of the possible threats to traditional mechanisms of knowledge control, though some caution must be heeded before heralding a more democratic media system's taking root in cyberspace.

Political economy theory and crime news. There are numerous media-studies scholars who have considered the ways dominant political-economic interests have influenced the content of news. The work of Herbert Gans, Gaye Tuchman, Noam Chomsky, and Edward Herman, the Glasgow University Media Group, to name a few noted examples, illustrates how money and power translate into information that reflects the interests of those who hold them (Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978; Herman and Chomksy 1988; Glasgow University Media Group 1976, 1982). Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting has a web site that regularly updates the insidious influence corporate America has on the ways the media cover key political issues.[1] Particularly relevant here is the relationship between news

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media workers and their chief sources, who tend to be those who hold key leadership positions in government and industry; this reliance is a key "filter" (to use Herman and Chomsky's term) in what comes across our television screens and newspapers (the situation may be more dire for papers, since so much content now is in the form of press releases written by the companies themselves rather than by reporters). Stuart Hall and his colleagues write in their landmark *Policing the Crisis* (1978) that the reliance on sources for information is at its highest on the subject of crime. Police authorities have a near monopoly on this information, since most crimes are reported to the police by crime victims, and thus, the first reports about a given crime have already been shaped by the police before reporters have arrived on the scene (either the scene of the crime or at the police precinct). Furthermore, reporters are more dependent on authorities for crime news because "crime is *less open* than most public issues to competing and alternative definitions" (Hall et al. 1978, 69). While one can find statements from, for example, labor and management regarding contract negotiations, "a police statement on crime is rarely 'balanced' by one from a professional criminal" (Hall et al. 1978, 69). The terms of debate regarding crime and solutions to crime problems are set primarily by the criminal justice system; as Hall et al. reported, there is much evidence to suggest that the "crime wave" of mugging in London from 1972–1973 was the product of a discourse preplanned by the police and already on the table of discussion among the magistrates (Hall et al. 1978). If the dominant perceptions on more general policy issues such as international relations and taxation are rarely challenged (see Kellner [1992] on the manipulation of the media by the Bush administration during the Persian Gulf War), issues that can engender public debate, the dominant perceptions on crime are even less challenged, with few alternative definitions even offered regarding crime. "This makes the avenue of crime a peculiarly one-dimensional and transparent one so far as the mass media and public opinion is concerned: one where issues are simple, uncontroversial and clear cut" (Hall et al. 1978, 69–70).

Newsmaking criminology and the media-police dynamic. Hall et al.'s analysis was one of many results of the National Deviancy Conference, a group of British sociologists influenced by Marxism who called for a radical understanding of crime and its causes. These scholars examined in particular the way the state could produce criminals by its reaction to deviant behavior. Their work is more nuanced than the picture I give above, for they explored the dynamic between law enforcement and deviants (especially deviant youth), but nevertheless, a general characteristic of their work is to cast the news media as working more closely with law enforcement than against it.[2] Given the ideology behind such reality-based

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programs as *Crimewatch UK* and *America's Most Wanted*, such a position may seem even more tenable today. A recent field of study, called newsmaking criminology by its chief practitioner, Gregg Barak, argues against this, fearing oversimplification in the political economy model. As Richard Ericson and his colleagues put it, "there is substantial overlap among the roles of source, journalist, and consumer" (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1991, 13)[3] that a dynamic exists in which multiple interests do struggle for representation. Newsmaking criminology addresses this dynamic. Barak believes that newsmaking criminology "entails an appreciation that crime news, like other news, emerges from struggles that are ultimately resolved, at least momentarily, by the prevailing but not necessarily dominant relations of power" (Barak 1994, 6). Barak's perception of mass media is largely a Gramscian one in which media hegemony "includes not only the ruling classes' world views but also the world views of the masses" (p. 239). Mass media discourse, Barak argues, cannot be simplistically characterized as following economic and social trends nor taking the lead in generating new ways of thinking on important issues.[4] Barak's formulation, as depicted in his introduction to an anthology of newsmaking criminology, is that the perception of crime is the product of the media "multiplied" by the "additive" effects of the political economy and culture through time (p. 6). The total relationship between these various institutions and those who work within them must be examined to understand the perception of crime. Mark Fishman's work is particularly useful to note here; his study of the ways a specific crime unit of the New York Police Department worked with the local news media describes a cyclical production structure whereby journalists report on crimes based on information provided by police, but police transmit newsworthy crime news based on their understanding of the *journalists'* definitions of newsworthy. While it is true that since "they rely on the police for raw materials, journalists convey an image of crime wholly in accord with the police department's notion of serious crime and social disorder," at the same time, police have a "concern with managing [their] image and remaining the media's routine source for crime news [that] results in the use of 'newsworthiness' as a means for deciding which incidents are unusual" (Fishman 1981, 387), and thus, worthy of journalists' attention. Thus, crime news is not the sole province of the police, nor does it belong solely to the media and the conventions of news gathering. Instead, "crime news is mutually determined by journalists, whose image of crime is shaped by police concerns, and by police, whose concerns with crime are influenced by media practices" (Fishman 1981, 387–88).

In my view, the Simpson case illustrates the challenges police face in controlling the information flow. Simpson's celebrity status and the murders' occurrence in Los Angeles, a major base for media, especially

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celebrity-driven tabloid media, ensured a significant presence of reporters who did not need to rely on the LAPD for information about the case: tabloid reporters had their contacts among the "rich and famous," and Simpson's own biography, well known, was a major source of information used by columnists and authors of quickie books. Early on, the LAPD provided information that pointed toward specific evidence of guilt; law enforcement officials also began constructing an image of Simpson as a jealous wife-beater with a pattern of abusive behavior that included statements such as, "I'll kill you." But because of Simpson's wealth, his own "dream team" was able to counter that image and attacked the credibility and competence of police detectives and criminalists. As the criminal trial came closer, several key players began producing books: Nicole's friend Faye Resnick's book appeared during (and disrupted) jury selection; Simpson house guest (and former guest at Nicole's), Brian "Kato" Kaelin, also was interviewed for a book; and Simpson himself, with Lawrence Schiller, was preparing a book to help defray legal expenses. During the trial, at least one juror was removed for taking notes in preparation for a posttrial book. The tabloid media continued to publish sensational stories, including excerpts from Nicole's diary (not admitted into evidence at the trial), autopsy photographs, and stories of other trial participants and their relations, such as defense attorney Johnnie Cochran's ex-wife and prosecutor Marcia Clark's second ex-husband (topless photographs of Clark sunbathing alongside her first ex-husband also surfaced). While crime is a popular subject in media, the view of crime is largely skewed by those who have immediate access to crime information—law enforcement and journalists. Simpson's fame generated a large interest in the murders, and to satisfy that interest, media flow moved beyond the sources of law enforcement.

The internet and the public sphere. The Simpson case is not the first such case in which public officials could not manage information flow, of course. The assassination debates regarding the death of JFK are a useful example of how individuals refused to accept the official story and sifted through research and testimony to argue for a different version of events. JFK is an apropos example here, for his success as a politician is linked directly to his performative skills on television, and his celebrity status surely influenced those who wanted to avenge his death. An example more contemporaneous with the Simpson case would be the Rodney King beating, caught on tape independently and shown throughout the world, becoming a symbol of police abuse and racism. Here, the official police reports of the incident were wholly contradicted by the raw, disturbing images of the fifty-plus–second video. Official discourse cannot be wholly controlled; even rumor and speculation have long formed a

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crucial part of popular media discourse, as Kevin Glynn (2000) illustrates in the case of a corporate product logo that was altered amid swirling rumors that it contained a Satanic message. That said, a new twist provided by the Simpson case is a new medium, the internet. No longer is it simply that audiences consume and debate television and newspaper information, but with a little bit of technical skill, audiences can *produce* information. A word of caution about technological determinism: I am not arguing here that the form of the internet determined the entire knowledge-production apparatus or even altered it. Nor would I claim that the considerable cyberspace discussions about the criminal trial had a direct effect on the acquittal (in an article published in the *International Journal of Cultural Studies* [Grochowski 2003], I do suggest that the influence of the tabloid media was crucial, but again, this effect is itself the result of Simpson's celebrity). Rather, I want to consider some of the cyberdiscourse of the Simpson case—in particular, a number of private home pages, some of which remain available even today—within the general discourses of internet theory that are still evolving and within the question of the production of crime knowledge addressed above.

Critical literature regarding the internet has grown considerably in the years following the Simpson criminal trial. Numerous journals are now devoted to the new information technologies. Anthologies such as *Internet Culture* and *Cybersociety* are making available important scholarship on cyberspace culture (Porter 1997; Jones 1995). Naturally, some scholarship appears on the internet, and in some cases, in cyberspace before in print—Johns Hopkins University Press's *Postmodern Culture* being the first humanities-oriented online journal, debuting in 1990. The primary language of the internet, HTML, is also known as hypertext, a term that was more fashionable in the early nineties than today but nevertheless an important one for a discussion of internet discourse. The word was coined by cyberspace avatar Theodor Holm Nelson, who envisioned a utopia he called Xanadu, a sophisticated global network of linked information that would allow a dynamic relationship among readers and writers. Hypertext, so Nelson believed, would radically decenter hierarchized forms of knowledge production. The realm of hypertext "would remove economic and social gatekeeping functions from the current owners of the means of text production" and "transfer control of cultural work to a broadly conceived population of culture workers" (Moulthrop 1993, 91). Postmodern writers such as Lyotard have spoken about the era of perfect information, in which all are equally competent in the production of knowledge. Soshana Zuboff also speaks of a "post-hierarchical" information order (see Moulthrop 1993). Hypertext, as George Landow wrote in 1992, also bears a strong relationship to the critical literary theory of Roland Barthes, who articulated important distinctions between readerly

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and writerly texts and argued that the contemporary age had seen the death of the author, and the deconstructionist theory of Jacques Derrida, who articulated a practice of decentering texts (Landow 1992). Because the user chooses the various links through cyberspace, the reading experience is presumed to be a model of an active audience and of a blurring of lines between producer/consumer of information. In the age of mechanical reproduction, Benjamin famously wrote, everyone can potentially be an author in some form. In the age of electronic reproduction, the opportunities have multiplied perhaps a millionfold: editors of newspapers can always choose not to publish one's letter; today, one can create a home page and post with a greater amount of freedom.

Numerous articles have addressed the question of the emerging internet culture in relation to liberal democratic practices, and in particular, the question of the role of the internet in the construction, or perhaps reconceptualization, of the public sphere. Mark Poster writes that the virtual communities constitute a new form of pubic sphere; with a technology that decenters so much of what modern political and cultural discourse represents, cyberspace does have a potential to reconfigure democracy. The technology "appears to promote a decentraliziation of discourse," to "threaten the state (unmonitorable conversations)" and " mock at private property (the infinite reproducibility of information)" (Poster 1997, 210). Poster is admittedly cautious, because many of the issues being raised are framed within older political and social practices: the United States is very concerned with issues of encryption, and in the governmental desires to control, "the question of the potential for new forms of social space to empower individuals in new ways is foreclosed in favor of preserving existing relations of force as they are embodied in the state" (Poster 1997, 202). (Poster speaks suspiciously of government fears of terrorism, and it is now clear that the events of September 11 are being used to justify an even greater governmental control of cyberspace.) James A. Knapp (1997) reviews electronic messages at newsgroups as an electronic public sphere, which again fulfills Benjamin's arguments. What is apparent to Knapp is that the lines between what is personal and what is political are no longer clear in cyberspace. The authority manifest in these messages is gained from personal experience rather than rationalized discourse in the Enlightenment sense; this description resembles the work of several scholars on daytime television talk shows, most notably the work of Jane Shattuc (1997). There is a decentering of information prioritization: Usenet messages and their discourse, Knapp argues, are "more or less given the same status. The report of a Clinton-sanctioned secret task force that is killing Americans who 'had been doing too much talking' is given the same format as a critique of *The Bell Curve* or a discussion of Armenian history" (1997, 188). Knapp, like Poster, is aware that there are important

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questions to resolve in this new public space, most crucially the question of how the discourse of the essay, rooted in personal experience, can affect direct political discourse and change (Knapp 1997).

In a similar manner, though not in explicitly in terms of the public sphere, Blumler and Gurevitch (2001) argue that the interactivity of new media such as the internet thus possesses a vulnerable potential to improve public communications, which will enrich democratic practice, provided that proper policies are implemented to encourage these enrichments. Despite reports of complaints about the internet as a communications medium, Blumler and Gurevitch argue that the internet will produce some important changes in public communication. The net "allows direct communication between citizens and politicians. . . . Politicians could be expected to offer more solid back-up to their policy ideas" (p. 6).

The direct interaction of politician to citizen, Blumler and Gurevitch note, changes the role of the news media in reporting political discourse, hopefully in positive ways. Howard Tumber (2001), in an essay appearing in the same issue of *Information, Communication, and Society* as Blumler and Gurevitch's, considers the internet in terms of the perceived crisis of contemporary journalism, affected by the changes in technology, and equally important, the changes in the economics of news gathering in the deregulatory, post-Reagan/Thatcher era. Reacting to the decreasing distinction between quality and tabloid media, which has produced a scandal-based media culture (that I argue was able to emerge because of political decisions to deregulate the broadcasting industry, at least in the United States), politicians have engaged in more direct communication with the public via cyberspace—this is, in fact, what O. J. Simpson attempted to do with his web interview at askoj.com in July 2000. Indeed, even the criminal justice system has begun to circumvent the usual journalistic intermediary, as Florida webcast a criminal trial in 1999 (Tumber 2001). Information can be directly transmitted in an unfiltered manner without being processed by a third party; Tumber mentions that the Starr report on the Clinton-Whitewater scandal was first made public via the internet. Advocates for public journalism, Tumber reports, claim a possible hope for the greater democraticization of information, thus leading to a more informed citizenry (or so the supporters of public journalism argue—its critics question this, as Tumber also notes). The gatekeeper metaphor, the advocates of public journalism argue, must be done away with. The role of the journalist is not to decide what is newsworthy but to function as a guide for citizens seeking information. This is, in fact, one of the stated goals of one Simpson web-site author, in an interview with Cecil Greek (1996):

> The Public has the right to know what's going on, and in a rare coincidence, it really wants to know it. Many people get a chance to learn a lot about

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> [the] American legal system. . . . But there are three necessary conditions for it to actually happen.
>
> 1. The information must be made available.
> 2. It must be well-organized.
> 3. People must be told where to find the information.
>
> My pages help to create these three conditions . . . people deserve to live in a friendly information environment. (p. 72)

It is worth remembering that the internet itself is the by-product of the military industrial complex's interest in securing control of weapons systems in the event of a communist strike: the decentralized network was established not for the democratic flow of information but for the careful management of power. It is also worth remembering that there are great disparities that still exist in terms of access to the web (Blumler and Gurevitch [2001] see this as a key policy issue that needs to be resolved for a more democratic cyberspace). Finally, it is obvious that cyberspace, like broadcasting, is being conceived as a marketplace, and corporations have made serious inroads on the superhighway. As Moulthrop (1993) points out, "the era of the garage-born computer messiah has passed. Directly or indirectly, most development of hardware and software depends on heavily capitalized multinational companies that do a thriving business with the defense establishment" (p. 92). Like all mass media before it, the internet has emerged from the capitalist system and must be seen as an instrument of this system. This is why we must be cautious in our prophecies of the implications of a decentered and democratic social order. In looking at several Simpson web pages, I hope to illustrate some of the more interesting aspects of knowledge production that can suggest some possibilities.

The Simpson web pages: Timelines and the question of narrative. In Vincent Bugliosi's *Outrage* (1996), the former prosecutor, who gained fame as a result of another famous multiple homicide-by-stabbing, the Manson case, bashed the deplorable way the Simpson case was presented to the jury. The fact of Simpson's guilt, like that of the cops in the King case, is obvious to Bugliosi; the failures of the prosecutors in both cases are that a cohesive argument was not sustained and the defense's counterarguments, which should have been trashed as fantasy, were not sufficiently challenged. Facts do not win cases; however, the *presentation* of facts leads to a successful prosecution, and Bugliosi must understand this, since he was, after all, able to convict Charles Manson as the mastermind of the Tate-LaBianca murders (actually committed by Manson's followers) based on such unusual pieces of evidence as the Beatles' White Album, which supposedly

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paralleled the Book of Revelations. The Simpson web sites illustrate the relationship narrative has to the judicial process. This is true of Simpson discourse more generally, regardless of medium, but there are some important qualities that are fairly unique to the web sites. First, many of these sites have authors who are not recognized as authorities in the same way as the authors of the majority of Simpson books (even those authors who make the case for reasonable doubt). It is, simply, easier to get one's information public than it was in the earlier days of JFK assassination buff publishing, for example.[5] Secondly, in the hypertext environment, the ability to link and cull data from various sources suggests an interconnectedness that has been described as a kind of paranoia that is literalized in some of the sites' narratives about what happened the night of the murders and what events before that night are relevant to the murders.

One useful way of understanding these discourses is to consider the role of timelines in the various web sites. The timeline was a crucial narrative in both court cases, and there was much dispute as to the exact time of deaths (the coroner who performed the autopsies emptied Nicole's stomach contents without testing them, and thus, eliminated the possibility of pinpointing the exact time of death). The authors of the various web sites engage in a careful selection of witness testimony to support their various claims. The key defense witness was Robert Heidstra, whose testimony suggested that the killings took place near 10:30 to 10:40, which contradicted the prosecution timeline that placed the murders near 10:15. Other important variable information includes the time Kaelin heard the loud thump that he first thought to be an earthquake; the testimony of Jill Shively, who supposedly saw Simpson driving from the crime scene and toward his home; and witness Pablo Fenjives, whose claims that he heard the "plaintive wail" of a dog at 10:15 was the basis for the prosecution timeline. Fenjives' testimony is generally discredited, with one web site's observing that Clark's use of Fenjives was deceitful since Fenjives claimed to have heard the barking for more than an hour, when this could not possibly be the case.[6] The general trend in the web sites I reviewed for this article suggests that the murders took place between 10:30 and 10:40, and the primary question to be resolved is whether or not Simpson had enough time to commit the murders and be spotted by limo driver Allan Park at 10:55. Another point of confusion is the thumping Kaelin heard: what caused it, and what time he heard it. Bob August's "The Real O. J. Simpson" web site claims that the thumping was, in fact, caused by Simpson as he jumped the fence to gain access to his property without being seen by the limo driver.[7] W. Schreck's "The Framing of O. J. Simpson" site points out that Kaelin's testimony as to the time of the thumping altered from the criminal to the civil trial; with corroboration by Rachel Ferrara, with whom Kaelin was speaking at the time

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of the "earthquake," the time, so Schreck argues, is 10:40, not 10:50, as Kaelin testifies at the civil trial. This is crucial since, as one author linked to Schreck's site claims, Simpson could not be killing Nicole and Ron and making the thumping (this author believes Simpson to be guilty and that the LAPD covered for him by planting evidence).[8]

These brief examples illustrate the way that key facts are interpreted, ignored, evaluated, and placed in a complex hypertext environment. Cyberspace is highly intertextual, as web pages are constructed of texts and images from a range of media sources. A single page will contain material from perhaps a dozen other pages in cyberspace. They may even borrow from other narrative forms; Bob August's page "The Story" recounts the events of the murders in made-for-television-drama fashion, including speculative thoughts by Simpson that provide motive and opportunity for him to commit the murders.[9] The authors of these sites use information that is generally available in other media—court transcripts, Simpson books, videotapes of the criminal trial—but the hypertext environment provides a means for the authors to weave a multilayered narrative that weaves multiple voices into a hypertext tapestry. While an individual site author's point of view is usually very clear, placing this narrative in cyberspace allows site visitors to create their own links and generate their own experience of information about the case, including a variety of narratives about what really happened. Thus, the reader's understanding of the case will be produced partly by the way he or she uses the links available. This allows for a possibility of multivoiced discourses beyond the limited range of the police-journalist dynamic.

August's site is particularly useful in examining the ways that other sites are subject to critical analysis. In a page entitled "Other Theories," August lists eight different theories about the case, takes excerpts from some and summarizes others, then points out the logical and factual flaws in each one. A brief excerpt follows, examining only one such theory (see Figure 1); true to the spirit of hypertext, I have cut and pasted this section directly from August's page, with his kind permission. The text in italics is August's words.

August provides links to sites that have published these theories, allowing one to go to the original sources to get more information and context.[10] One can, for example, link to Schreck's site for the full article on the Bruno Magli shoes or the "O. J. Simpson: A Different View" site for a discussion of evidence corruption and contamination, which August dismisses with a few sentences.

Through the linking of hypertexts, a dialogue is constructed as the various web-page builders engage in close analysis of various sources, both official and unofficial, including one another's sites. Schreck's site closely deconstructs Marcia Clark's trial book to show her willingness to distort

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Impossible Theory...

OJ SIMPSON COMMITS MURDER
THE LADA & LAPD COVER FOR HIM

This whole theory is filled with so many inaccurate facts that any conclusions drawn except that Simpson was the killer are unsupportable. For example...

10:25
Alan Park arrives at Rockingham five minutes before Simpson expected the limousine. The location previously occupied by the Bronco is vacant.

Simpson did not expect the limousine to take him to the airport, to arrive before 10:45 PM..

As Goldman collapses against the "garden" fence adjoining the neighbors property, the killer stands by the gate—he isn't going to leave this one alive. Taking the knife in his left hand, the KILLER removes his right glove—discarding it against the gate fence. The glove falls into the low plantings.
Stepping forward, the Killer pokes Goldman with the knife; he then uses his bare right hand to check for a pulse on Goldman's neck—blood from the neck wound attaches to the Killer's fingers.

Here is an example of trying to dream up what happened based on an inaccurate fact. The glove that was recovered from the Bundy murder scene was the left hand glove not the right hand glove.

10:45
Killer drives south, away from Rockingham. He drives to a nearby location where he disposes of the knife, shoes and blood stained clothes. Without noticing, Killer drops a glove on the floor of the Bronco.

Total unsupported speculation.

Working under the assumption that Detective Mark Fuhrman did NOT tamper with any evidence, consider:
Only someone who knew of the noise, and had access to the glove, could have placed it behind Kato's room. To do so,
he would need the opportunity—Vannatter had five minutes when his exact location is unknown.
he would need access to the glove—if it was on the floor of the Bronco, they would have it. This provides a second benefit—theglove would NOT be at Bundy, and thus not have been seen by the
four officers who were in a position to see it.
he might leave evidence of what he did—evidence unique to an LAPD detective.
That evidence might be observed—even documented—by another Detective.

Once again pure speculation based on inaccurate facts. Fuhrman found out about the noise behind Kaelin's room from his questioning of Kaelin. Following this lead he discovered the glove and then reported to Vannatter. The glove was not planted by anyone. Not by Fuhrman, not by Vannatter, not by anyone. It was dropped there by the killer Simpson.

The rest of this theory is just as inaccurate as the previous examples... Good bye theory.

FIGURE 1. Excerpt from "Other Theories."

SOURCE: The Real O.J., http://www.bobaugust.com/

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testimony such as Fenjives's and to put LAPD Detective Mark Fuhrman on the stand knowing he would perjure himself. Author Jasper Garrison criticizes the lies Fuhrman published in his book.[11] As I indicated, the web pages themselves link to one another and criticize one another. I have given an example from August's site, which itself has been strongly criticized. At "Kato is the Real Killer," the author sets up a link to a particular page in August's site to allow August's own words to speak for him and then offers a detailed critique of August. An excerpt from this site is an illustration of the ways evidence and testimony are selected to fashion a narrative.

August, following civil trial attorney Daniel Petrocelli's book *Triumph of Justice* (1999), summarizes the Goldman lawyer's explanation of Simpson's "accomplice," his daughter Arnelle, whom Simpson is alleged to have called to tell her to wash her father's blood-stained clothes (Petrocelli theorizes that Arnelle was a coconspirator, while August casts her as accessory after the fact). The evidence August presents is the fact that Simpson called Kaelin from a pay phone at LAX and told him to set the alarm, giving Kaelin the code (Simpson had never given it to him prior to that night), that Kaelin did so, and that when detectives were led into Simpson's house by Arnelle, no alarms went off and no one saw anybody disable the system. Since Arnelle Simpson told several lies, August concludes that Arnelle went into the house as per her father's call (a call which remains undocumented), took care of the clothes, and forgot to reset the alarm. The problem the "Kato" author has with this is as follows:

> By calling Kaelin to turn on the alarm, he was putting an unnecessary obstacle in the path of Arnelle, who he wanted to enter the house later. Sure, Arnelle knew the code herself and could get past the alarm—but why even bother with it? And a few minutes of thought would have allowed "OJ" to notice that, by calling Kaelin and giving him the code, he risked putting a "glitch" in his alibi if Kaelin should turn on the alarm, only to have Arnelle turn it off and forget to turn it on again.[12]

The author then proceeds to insult August personally, a common occurrence at the various web pages and one that is more prevalent at newsgroup message postings such as alt.fan.oj-simpson. This particular piece of testimony is a further illustration of the modes of interpretation offered at the sites. The author of "O. J. Commits Murder/LAPD Cover for Him," broken down by August, speculates that it was lead detective Vanatter who entered the Bronco, turned out the light bulb, smeared the bloody glove on the dashboard, entered Simpson's estate (somehow disabling the alarm), and planted the most famous piece of evidence in the trial. The author of "O. J. Simpson: A Different View" sees the evidence that someone was inside Simpson's house between the time of Kaelin's

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setting the alarm and the entry of the LAPD detectives as proof of reasonable doubt, simply stating, contra August, that it was not Arnelle who entered the house and disabled the alarm.[13] The author of the "Kato is the Real Killer" site simply dismisses the question by denying one part of the problem: Kaelin never set the alarm, and that is why the police entered the house without setting off an alarm.[14] The participants in this complex, decentered hypertext, Greek (1996) argues, can be understood in the context of sociological terms *accounts* and *game frameworks*, in which information is discussed and argued to explain the various known facts and in which participants role play the parts of detective, lawyer, journalist, and so on. While Greek mentions that the content of popular discourse to be found on the internet is similar to that one can find in everyday life, the form of the internet, allowing users to publish their commentaries available to audiences all over, creates an interesting network connected by a decentered set of links and strands. This is not the conventional model of media organization in which information disseminates from a small number of institutions to large numbers of people. It is true that Simpson's acquittal cannot be attributed to the web sites that proclaimed his innocence, but these web sites do offer a model of critical thinking that gives the public another layer of discourse through which it may speak its views. This development has run concurrently with the explosion of tabloid media and talk shows, which also have altered the public sphere (Shattuc 1997). The very notion of what constitutes important political discourse comes under serious re-evaluation in contemporary society. That said, there are some rather bizarre effects of this interconnected quality of cyberspace, and some of the Simpson pages illustrate what Stuart Moulthrop (1993) calls "creative paranoia."

Creative parnoia and the Simpson conspiracies. Borrowing from novelist Thomas Pynchon, Moulthrop, observing that the technics of hypertext foregrounds the reader's ability to make connections, writes that affiliation and correspondence are fundamental concepts in hypertext. This opens us, the hypertext readers, to the possibility that we will become "anxious interpreters convinced that all structures are mysteriously organized against us" (Moulthrop 1993, 82). This paranoia, paradoxically, leads to an even greater emphasis on authority as the reader becomes aware that while he or she is able to choose many paths, the hypertext is "hardly indeterminate. The text gestures towards openness . . . but then swiftly forecloses. Some options are available but not others, and someone clearly did the defining long before you began interacting" (Moulthrop 1993, 82). Moulthrop suggests that hypertext readers "may actually be more concerned with prior authority and design than are readers of conventional writing." Because we are given the opportunity,

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via the link, we become more obsessed. Moulthrop suggests that since we are "dealing with vast and nebulous information networks . . . a certain 'creative paranoia' may be a definite asset" (pp. 82–83). The hypertext reader "will always be reminded of her situation in a fabric of power arrangements. Her ability to build and pursue links should encourage her to subject those arrangements to inquiry" (p. 83).

The Simpson conspiracy pages provide an interesting illustration of this. The first page of "The Framing of O. J. Simpson" situates the case in the context of the Lindbergh case, the Sheppard case, and Watergate, claiming that the previous cases "contain and reveal a pattern of American justice in the twentith [sic] century . . . which comes together in the *Simpson Matter*." The "coming together" seems to concern the role of the media in these cases: in the Lindbergh case, kidnapping became a capital offense because of the excessive media attention, and in the Sheppard case, television showed its newly emerging influence by convicting Dr. Sam Sheppard before he was officially tried. But then the Watergate case presents a somewhat different situation, as the news media eventually helped bring forth true facts about corruption in the Nixon administration—here, Schreck writes that the LAPD and the LA district attorney "resemble the Nixon Whitehouse [sic]." It is not clear to me still what the unifying pattern is in these four cases, though I have looked at all available links provided by Schreck.

Schreck provides a list of guest articles from other sources that document various problems of evidence: an analysis of the shoes, questions about the sudden appearance of blood on Simpson's socks, and a detailed discussion from the pathfinder crime forum (now long gone from the internet) concerning the contamination of blood evidence (this is the post that August quickly dismisses on his "other theories" page). While the various analyses of evidence indicate a willingness to scan and critique various data, to seek out authority and agency, what is most striking about Schreck's main page is the "new scenario," wherein Ron Goldman becomes the primary target and the killer is a hit man hired by his stepmother's first husband, a former attorney convicted of drug trafficking by none other than prosecutor-turned-author Scott Turow. In this scenario, Marvin Glass, resentful about losing his wife to Fred Goldman, plots out an elaborate revenge scheme to kill Fred Goldman's son: the murders are an anniversary present planned during a period of at least five years. Glass's coincidental arrival in Los Angeles for his daughter's junior high graduation provides, in Schreck's view, "the perfect cover, and opportunity, for him to enjoy—first hand—Fred's sudden and brutal loss." Schreck then lists a series of what we really know about Goldman's father and Goldman's associates who have been brutally murdered. Kimberly Goldman's admission that she did not know what her father did for a

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living is taken to cast a suspicious light on Goldman himself. Factoids about Michael Nigg, a friend of Kim Goldman who got Ron a job at the Mezzaluna restaurant, are strung together in an effort to suggest that the Colombian drug trade was a factor in Ron's death. Schreck later introduces a Mafia drug connection. Cleverly, the fact that the prosecutors did not pursue these various pieces of information is interpreted by Schreck as proof of a cover-up, a refusal to accept any alternative explanation than Simpson-as-killer, though Schreck presents no specific evidence to support the scenario he describes. Rather, he pulls a series of disparate facts surrounding the Goldman family—suggesting that the six-degrees-of-separation concept is a means of proving Glass's involvement in Goldman's death—to construct his revenge scenario.[15]

Another conspiracy example is offered at a web site called Policenet, which appears to be a site about law enforcement and at which citizens can learn information about crime statistics (links are provided to federal agencies) and how to work with local police. There is a features page and one of the articles authored by one A. G. Coleman, called "The O. J. Simpson Affair: More and Better Conspiracy Theories." At times, Coleman cites the theories of another Simpson buff regarding particular scenarios, and it is also hard to tell if Coleman is stringing these theories together or merely reciting them. The threads that are pulled together are rather far reaching, beginning with the drug-war theories that were floated by the defense through the media.[16] Coleman reports on the importance of Faye Resnick's drug problems, theorizing that she may have stolen a key from Nicole (it was reported missing, though most who believe Simpson to be guilty claim either that Simpson himself stole it or that the missing key is coincidence) and helped the people to whom she owed money into the house for a robbery, and the murders were a case of bad luck for the victims to be around (Resnick is to have assured her accomplices the house would be empty, trying desperately to get Nicole out of the house for a few days). Or, Coleman suggests, Resnick was a snitch for the Drug Enforcement Agency, and what was about to go down was a major bust that got screwed up. Thus, there is an official conspiracy.

A key fact that is a popular one cited by such theorists was popularized by Joseph Bosco (1996) in his trial book *A Problem of Evidence*. Bosco reports that at 10:30, a call was placed to 9-1-1 asking if the police had heard about a double murder on the West Side of Los Angeles (the Simpson-Goldman murders are the only such murders that night in west Los Angeles; Bosco 1996). Coleman suggests that this is a hint that there is a "frame-up or cover-up at a level much higher than the LAPD" possible and acknowledges its appeal to "devoted conspiracy theorists." One week following the murders, Coleman writes, the *Los Angeles Times* "publishes an interview with FBI Director, Louis J. Freeh, in which he says the

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turf war between the FBI and the DEA is over and promises greater cooperation between the two agencies to avoid future misunderstandings in undercover operations." Evidently, such a circumstance is not coincidence to devoted conspiracy theorists. Furthermore, Coleman reports that there may be evidence that some VIP was inside Nicole's house at the time of the murders and that this evidence was removed by the LAPD: the presence of the VIP accounts for several delays by law enforcement officials, including sending the forensic team to Simpson's house before the crime scene and not contacting the coroner for an unusually long period of time. Such a scenario means very high-up people, and Coleman suggests then-president Bill Clinton:

> Accusers say his administration masterminds all recent unnatural disasters. Simpson plays golf with the President at Del Mar, California, three weeks before the murders. . . . Knowing what we now know about the President's fund raising habits, does Simpson make a political donation, and what is the quid pro quo? Only a week later, Simpson orders his assistant, Cathy Randa, to purchase the cheap disguise. . . . The Simpson affair pushes Whitewater off the front page for months.[17]

This is plausible to those who see the suicide of Vince Foster, the plane crash of Ron Brown, the disaster of TWA 800, the incidents at Waco, and the Oklahoma City bombing as conspiracies from above (evidently, the Oklahoma City bombing took place the same day that Clinton's former lover Gennifer Flowers' book was published).

There are more connections that are made regarding the murders, including a connection to the Manson case. Simpson's recent attendance at a charity dinner at which the honorees were Israeli first lady Leah Rabin and former Egyptian president Sadat's widow Jehan is evidence of the motive for neofascists to get him, and/or it is related to the explanation for the Manson murders—Helter Skelter, the race war Manson attempted to ignite with the killings. Manson was influenced by scientology, an offshoot of a religious group whose Riverside, California, lodge "tried to start a race war in Los Angeles, in the 1960s, by directing psychic energy towards the Watts area." Marcia Clark's second husband was a scientologist, and her first husband, who was shot and paralyzed by a scientology minister, is a professional backgammon player who "gambled at the same clubs frequented by Simpson and undoubtedly knew him. Another nightclub operator, Brett Cantor, was murdered a year previous to the Bundy incident, in a manner nearly identical to the murders of Nicole and Ron. Nicole and her crowd frequented Cantor's club and Ron once worked for him." These are strange connections that seemingly suggest "another murderer duplicating his or her own work at Bundy."[18] The

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connections are reminiscent of the popular internet game, Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon. As a final point to mention, Coleman, perhaps anticipating criticism (or aware of the criticisms of these various theories he is reporting), claims that such criticism of the official story is commonplace and that the internet is a tool that can be used to quash it: "There are now on the internet persons, possibly organized cults, perhaps even auto responding, mock-bot engines, that denigrate individuals who disagree" with the official explanation. "Hackers recently uncloaked the president of a major Hollywood record company . . . posting over 7000 messages to various newsgroups on a variety of subjects."

Conclusions: The Simpson web and citizenship. The web discourse surrounding the Simpson case, though more than ten years old, is still a very tangled one. There are many more web sites I wish I had room to discuss, but it is necessary at this point to make some concluding remarks about the Simpson internet discourse and its relation to the model of crime news production described in the first part of this essay. First, the presence of these web pages, which attempt to look critically at official discourse and mainstream media accounts of the Simpson case, suggests that a Gramscian-based media theory holds much value in understanding the ways the social order is maintained. None of these sites has been given any recognizable significance within the mainstream media, especially those sites that find Simpson innocent, and there have been hardly any meaningful changes to the United States criminal justice system as a result of the weight of these sites. As I have mentioned before, it frequently takes unusual circumstances for the public—to say nothing of the mainstream media—to challenge the authorities that dominate crime news dissemination, and Simspon's celebrity status provided one such circumstance.[19] Nevertheless, the ability of information to be quickly disseminated via cyberspace in a networked fashion likely will make it more difficult for law enforcement agencies to maintain control of crime knowledge, even as they clearly will use the internet for that purpose.

Second, as the authority of official sources is challenged, web-site authors get their opportunities to assert their own agencies. Frequently, their own experiences are used to assert their authority, and the medium allows them means to publish their ideas and analyses directly, without having the intermediaries of publishers and editors. A useful example is that of Jasper Garrison, a Vietnam veteran who has written a book called *Iago in Brentwood*, that casts Furhman, the real killer, as a longtime racist and facist whose hatred of Simpson goes back to Simpson's work in made-for-television films. The book is only available directly from Smartfellowspress.com, and visitors have the option of purchasing a copy (the cost helps keep the site open), reading most of the chapters online, or

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downloading the entire book as a series of .pdf files. I found the link from another web site, not a partisan one but one that collected various kinds of Simpson-related links; the open cyberspace gives Garrison a chance of being recognized, even if no major or even small press would be interested in publishing his ideas.

Thirdly, cyberspace is hardly a level playing field. Many Simpson pages have links to other sites that no longer exist, and what is commonly found on search engines are archives to "official" media sites from news outlets Court TV and CNN. Although the medium gives the opportunity for everyone to become an author, a manipulator, in Hans Magnus Enzensberger's terms, the emphasis on cyberspace as marketplace may reduce the site builders to the status of ineffectual amateurs much the way ham radio operators had become a generation earlier (Enzensberger 1974). Toby Miller, in an editorial for this journal published in 2000, argued that "expansion of entertainment conglomerates in the internet will not . . . end the technical capacity of Web users to make their own sites, but it will minimize their significance" (Miller 2000, 132). Worse, a postmodern landscape with no hierarchies of information is a double-edged sword: it may be able to expose power relations that determine news content, but it may also permit those power relations to exist by denying their importance in a postmodernist landscape. It permits those in power to engage in fantastic discourses with greater chances of success, as the defense lawyers for the cops who beat Rodney King demonstrated.

The Simpson case brought numerous social problems to light along gender, race, and even class lines. The case had it all, many observers said, frequently to justify their employers' extensive coverage of the case. This made it more difficult for law enforcement agencies to control information effectively. The internet provided a significant outlet for those who wished to follow and analyze the case as it unfolded, an outlet in which there were multiple authors speaking in multiple voices that were not limited to the official versions. They implicitly illustrate that knowledge is a function of productive forces, and while many site authors do claim to know "the" truth about the murders, their engagement with one another and with official sites demonstrates the complex ways knowledge is produced. Miller's editorial called for the use of internet to increase citizenship: "the citizen is intersubjective, keen to link her life with others in solidarity as well as conflict" (Miller 2000, 133). The site authors I have visited have a range of interests politically, and they have used cyberspace to create links that have led to both solidarity and conflict. It may be argued that all this cyberspace devoted to the killings of two people in west Los Angeles does not exemplify citizenship as outlined by Miller, but I would argue that there are numerous political issues surrounding the Simpson case (something the mainstream media used to

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justify its own coverage, remember) and that the site authors speak frequently on the subjects of domestic violence and police abuse that were frequently pitted against one another in the mainstream. This suggests to me more than a strong possibility for greater citizenship in cyberspace, for greater interest in how information is produced and who produces it.

Notes

1. http://www.fair.org.

2. See Chibnall (1981) for an observation on changes that occurred in the police-journalist relationship in the United Kingdom from the postwar period to the late sixties and early seventies. While crime reporting has long been a "deeply entrenched and conservative bastion of Traditional Fleet Street reporting," in more recent times, younger, university-educated journalists have been more openly political and critical of police (Chibnall 1981, 76–77).

3. Individuals, Ericson, Baranek, and Chan argue, are not so rigid into one role. Consumers, for example, also report crimes to police (and sometimes to news media, i.e., the local "consumer watchdog" reporter), and as I will show, police also function as news workers thinking in terms established by journalistic practice.

4. See Barak (1994) for his discussion of how two sitcoms (*Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*) reflect economic changes during the previous two decades while news media are characterized as "taking the lead" on President Clinton's attempt to lift the formal ban on homosexuals in the military (meaning, for Barak, editorials that supported this attempt).

5. Another web site author interviewed by Greek explains his interest in providing Simpson information to the public in similar terms: he didn't believe it necessary for people to pay for transcripts (as many were), and believing he had received many benefits from others on the net, felt that "spending less than an hour a day to make the transcripts freely available . . . would be an appropriate way to repay the many benefits I've derived from the efforts of others" (Greek 1996, 73).

6. http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5244/time0002.html. June 5, 2002.

7. http://www.bobaugust.net/, May 15, 2002. Since I last extensively reviewed this site, August has changed his URL to http://www.bobaugust.com.

8. http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5244/nobel002.html. June 5, 2002.

9. http://www.bobaugust.net/story.htm, May 15, 2002.

10. August's site has not been updated for some time, and a check I made in May 2005 shows that some of the links on this page are no longer available.

11. http://www.smartfellowspress.com/iago/appendix.html, May 15, 2002.

12. http://www.angelfire.com/extreme3/ojisinnocent/index.html, June 5, 2002.

13. http://web2.airmail.net/marjo/bosco.htm. June 3, 2002.

14. http://www.angelfire.com/extreme3/ojisinnocent/index.html, June 5, 2002. For those who are wondering, the author cites pages from Marc Eliot's book (1995), based on interviews with Kaelin, to show that Nicole was emotionally dependent on Kaelin and would frequently knock on his door at all hours and ask to talk to him about her personal problems. Because he owed her rent money,

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Kaelin was dependent on her and powerless to refuse her requests. "If being consistently awakened and forced to listen to someone emotionally dumping on you isn't enough to arouse a murderous hatred, I'd like to know what is."

15. http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5244.

16. For a detailed look at how the mainstream media characterized the defense theories as "floating," in comparison to the presentations of hard facts by the prosecution, see Hunt (1999).

17. http://www.policenet.com/ojcons.htm, June 3, 2002.

18. Quoted from http://www.policenet.com/ojcons.htm.

19. At one point in my research, I had considered a comparison between the media coverage of the Simpson trial and that of the trial of Colin Ferguson, the "Long Island Railrod gunman" who massacred nearly a dozen people on a commuter train in New York in December 1993. There are to this date no web sites devoted to Ferguson, a Jamaican immigrant of no celebrity status.

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