1 In Pursuit of Entertainment: The Beginnings of a Megaspectacle

17 June 1994

Four days after the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman, the Los Angeles Police Department established O.J. Simpson as their prime suspect. Inconsistencies in his statements to law officials and first DNA testing results constituted grounds for an arrest warrant, and Simpson was subsequently ordered to turn himself in; a rare privilege in a homicide investigation that immediately alludes to the sway of the celebrity suspect. The warrant noted special circumstances, implying that due to the brutality of the crimes, O.J. Simpson was eligible for the death penalty if the prosecution chose to seek it. Additionally, he would be denied bail and incarcerated for at least the duration of the trial. Despite these rather poor prospects and O.J. Simpson's extensive financial resources, the LAPD permitted their prime suspect to surrender on essentially his own terms, solely relying on the positive public image and reputation of the accused and his attorney as warranty for their full cooperation.

Contrary to what Lead Detectives Tom Lange and Philip Vannatter presumed on the day of O.J. Simpson's scheduled arrest, however, their prime suspect was not located at his Rockingham mansion. With the help of close friends, his defense team, and acquaintances at the LAPD, Simpson had escaped to an undisclosed hideaway in San Fernando Valley, where lawyers, medical personnel, and other confidantes supervised him. This secret hideout was later revealed to be Robert Kardashian's home who had been one of Simpson's closest friends for over 25 years. When the celebrity suspect failed to appear at the police station at the time agreed, a police patrol car was dispatched to Kardashian's estate where it was soon discovered that Simpson and another one of his close friends, Al Cowlings, had disappeared from the premises in Cowlings' white Ford Bronco. Subsequently, the LAPD issued an all-points bulletin (APB[1]) in search for the fugitives, and three separate parties com-

1 An APB is a broadcast issued by a law enforcement agency to its personnel in search of dangerous or missing persons and contains important information to facilitate the capture of the suspect(s).

menced public relations work: the LAPD, the District Attorney's Office led by Gil Garcetti, and Simpson's legal defense team consisting of Robert Shapiro and Robert Kardashian at that point. Consecutively and respectively, at 2 p.m., 3 p.m., and 5 p.m., each group convened a press conference to comment on O.J. Simpson's flight.

1.1 The Press Conference as Performance Stage

For Daniel Boorstin, the press conference constitutes a notable example of what he termed a 'pseudo-event' (Boorstin 11). The media scholar defines it as a happening that is planned and incited for a specific purpose and with the intention to be reported, reproduced, and mediated (11). Due to its ambiguous "relation to the underlying reality of the situation" (11), the pseudo-event offers different angles of interpretation and assessment, which are the source of its magnetism and "the test of being 'informed'" (40). Key components of power and persuasion include the set-up of and props in the conference room, one's positioning within the set-up, and most importantly, the interlocutor's linguistic implications. The following analysis of the three press conferences held in the wake of O.J. Simpson's disappearance on June 17, 1994, illustrates said ambiguity and obviates that pseudo-events, staged on occasion of one and the same event (Simpson's getaway), can project inherently different narratives and realities to the audience.

Press Conference: Los Angeles Police Department

The first person to address O.J. Simpson's disappearance was then LAPD Commander David Gascon, who took the stage at Parker Center, the Police Department's headquarters, at approximately the same time the APB was issued in search of Cowlings and Simpson. As will be shown in the following, in contrast to District Attorney Gil Garcetti and defense attorney Robert Shapiro, Gascon contributed a human dimension to a highly ritualized and formalized media event. When he stepped to the podium in the center of the conference room, for instance, Gascon appeared noticeably afflicted as he skimmed through his notes, taking several deep breaths and slightly biting his lip before addressing the room. Despite these signs of insecurity, the Commander's rhetoric reflected specific tactics and strategic maneuvers to position the LAPD in the most favorable light possible and absolve the Department of any wrongdoing. Gascon commenced his statements with:

> This morning, detectives from the Los Angeles Police Department, after an exhaustive investigation, which included interviews of dozens of witnesses, a thorough examination and analysis of the physical evidence, both here and in Chicago, sought and obtained a warrant for the arrest of O.J. Simpson, charging him with

> the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Lyle Goldman. ("OJ Simpson a Fugitive," 00:56)[2]

Immediately, the Commander's verbal dexterity and precision protruded. He used the first seconds of public anticipation to incorporate as much information as possible into the first sentence without being interrupted or questioned and to accentuate the capabilities of the Los Angeles Police Department. Gascon made use of commendable adjectives such as 'exhaustive' and 'thorough' to underscore the police's tireless efforts in the case and supported the praise with specific examples: detectives interrogated "dozens of witnesses" and examined and analyzed evidence both in and out of state. He concluded that O.J. Simpson was subsequently charged on the basis of this careful preparatory work. Gascon brought this information further into effect by pausing for several seconds while looking down on his notes. He then continued with: "Mr. Simpson, in agreement with his attorney, was scheduled to surrender this morning to the Los Angeles Police Department. Initially, that was 11 o'clock. It then became 11:45. Mr. Simpson has not appeared. The Los Angeles Police Department, right now, is actively searching for Mr. Simpson" (01:29-2:00). This time, Gascon conscientiously faced the reporters in the room, letting his gaze pan from left to right. The revelation that O.J. Simpson was a fugitive "right now" caused a collective gasp by the reporters in the room (02:01). In a sense, David Gascon set the stage for the TV drama and national obsession that soon became the O.J. Simpson trial. Neither Simpson nor the police followed typical procedure, hence, standard rules seemed abrogated. Later, with the Bronco Chase already underway, media personality Larry King commented on live TV: "There's no rulebook on this because this hasn't happened [before]" ("OJ Simpson On the Run in 1994," 3:09).

Rhetorically, Gascon further shifted the blame for the suspect's disappearance from the LAPD onto O.J. Simpson and his attorney by accentuating the police's accommodation in extending the deadline for surrender. It is also noteworthy that Gascon repeatedly spoke of "Mr. Simpson," using the formal address to suggest a respectful attitude towards the high-profile suspect. However, despite pointing out the presumption of innocence, which is at the core of the American justice system, Gascon continuously depicted O.J. Simpson as a guilty and dangerous individual as the press conference progressed. He stressed that the athlete was the only culprit the police believed to be responsible for murdering Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. Fear evoking comments such as "Mr. Simpson is out there somewhere" ("OJ Simpson a Fugitive," 07:05), "Mr. Simpson is a wanted murder suspect, two counts of murder, a terrible crime" (10:31) as well as the Commander's repeated labelling of him as a "wanted murder suspect," who was at large, added severity

2 Spelling errors in video titles have not been corrected or highlighted for the purpose of easy traceability in the Works Cited register.

to the situation and evoked fear of the unknown, bringing further attention to the story. Media scholars note that the element of genuine, unscripted chance and concomitant unpredictability are fundamental to reality television's program structure and narrative pleasure (see e.g., Huff 128, Haralovich and Trosset 82). Although the presumed invariability of a story increases in tandem with the viewers' knowledge about the respective events, a reality-based show is never marked by complete certainty due to the possible intervention of chance. Narrative pleasure is then derived from the need and desire to know an outcome and the resolution of a story (82). Neal Gabler speaks of an "Entertainment Revolution" (Gabler 56), which commenced in the US in the 19th century as a countermovement to the hegemony of typography (56), to describe Americans' increasing desire for entertainment, calling it an instinct, a rebellion, and even a form of empowerment (56).

While David Gascon painted the vivid picture of a violent criminal on the loose on the one hand, he refused to provide any unequivocal information relating to the investigation on the other hand. He clarified right from the beginning that "[a]s to the evidence, we will not be making specific comments relative to the evidence" ("OJ Simpson a Fugitive," 03:48-03:54) as well as "the rumors that have floated around all week, including some today, we don't acknowledge or address any of those rumors" (04:08-04:17). When a reporter asked him why Simpson had not been monitored around the clock, the answer was: "We're not going to make any comments relative to the investigative efforts itself or anything else surrounding what has occurred since the beginning" (06:01). The same elusive answer was given when a journalist addressed the possibility of a second suspect. David Gascon refused to "dignify any of the rumors" (09:33), although he had previously claimed that O.J. Simpson was the only suspect. Thus, the press conference, which was partly supposed to answer the public's questions, de facto did the opposite. The certitude that the spokesperson was not allowed to or simply could not address certain topics was irrelevant. Instead, it encouraged the audience to conjecture their own version of events. Simpson's erratic behavior and the police's refusal to offer any concrete information resulted in a blending and blurring of facts and speculations. In addition, Gascon's partly invective comments towards the media's behavior concerning the coverage of the events up to that point could also be interpreted as provocative. For instance, when asked whether Simpson's disappearance had been made known to other agencies of law enforcement, Gascon jokingly answered: "We will make sure everybody knows about it. Or you will make sure of it" (11:32). His comment indicates that the police were aware of the role of the media in this case even before the criminal trial began. One of Gascon's last comments almost served as a teaser for the legal reality show in-the-making: "I doubt that there is anyone around this country that has been monitoring television, radio, or newspapers, that doesn't know at this point that something's going on in this case" (08:50-08:59).

During the police press conference, Gascon also shortly addressed two other topics that would be key issues in the Simpson matter: the suspect's celebrity status and a general public indifference towards the two murder victims. For one, the spokesperson denied any influence of the athlete's popularity on the investigation and police behavior, claiming that "[t]here is no preferential treatment, [and] there has not been any preferential treatment" (08:05). The mere fact that this concern had to be refuted indicates in and of itself that the general idea of treating a celebrity suspect differently to any other suspect was not as improbable as it seemingly sounded to the police. He also offered his condolences to the Brown and Goldman family (04:55-05:08) in front of the camera as a reminder that the unfolding search for Simpson had been induced by a crime and the death of two people.

Press Conference: District Attorney's Office

While Commander David Gascon was still talking to the media, police officers drove to different locations in Los Angeles that were presumed to be of importance to O.J. Simpson. News helicopters went up in the air searching the L.A. area for a white Ford Bronco, which was revealed to be the getaway car. Meanwhile, District Attorney Gil Garcetti prepared for his own press conference, exemplifying Daniel Boorstin's observation that "[p]seudo-events spawn other pseudo-events in geometric progression" (Boorstin 33). Supported by prosecutors Marcia Clark and David Conn, Gil Garcetti took the stage at around 3 p.m. The District Attorney's anger stood in stark contrast to the hesitant and more apologetic approach of David Gascon. His rhetoric reflected the scolding tone in his voice. For instance, when he spoke, Garcetti addressed the community and an unspecified 'you,' directly calling on, if not threatening, the audience listening to him: "If you in any way are assisting Mr. Simpson in avoiding justice, Mr. Simpson is a fugitive of justice right now. And if you assist him in any way, you are committing a felony" (*O.J.: Made in America*, disc 2, 21:02-21:18). Garcetti pronounced every word distinctly, with particular emphasis on 'Mr. Simpson,' 'fugitive,' and 'justice,' shifting the blame for Simpson's disappearance onto the fugitive and his enablers. He continued to utilize the personal pronoun 'you' in an accusatorial manner throughout his speech: "Think about it. And I'll guarantee *you* that if there is evidence establishing that *you*'ve assisted Mr. Simpson in any way to avoid his arrest, *you* will be prosecuted as a felon" ("OJ Simpson 1994 Media Coverage Compilation Part 1," 0:26-0:39, emphasis added). Calling the process "the literal inscription of television's own intimate vision" (Langer 362), John Langer states that direct address is a common, interactive tool used on television to create a "pseudo-gemeinschaft" (363) to summon viewers and express urgency and directness, allowing the speaker to bridge the spatial distance between themselves and the audience. In Garcetti's case, the immediate broadcasting of the press conference further aided his verbal cues in strengthening the direct and personal link with the spectators.

The District Attorney's press conference is also an example of how the *mise-en-scène*, i.e., the arrangement of a scenery, carries and transfers meaning in seemingly spontaneously arranged non-fictional events. For instance, Garcetti stood behind a podium in the middle of the room. The American flag, the most important symbol of the nation's power and greatness, was positioned to the left of the District Attorney. To his right, the seal of the DA's Office, with the Scales of Justice displayed at the center of the emblem, accentuated the nation's aspiration for law and order. Taking the room's arrangement into consideration, Garcetti's titling of Simpson as a "fugitive of justice" became even more powerful and symbolic, evoking images of Hollywood's beloved "char chase epic […] with outlaws on the run and the forces of law and order in hot pursuit" (Kellner 96). The District Attorney continuously characterized Simpson as an irrational, unpredictable, and dangerous person. Admittedly, it could be argued that Simpson did in fact behave in the aforementioned manner and was responsible for the equal reaction to his actions, but the press conference substantially contributed to a fear-imbued atmosphere, for captivating elements such as murder, violence, and flight from the police made and make for good entertainment. Similarities to American cinema classics can also possibly explain why the seriousness of Simpson's disappearance was so easily lost in the tabloidization of the events. Witnessing the raw emotions from members of an apparently overwhelmed Police Department as well as an outraged District Attorney added fuel to the disseminating drama and laid the groundwork for the dramatized reality show the subsequent trial turned into. Although in an attempt to diffuse it, Garcetti also acknowledged the suspect's larger-than-life status, unknowingly providing a quotable title for the Simpson story when he spoke of "the falling of an American hero:"

> Now, you can tell that I am a little upset, and I am upset. This is a very serious case. Many of us, perhaps, had empathy to some extent. We saw, perhaps, the falling of an American hero. To some extent, I viewed Mr. Simpson in the same way. But let's remember we have two innocent people who have been brutally killed […]. It's a serious case. ("OJ Simpson 1994 Media Coverage Compilation Part 1," 0:41-1:28)

Garcetti's statement implied that O.J. Simpson was no despicable murderer whom every American citizen could easily hate. He was an idol whose pedestal began to break down in front of the eyes of millions. In this regard, Simpson's story was not only one of American upward mobility but equally one of downward mobility and the transience of fame. As Chris Rojek notes, "[d]escent and falling are twinned with ascent and rising" (Rojek 79). After being uplifted by public adulation, a hero's failure and downfall is equitably desired by the public, for fame and wealth are "a source of envy as well as approval" (79).

Press Conference: O.J. Simpson's Defense Team

After the Los Angeles Police Department and the DA's Office, Simpson's defense team decided to likewise hold a press conference to offer their perspective on the events. Robert Shapiro took the stage at around 5:00 p.m. in a briefing room of his Century City office building. He began his speech with a plea, directed at O.J. Simpson: "First to…ah…O.J. Wherever you are, for the sake of your family, for the sake of your children, please surrender immediately. Surrender to any law enforcement official at any police station, but please do it immediately" ("Robert Shapiro Ask OJ Simpson to Surrender at Press Conference," 00:00-00:13). Shapiro used the broadcast as a way to address his client personally, which, similarly to Gil Garcetti's direct approach, emphasizes that television oftentimes serves as a communication tool and mediator and not, as is often argued, as a passive transmitter of information.

Shortly after his explanation of the arrangement with the LAPD for Simpson's self-surrender, Shapiro introduced a man to the viewers and listeners whose last name would ironically become the epitome of reality television in the early 2000s: Robert Kardashian. Without further clarification on why he decided to share Simpson's note with the public, Kardashian began reading a letter to the reporters and television audience. According to the lawyer, Simpson had put his thoughts on paper prior to disappearing. Before analyzing Kardashian's presentation during the press conference, it is worth taking a closer look at the original letter as it was composed by O.J. Simpson. His presumed suicide note supports the assumption that most of the public's information about the celebrity was manipulated or fabricated and actively circulated by Simpson's friends and the media to depict the athlete in the most positive light, illustrating the split between the private and public self of a celebrity.

The Suicide Note

Before disappearing from Robert Kardashian's house, O.J. Simpson wrote a total of three letters: one to his mother, one to his children, and one to the public. The latter, which became known as Simpson's 'suicide note' in the media, was addressed "to whom it may concern." It was written in block letters and numerous words were crossed out illegibly, which gave the letter a chaotic layout. First, O.J. Simpson established that he had not been involved in the murders in Brentwood. He proclaimed eternal love for his ex-wife despite their differences and struggles. According to the athlete, the press exaggerated their reports about the couple's relationship for dramatic effect. Reminiscent of an award acceptance speech, Simpson then thanked his friends for supporting him throughout his career before looking back on his life and praising his mother for teaching him the values of helpfulness and compassion. In the last paragraphs, Simpson pled with the public, and particularly with the press, to respect his children's privacy. The letter was signed "Peace and love, O.J.," whereby the letter O in his name had been turned into a smiley face.

For the purpose of this study, it was focal to establish how the media and Simpson's friends used the presumed suicide note to uphold a particular image about the writer. Notably, the letter was corrected and edited on numerous occasions: first by Robert Kardashian as he read it out lead during the press conference, and later by the media, who cited revised excerpts in their articles and reports. As a matter of fact, the letter was cluttered with orthographic mistakes as well as grammatical and punctuation errors. While it can be argued that some of these mistakes were made because of the extraneous circumstances in which the note was conceived, other errors point to O.J. Simpson's secret illiteracy that was rarely revealed or discussed in the media. The three-page letter contained over 66 errors, starting with the first sentence where Simpson omitted the two words "I had" as he wrote "First everyone understand nothing to do with Nicole's murder" (Toobin 97).[3] In addition, there are numerous misspellings, sometimes repeatedly, which suggest that there was indeed a concrete lack of knowledge on O.J. Simpson's part on how to write certain words. The most prominent examples include "allways" (97), "thair" (101) instead of "their," "tottaly" (101), "dispite" (97), "privicy" (98) and the repeated misspelling of "recently" as "recitly" (97) and "recite" (99). Furthermore, Simpson transposed numerous letters and wrote "spaerate" (97) instead of "separate," "beleive" (98) instead of "believe," and "confrim" (101) instead of "confirm."

Further indicators of Simpson's seemingly lacking mastery of the English language can be found upon closer analysis of the content. When he looked back on his life, the athlete wondered: "I think of my life and feel I'v done most of the right things. so why do I end up like this. [...] I treated people the way I wanted to be treated I'v always tryed to be up + helpful so why is this happening?" (101). Indicative of his suicidal thoughts, Simpson worried about the consequences of public humiliation: "I can't go on, no matter what the outcome people will look and point. I can't take that. I can't subject my children to that. This way they can move on and go on with thair lives" (101). The consistent and salient omission of punctuation marks seems trivial at first. At closer inspection, however, it reveals that O.J. Simpson was not as educated as he pretended to be. With a certain degree of literacy comes an automation of punctuation ("Automatismus der Zeichensetzung," Grzesik 185), i.e., one is inclined to use commas, periods, or question marks because punctuation is an integral part of one's textual production. Commonly, a writer consciously discerns if the correct mark is missing and, in most cases, chooses to add the respective mark to

3 A transcript of an unedited version of O.J. Simpson's suicide note is currently unavailable online. Merely images of the letter exist for analysis. To establish consistency, this study quotes Jeffrey Toobin's *The Run of His Life*, where the suicide note has been reprinted in its unedited form. Toobin's account has been collated with the available image sources for verification purposes.

ensure accuracy. O.J. Simpson's repeated neglect concerning punctuation, however, suggests that there was no automation of punctuation.

The occasional incorrect syntax of his sentences as well as the inappropriate use of verb tenses further confirms the assumption that his linguistic level was average or below. Recounting the 1989 domestic violence incident at Rockingham, Simpson wrote: "I took the heat New Years 1989 because that what I was suppose to do I did not plea no contest for any other reason but to protect our privicy and was advise it would end the press hype" (Toobin 98). Correctly, the sentence would read: "I plead 'no contest' for no other reason than to protect our privacy." In other cases, Simpson employed incorrect verb tenses. For instance, he utilized the present tense in "Ahmad I never stop being proud of you" (99) instead of the appropriate present perfect form. As mentioned in an example above, Simpson also used an erroneous past participle of the verb "to try," writing "I'v always tryed" (101) instead of "I've always tried." There are also noticeable idiomatic mistakes and indicators that Simpson's overall linguistic knowledge was on a vernacular level. In his letter, the athlete spoke of "a few downs + ups" (98) in his relationship with Nicole[4] instead of using the correct idiom "ups and downs." On numerous occasions, Simpson wrote in vernacular: He was "suppose to" (98) take the blame for the 1989 New Year's incident, and addressing his friend Marcus, Simpson let him know that "[he] got a great lady" (99).

The concealment of all these textual weaknesses can be understood as an indicator for a broad, inherently American cultural phenomenon: an obsession with fame and celebrity and the subsequent elevation of these celebrities to flawless, larger-than-life figures. Prominent scholars in the field of Celebrity Studies go as far as to say that "[c]elebrity culture has become [such] a central, dominant, and structuring force in American life" (Douglas and McDonnell 1) that "our society has become 'celebritized' or 'celebrified'" (1). This observation does, however, not only apply to ordinary people worshipping somebody they consider an idol but equally to celebrities themselves whose public image dictates their feeling of self-worth. In this aspect, O.J. Simpson is also a noteworthy example: despite wanting to clarify that he had no involvement in the murders in Brentwood, his main concern in the letter was to protect his reputation. It meant so much to him that, at least on paper, he preferred to die rather than be humiliated in front of the world.

4 The occasional use of the murder victim's surname *sans* last name is meant to facilitate the distinction between the last name of the defendant and his ex-wife, who kept the Simpson name after their divorce. This approach also helps condense sentences to advance readability. The use of only the surname is not indicative of my personal position towards the respective person. This disclaimer applies to all first name-references throughout this study.

Defense Press Conference: Robert Kardashian

As indicated above, O.J. Simpson was not the only one who tried to retain his untainted image in the public eye. Robert Kardashian's behavior during the press conference indicates that he was pursuing the same goal. Simpson and Kardashian had been good friends and business partners for over twenty years, which could explain why the latter chose to edit the letter as he read it out loud to the media. The first sentence of the note, incomplete in the original, was completed in Kardashian's speech: "First, everyone understand, I had nothing to do with Nicole's murder" ("OJ kardashian reads letter," 00:18-00:25). Apart from adding the two missing words "I had" to this first and inarguably most important sentence, Kardashian looked up and emphasized the term 'nothing' in particular, giving a voice to his friend's writing. As he continued reading the letter, Kardashian spoke slowly and distinctly, as if to ensure he was not misunderstood. Throughout his six-minute appearance, the attorney relied on conscious glances around the room to emphasize certain passages in Simpson's letter. For example, he accentuated the assertion that "Nicole and I [O.J. Simpson] had a great relationship" (01:21) or highlighted Simpson's, and possibly his own, incomprehension of the situation: "I can't believe what is being said" (02:06) and "So why do I end up like this?" (4:13). In other instances, his look was of accusatory nature, particularly visible when he read the passage "Let my kids live in peace *from you*, *the press*" (04:41, emphasis added). It is ironic that a photographer was standing slightly behind, yet still next to Kardashian and was taking pictures of the suicide note while the familiar clicks of the camera shutter transmitted through the microphones.

Repeatedly, Kardashian added missing words or dissolved compositions which contributed to a more literate impression of Simpson than the original letter allows to assume. Examples include the statements "We were not right for each other" (0:45), "I have felt like a battered husband" (5:40), or "Unlike what has been written in the press" (1:17). But despite his attempts to masquerade the flaws in Simpson's verbalism, the lawyer repeatedly floundered as he spoke. His difficulties with deciphering Simpson's handwriting and the overall content of the letter became particularly apparent when he tried to convey the passage about the 1989 New Year's incident and Simpson's subsequent response to charges of domestic violence: "I took the heat New Year's 1989 because that's what I was supposed to do. I did not plead (…) no contest for any other reason" (1:34-1:45). Kardashian was noticeably confused by his friend's sentence structure. Thus, in this case, he decided to read the passage as it was in the attempt not to draw excessive attention to it. In other instances, he automatically, possibly unintentionally, finished or edited sentences the way he would have uttered them. In those cases, he either paused reading or openly acknowledged that his statement was not a quote: "Paula, what can I say, you are special, I'm sorry, I'm not going to have…we're not going to have our chance" (03:45-03:56). Shortly thereafter, Kardashian apologized for misreading the letter's content:

"Nicole and I had a good life together. All this press talk about a rocky relationship was no more than that…than…I'm sorry…no more than what every long-term relationship experiences" (05:13-05:28).

Arguably, instead of achieving the intended favorable portrayal of O.J. Simpson, Robert Kardashian's personal idiosyncrasy contributed to a more alienated reception of the letter. The monotone delivery of his friend's absolution distracted from the message itself and the attorney's representation of the caring athlete was particularly inauthentic when Kardashian, speaking in the first person, unemotionally thanked the people Simpson mentioned in the letter: "My golfing buddies, […] thanks for the fun" (03:00). "Skip and Cathy, I love you guys" (03:30), or "Marguerite, […] we had some fun" (03:39). Oftentimes, Robert Kardashian's serious and reserved manner stood in too stark a contrast to Simpson's tone in the letter, which brought an imbalance and surreal effect to the presentation. In one passage, O.J. Simpson thanked Al Cowlings for his friendship, writing: "A.C., man, thanks for being in my life" (Toobin 99). People familiar with O.J. Simpson could vividly imagine how the athlete would have delivered this sentence, i.e., in a lighthearted and easygoing way. Kardashian, with his almost robotic voice and worn-out and worried face, seemed strangely out of place. In addition, four minutes into his speech, a distracting pager echoed in the room, yet Kardashian kept reading ("OJ kardashian reads letter," 04:30). The incident further accentuated the odd nature of the press conference.

In hindsight, the question remains why O.J. Simpson's defense lawyers decided to publish a presumed suicide letter without having confirmation that their client and friend was dead. Combined with Simpson's disappearance, the press conference was highly incriminating of the football star and predominantly achieved the opposite of the desired effect to accentuate the athlete's human and impeccable side. However, the introduction of a possible suicide, in particular the suicide of a celebrity, added another captivating element to the unfolding story.

1.2 From Chase to Arrest: The Media Coverage of 17 June 1994

The Slow-Speed Chase

At around 6:25 p.m., Los Angeles residents Chris Thomas and his girlfriend Kathy Ferrigno spotted a 1993 white Ford Bronco with the California license plate 3DHY503 on the freeway lane next to them and recognized Simpson's friend Al Cowlings in the driver's seat. Only minutes after Thomas placed a phone call to police, Deputy Larry Pool spotted the white Ford Bronco and was soon joined by other policemen in hesitant pursuit of O.J. Simpson and Al Cowlings. As was standard procedure in media circles, reporters listened in on police scanners in hope of getting first-hand information and possibly a head start to their competitors. With the announcement of the sighting over the radio, the major networks' helicopters commenced their own

hunt for the fugitives. The first to locate the car was former KCBS pilot Bob Tur. He informed the executives at CBS who immediately interrupted and replaced their evening program—a scripted drama—with the Bronco Chase. The network's *CBS News: Special Report* was hosted by Dan Rather and Connie Chung who combined their own commentary with transmissions from the helicopter in order to "get a flavor of what's going on" ("OJ Simpson Chase Live 6/17/94," 06:02). According to John Fiske, "of the ten occasions before the O.J. chase on which the networks suspended schedules to carry live events, nine were presidential […] and the tenth was a natural disaster, an earthquake in Los Angeles" (Fiske 263–64). Thus, there were implications to interrupting regular scheduling for 'soft' news, which, according to Boorstin, encompass "sensational local reporting" (Boorstin 23). The reconfiguration of a Los Angeles-based car chase as national news galvanized the public into action as it invocated a threatening state of disequilibrium in all of the US by implying urgency and severity.

While it was quickly confirmed that Al Cowlings was driving the Bronco, neither the police nor the reporters in the helicopters could initially corroborate that O.J. Simpson was inside the car as well. Media coverage reflected this uncertainty and the lack of definite information served as a captivating cliffhanger, forcing the audience to keep watching for updates. The focus of the early reports, however, quickly shifted to the possibly imminent danger Simpson posed to himself, his friend Al Cowlings, the police, and the public. Pilot Bob Tur transmitted from the helicopter: "They [law enforcement] believe he's suicidal and very dangerous. Unfortunately, at this time, it does not appear as though the driver is slowing down or complying with the orders of the officers" (*O.J.: Made in Americ*a, disc 3, 28:49). Again, the element of unpredictability, which is a key characteristic of reality television, was highlighted for dramatic effect. During the *Special Report*, Dan Rather commented: "[T]he police believe O.J. Simpson could be, may be, might be in that car with a gun and possibly has the gun to his head. None of this confirmed" ("OJ Simpson Chase Live 6/17/94," 00:26-00:35). Rather's choice of modal auxiliaries also linguistically illustrates the impermanence of information that characterized the early stages of the car chase.

After 22 minutes of CBS' exclusive coverage, the other major networks likewise interrupted their scheduled programming for O.J. Simpson. As Paul Thaler notes on the decision: "Sacrificed in the rush to coverage, ABC's *20/20* pushed aside its featured newsmagazine piece on flesh-eating bacteria; CNN broke from *Larry King Live*; NBC pulled the plug on the fifth game of the National Basketball Association championship series" (Thaler, *Spectacle* 5) for a "runaway van on a Los Angeles freeway" (5). This decision cost the networks an estimated $7 million in advertising revenue, but in hindsight, Simpson's story yielded even higher profits for the producers (5). Almost instantly, the unfolding car chase became ubiquitous, "and with the disappearance of all regular networking programming, viewers were left with the dreamlike reality that nothing else existed anywhere" (9). This phenomenon is exemplary of how

"discourses are suborned by sudden, accelerated, sustained blasts of media messages—visual and in print—that rapidly enforce the narrative and truncate alternative opinion" (Morrison xvi). In the realm of Media and Communication Studies, this process is also known as "gatekeeping" (Selby and Cowdery 140), during which news editors exert their power to select and reject stories for coverage. Even the medial titling of Simpson's flight and the police's pursuit as a 'chase' is arguably fallacious, for the pursuit rarely exceeded the 30-mile-per-hour (50 km/h) mark and was more comparable to a VIP escort. Bob Tur commented from his helicopter: "The game plan is really being conducted by Mr. Simpson at this point. And it's very much like when the President travels down […] a freeway" (*O.J.: Made in America*, disc 2, 29:41-29:49). Considering O.J. Simpson was allowed to comfortably make his way back to Rockingham after a long drive on L.A.'s freeways, it could be argued that he received preferential treatment despite LAPD Commander David Gascon's denial. Tur was likewise startled by these circumstances: "This was not usual police behavior. If O.J. Simpson were black, that […] wouldn't have happened. He'd be on the ground, getting clubbed. But because he transcended race and color to this exalted status of celebrity, he got a motorcade" (30:13-30:35). News anchor Peter Jennings also commented live on TV: "This is not a chase; this is basically an accompaniment" (30:36). Sociologist Chris Rojek ascribes the preferential treatment of famous personalities in industrialized societies to the substitution of traditional religious systems with the apparatus of celebrity. He argues that "[i]n secular society, the sacred loses its connotation with organized religious belief and becomes attached to mass media-celebrities who become objects of cult worship" (Rojek 53). Celebrities are metonymic with heroes and gods and praised as such. This process of glorification confirms that societies operate on what Orrin Klapp termed "social types." In 1954, the sociologist published the article "Heroes, Villains and Fools, As Agents of Social Control" in the American Sociological Review, where he demonstrated how categorizations are used "as a means of control, operating to classify [a person] invidiously, treat him in certain ways, exert pressures, and call down various kinds of punishment or reward upon him" (Klapp 57). The necessity for typification arises from a need to understand problematic behavior "by reducing [others] to simple concepts, familiar to all and indicating proper modes of response" (57). In contrast to stereotypes which, according to Klapp, are used to create distance between people, social types offer insight into the functions of communally produced images, as they "supply important information about people as individuals and also make more visible a kind of connective tissue in society–an informal network of roles and linkages that, however subtle, is highly important for anyone who wishes to enter those worlds" (Klapp, *Changing American Character* 20).

Drawing on Klapp's train of thought, the discussion of the Bronco Chase media coverage, the immediate events preceding it as well as O.J. Simpson's typing as a heroic figure who was "set apart, placed on a pedestal, rewarded with special priv-

ileges, and regarded with an awe that verges on veneration" (Klapp 60), reveal that Americans "could not reconcile Simpson's image of likeability, imprinted by thousands of media moments" (Thaler, *Spectacle* 5), with the possibility that he had murdered two people in cold blood.[5] Cultural Studies scholar Susan Bordo, who has analyzed the Simpson case as a cultural image in her 1997 publication *Twilight Zones*, also concedes that her initial response to the accusations against the sports celebrity was far from scholarly:

> I recall my first reaction when […] it became clear that O.J. Simpson might be involved. It couldn't be, I thought. He's much too *beautiful*. […] Images of O.J.'s face—smiling, friendly, and impossibly handsome—flashed before me, images that refused to admit, to cohere with, certain loathsome scripts. During the Bronco chase I began to wonder. But if it were true—if O.J. actually *did* commit these horrible crimes—it surely must have come from a chaos and despair so deep as to befit a classic tragic hero. […] My sympathies were with him. I knew nothing about Nicole or Ron; they were an abstraction for me, still faceless victims. But I knew O.J., I believed. (Bordo 95, emphasis original)

In the field of Psychology, this phenomenon is known as the 'Halo Effect.' It describes "the tendency to overgeneralize the evaluation of an individual's positive or negative qualities" (Rasmussen 458), leading to the belief that if an individual possesses a few positive traits, they[6] must conclusively possess "mostly positive qualities in all areas of functioning" (458). According to Boorstin, the sentiment of knowing a celebrity was amplified in the wake of the "Graphic Revolution" (Boorstin 45) in the late 19th century and "[m]an's ability to make, preserve, transmit, and disseminate precise images" (13). As a result, an image came to stand for "a studiously crafted personality profile of an individual, institution, corporation, product, or service" (186). O.J. Simpson was thus treated according to his prevailing image of a trustworthy celebrity and less as an average murder suspect by the police, the media, and the public.

On June 17, 1994, news anchors and helicopter reporters still had very little information to go on, and so they simply summarized what they saw or speculated about what had happened and what was possibly going to happen next in the Simpson story. They described seemingly trivial things, e.g., that cars came to a halt on the sides of the freeway "to get a glimpse of one of the icons of American sports history, O.J. Simpson, on this tragic June day" ("(1994) OJ Chase As it Happened – From

5 This assumption is further corroborated by the fact that O.J. Simpson was never charged with resisting arrest in the aftermath of the Bronco Chase on June 17, 1994.

6 As the English language currently lacks a gender-neutral third-person singular personal pronoun, I employ the pronoun 'they,' which has been officially recognized by several key bodies such as the Associated Press to also refer to an individual person.

my VHS Archives," 12:12). In his account of the events, Paul Thaler summarized the 'Bronco experience' as follows:

> Absent were the devastating pictures we had come to expect from television's breaking story. Instead, ordinary images filled the screen—inexplicably jarring for their plainness, and riveting to about 95 million American viewers, more than the number who watched the first man walk on the moon some 25 years before. (Thaler, *Spectacle* 6)

Journalist Jeffrey Toobin claims that these "informative nondescriptions" (Toobin 106) can be attributed to the fact that most of the news anchors who were reporting on the Chase were "completely ignorant of Los Angeles freeway topography. Their narratives, accordingly, reflected only bewilderment at the scene unfolding before them" (106). Despite the "emptiness of information" (Thaler, *Spectacle* 9), however, the immediacy of transmission established an instantaneous bond between the news anchors and their audience because "[b]roadcast news exists in the same moment as its audience, and so it has no more certainty about the future than they do. Instead, it accompanies them through life, allowing each individual to define their personal present as part of a general phenomenon: the contemporary" (Ellis 75). At one point, for instance, it was falsely assumed and publicly speculated that somebody was sitting next to Al Cowlings on the front passenger seat ("(1994) OJ Chase As it Happened – From my VHS Archives," 30:48), which later turned out to be inaccurate. Occasionally, the news anchors quoted from Simpson's suicide note that Robert Kardashian had made public during the evening press conference to continue their monologue (22:23). Even official sources such as police officer Bruce Ferrier, who called in to Fox 11 Live, could not provide any additional information on the current state of events (13:36-14:35). Nevertheless, the American public "stayed glued to the inaction" (Thaler, *Spectacle* 9). Four days after the freeway spectacle, *The Washington Post* reporter Howard Kurtz came to the conclusion that "[i]n the end, what gave the low speed chase its Hollywood-style urgency was not the monotonous pictures of the Simpson car but the unspoken recognition of what might happen" (Kurtz, *Washington Post*, 21 June 1994); an observation that was later confirmed by Thaler who argued that "[t]he power of TV images did not lie in the information that the medium conveyed, but rather in each viewer's interpretation. The chase was, simply, inscrutable, a puzzle to contemplate" (Thaler, *Spectacle* 9).

The monotony of the white Bronco driving on the freeway was leavened by desperate pleas from Simpson's friends who hoped to reach the football star via news radio. Their personal stories about the friendship with the athlete, combined with the occasional crying outburst ("(1994) OJ Chase As it Happened – From my VHS Archives," 7:35), added a highly emotional component to the otherwise unchanging scenery of a white car driving nowhere at moderate speed. One of the outspoken friends was Jim Hill who pleaded with the fugitives to turn themselves in:

> O.J., Al, if you're listening to me, if you can hear me, guys, please, please stop. If you can hear me, just turn on the emergency blinkers and just pull over to the side. I can't begin to tell you, O.J. and Al, how many people […] have called this station praying for you and wanting your safety. There are a lot of people who believe that if you two keep up with what you're doing right now, that the worst is going to happen. You do not want to be remembered as someone who ran from a bad situation. ("OJ Simpson Chase Live 6/17/94," 07:00-7:42)

Other friends such as sportscaster Al Michaels expressed a more somber view and publicly distanced themselves from the former football star:

> I think earlier in the week, all of us close to O.J. didn't believe that he had been involved in this. And now, I think there's a sense of resignation and has been for the last 24 hours. And we can't believe what's happening. There was nothing ever, ever, in the past that would indicate O.J. would be capable of doing what he is doing right now. (*O.J.: Made in America*, disc 2, 34:56-35:14)

Apart from O.J. Simpson's friends, self-proclaimed experts and "on-air therapists practicing pop psychology" (Kurtz, *Washington Post*, 21 June 1994) wanted to be heard or were asked to offer their opinion on the situation. Psychiatrist Dr. Tom Linden called in to Fox 11 Live, stressing the threat Simpson posed to society:

> Judging from other experiences with suicidal people, number one, he has to be taken very, very seriously. Number two, quite often, people who are suicidal, at that time, are also potentially homicidal. […] So he's not only a risk to himself at this moment, he is a risk to other people as well. ("(1994) OJ Chase As it Happened – From my VHS Archives," 23:26-24:16)

Moments after Dr. Linden's call to Fox News, Larry King at CNN interviewed a psychiatrist as well and asked Dr. Alfred Messer for an assessment of Linden's diagnose. Messer agreed with his colleague, then continued to reckon on live television that O.J. Simpson was possibly suffering from multiple personality disorder:

> I think Tom Linden has it just right. What he's describing, I think, is what we call a "dissociated state," where people act in one way […] and they behave in another and think in another. The end result of that […] is multiple personality disorder. And here, we have a more acute phase of that dissociated state. (27:00-27:22)

Another expert who commented on Simpson's state of mind and behavior was Dr. Michael Baden. He was a forensic pathologist who had been present at Robert Kardashian's home when O.J. Simpson disappeared. Working for the defense team, he emphasized Simpson's depressed and fragile state, saying his client required constant monitoring by physicians and psychiatrists. The conversation between Baden and Larry King took a surprising turn for a short moment when the pathologist mis-

understood King's question and involuntarily suggested that Simpson could have committed the murders. Larry King asked: "Could we, in fact, have O.J. being totally in an unreal world here and not accepting the fact that he may have done what he did?" Baden answered: "Sure. Sure, he was so depressed, and he's so upset that we were concerned that he was…could hurt himself" (38:44-38:58). Initially, it appears as if Baden admitted that his client could have killed Nicole and Ronald but had suppressed that memory for self-protection. What Baden meant, however, was that Simpson's defense team was worried about him committing suicide. Nevertheless, his answer offered a short and surprising moment of excitement for the TV audience.

It is noteworthy that the experts' psychological assessments of O.J. Simpson were rarely in his favor. Instead, their commentaries instilled fear in the viewers. The news anchors and reporters further enhanced that fear by pointing out that O.J. Simpson was armed. Larry King, for instance, who covered the Chase for CNN from Washington, enhanced his arguably unspectacular observations by repeatedly mentioning the weapon: "Police cars are in the left lane, [the driver is] in the lane right next to the left lane, and you see other traffic in the two right-hand lanes, and they're slowing down and moving over. […] O.J. is in the passenger seat with a gun" (00:26). Moments later, he continued: "The car is travelling at normal speed. The police reports that O.J. Simpson is in the passenger seat and apparently has a gun" (1:28-1:35). On Fox News, it was announced that O.J. Simpson "would not give himself up. He's in the back of the vehicle. He has a gun to his head, and he says he will hurt himself. He is demanding to be taken to his mother" (21:04-21:15). Annette Hill asserts that the constant updating of the audience is a basic communicative mode of news reporting that "provid[es] a source of reassurance and anxiety in equal measure" (Hill, *Restyling* 99), creating feelings of urgency and immediacy as well as the sensation of being fully immersed in the unfolding events.

The fact that O.J. Simpson's low-speed car chase took place in Los Angeles is also of major significance in understanding why so many Americans were interested in and moved by his story. Logistically speaking, "[h]ad the drama unfolded just about anywhere else, there might have been few aerial pictures. But live helicopter footage long ago became a TV news staple in Los Angeles" (Kurtz, *Washington Post*, 21 June 1994). The audience had access to continuous, uninterrupted coverage of the Chase on every major television network, which ultimately led to the anchors' and the public's infatuation with the story. In *Crimes of the Century*, criminologist Gilbert Geis and criminal defense attorney Leigh B. Bienen connote that many televised high-profile cases share certain common features such as the "nature of the offenders and victims" (Geis and Bienen 5), "details of the offense," and the geographic setting of the events (5). Evidently, most sensationalized and telelitigated criminal trials occur in the media-saturated cities of New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles (5). However, L.A. also offers symbolic meaning that elevates it to the center of tabloid justice.

The mythical city of angels is often called America's "promised land" (Thaler, *Spectacle* 8). It is the place where stars are born, and dreams come true. Hollywood, fame, and wealth immediately come to mind. Nowhere in the United States is the concentration of celebrities higher than in Los Angeles. It is the city where the American Dream seemingly becomes reality, where stories about the rise from rags-to-riches, i.e., O.J. Simpson's story, are told. It seems ironic that he fell from grace in the very city where he was once elevated to an American sports icon and national hero. In his own account of the case, Simpson's former agent Mike Gilbert described his client's unusual charisma: "People wanted to touch him, shake his hand; they felt he had some kind of magic to impart. O.J. was larger than life, bigger than celebrity. He represented success, and *hope*. He embodied the American Dream. He had, after all, transcended some pretty tough odds" (Gilbert 14, emphasis original). On television, psychiatrist Dr. Tom Linden explained the significance of heroic figures in society and how their failures negatively affect people's own self-perception:

> It's such a chaotic and sometimes crazy world, everybody needs heroes. And there are, I'm sure, millions of Americans who have looked to O.J. as a hero, and when a hero is in trouble, it's very, very hard to accept. And I think that's probably the feeling of a lot of people. ("(1994) OJ Chase As it Happened – From my VHS Archives," 29:34-30:00)

Indeed, O.J. Simpson's slow fall from grace was titled an 'American tragedy' from the very beginning and particularly during the spectacle of the Bronco Chase, although little facts about the murders were known at that point and Simpson had only been officially declared a suspect for less than 24 hours. However, calling the events a tragedy and predicting his certain downfall was a more captivating narrative than urging the public to keep an open mind and wait for new facts to arise. In a *New York Times* editorial from July 1994, Simpson's murder case was even compared to the great tragedies of world literature:

> All literature stands as evidence that the story of murder compels, and it compels most when the protagonist is seen to have toppled from on high. The fall of the mighty was a central theme of classical Greek tragedy and medieval morality plays, and it became the spine of Elizabethan tragedy. O.J. Simpson may or may not be a "hero" to individual citizens, but as one who was given great gifts and has been brought to a grim pass by either fate or frailty, he fits the fearsome pattern that lurks in our ancestral memory. ("Primal Curiosity," *NY Times*, 10 July 1994)

Bob Tur, the helicopter pilot who first spotted the Ford Bronco on the freeway, also expressed how torn he was between acknowledging the severity of the situation and profiting from the lucrative sensational news that Simpson's unfolding personal drama constituted:

> And this was the most conflicted I've ever been. The gravity of the murder, I mean, this is a double homicide, and this is a tragic story. Very few human beings fall as far as O.J. Simpson. […] [T]his is […] an epic fall. And I'm weighing the consequences of this with also the biggest news story like ever. (*O.J.: Made in America*, disc 2, 27:38-28:10)

The news anchors, of whom many knew O.J. Simpson in person, also repeatedly expressed their sadness and disbelief to their television audience. In most cases, there was noticeable sympathy for the accused. News caster Peter Jennings, who covered the Chase with Barbara Walters for ABC, tried to make sense of the events of the day: "This is just excruciatingly sad. Yes, indeed, tense, full of sadness. Sadness for the victims, for the children, who, of course, are also victims. And so sad [for] a man who has represented so much to Americans through his example" ("(1994) OJ Chase As it Happened – From my VHS Archives," 1:10:52-1:11:27). Moments later, he continued:

> These are scenes we've witnessed before, of course; we've seen hostage situations before, we've seen situations of people on the edges of buildings, on the edges of bridges. But what has made this so intimate for so many people in the country is because so many of us know this guy; either in person, as so many of us do at ABC, so many of us because we watched him over the years, either as a spokesman for Hertz or a football player or a sports commentator, and also because modern technology now has enabled us to be there for all of this time since the police first identified this vehicle several hours ago. (1:15:33-1:16:16)

Barbara Walters added her opinion by addressing the newly surfaced information about domestic violence in the Simpson household:

> Of course, what we have not known and could have no way of knowing is the difference between the public man with that gentle face and that […] lovely demeanor, and the private turmoil of this man and what has been described by their friends as a passionate tumultuous relationship, and it's very hard to reconcile the two parts of this man. (1:16:14-1:16:41)

Evidently, both average citizens who did not know O.J. Simpson personally as well as the athlete's friends and acquaintances alike attempted to make sense of the newly emerged facet of Simpson's character, one that stood in stark contrast to the public persona he had embodied throughout his career.

The Stand-Off

Shortly before 8 p.m., Al Cowlings left the San Diego Freeway at the Sunset Boulevard exit, indicating that he was headed towards Simpson's Rockingham home in Brentwood. As he reached the inner city, cars quickly moved out of the way as if to

encourage the fugitives to go on. The helicopter live feed transmitted the howling sirens of the police cars that were following Simpson and Cowlings from a safe distance ("(1994) OJ Chase As it Happened – From my VHS Archives," 48:39). Pedestrians stormed the streets, took off their t-shirts while waving and shouting at the passengers (47:30, 47:48). Hundreds of residents held up home-made signs that read "Go O.J.," "Go Juice Go," "We Love the Juice," and "Save the Juice" (1:14:21). Others climbed atop of their cars or gave interviews to reporters. People were even captured following the escort on their motorcycles (49:25) to witness "O.J.'s last run" (*O.J.: Made in America*, disc 2, 33:38). The uninterrupted coverage and surveillance atmosphere surrounding the events in Los Angeles intricately links the Chase and subsequent Simpson trial to the realm of reality television, for "[i]t invited the TV viewer to sit in the panoptic seat and experience the pleasure of the power to see" (Fiske 287). The aforementioned reactions and behavior of bystanders illustrate how the onlookers as voyeurs likewise doubled as exhibitionists by actively inserting themselves into the media coverage, using the raw and unedited nature of the event for their own proverbial fifteen minutes of fame. Thaler argues that "Simpson's name was only partly responsible—it was the television experience itself that had mobilized the masses. The freeway 'fans' wanted simply to be a part of the great chase" (Thaler, *Spectacle* 13). French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu likewise explains that the "popular audience" (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 24) is driven by a "deep-rooted demand for participation" (25) and "[t]he desire to enter into the game, identifying with the characters' joys and sufferings, worrying about their fate" (25). Fiske supports Bourdieu's assessment by explaining:

> Local people watching the chase on TV went to O.J.'s house to be there at the showdown, but took their portable TVs with them in the knowledge that the live event was not a substitute for the mediated one but a complement to it. On seeing themselves on their TVs, they waved to themselves, for postmodern people have no problem in being simultaneously and indistinguishably livepeople and mediapeople. (Fiske 292)

By coming to the scene of the spectacle and being captured on video, viewers turned from outside spectators to active participants in this unprecedented media event. In addition, Thaler argues that "[t]elevision's pictures of the Bronco Chase presented a mass cognitive dissonance—a disbelief that what we were seeing was actually occurring. We had to keep watching to confirm somehow that this scene, as it unfolded on TV, was, in fact, real" (Thaler, *Spectacle* 9). Engaging the audience and making them co-producers has contributed greatly to the growing success of the reality genre. Unlike with fictional formats, ordinary people can become part of a show without much effort, even if only for a single day or an episode. Almost poetically, Alan Blum elaborates:

> The city's saturation by stories of what is being missed and what is going on, evokes an uncanny collective sense of a continuous scene of action, exclusive and remote, always running elsewhere and other-where along the margins as a secret place, an urban utopia, arousing resentment and fascination, always functioning as a temptation for its restless souls. (Blum 285)

One man, e.g., who became known as 'Maury from Brooklyn,' talked his way into speaking with ABC anchor Peter Jennings on live television late in the evening on June 17. Speaking in vernacular, he claimed to have visual contact with O.J. Simpson, who, at that point, was presumed to be sitting inside the Bronco, already parked in the driveway at Rockingham. The prank call went on for about one and a half minutes, and Jennings seemed unaware that the caller was a fraud:

Jennings: *We have on the phone with us as well Robert Higgins, who lives in the neighborhood and is on the ground and can see inside the van. Mr. Higgins.*
Caller: *Ah, yeass, ah, how are you?*
Jennings: *Ah, just about as tense as you are, sir.*
Caller: *Oh, my Lord, this is quite tenses [sic].*
Jennings: *What can you see?*
Caller: *Ah, what I'm lookin' at right now is, I'm lookin' at the van, and I see O.J. kinda slouchin' down lookin' very very upset. Now lookee here, he look very upset. I don' know what he gon' be doin'. (Petchesky, 00:09-00:35)*

After Jennings thanked the caller for his contribution, 'Maury from Brooklyn' hung up with a last mocking "An' Bobba Bouey to y'all!" Seconds later, sportscaster Al Michaels informed Jennings that he had just conducted a "totally farcical call." Later that evening, as the Chase came to an end, Peter Jennings, sounding puzzled, wondered about the motives of people who had spent their day camping on the streets and outside of Simpson's house:

> And all along the route today, there has been this strange scene of people either cheering him [Simpson] on or perhaps just cheering the bizarreness of all this. […] Whether they're aware they're cheering a man who's been accused of multiple murder; whether they're cheering a man who […] was a role model for so many people in this country; or whether they are just simply participating in this drama. Probably all of the above. ("(1994) OJ Chase As it Happened – From my VHS Archives," 1:14:38-1:15:15)

It is noteworthy that when reporters addressed the spectacle that was taking place on the streets, they oftentimes deliberately pointed out the race of the gazers. Reporter Eric Spillmann, noticeably overwhelmed with the magnitude of the situation, described his observations as follows: "What I can see here…we've just turned the corner. It's…it's total chaos here. Motorcycles, black and white people running around.

Officers getting out of their cars" (51:50-52:00). Another reporter, Judy Muller, made a similar remark in her commentary: "We just heard from a producer […] the crowd is just growing, […] few hundred people now right outside the house and the police are moving in to try to control that. But he said, people from everywhere, all over the city and all races, and a lot of them holding up signs that are in support of O.J." (1:27:43-1:28:06). Their choice to emphasize the heterogeneity of the crowd indicates that even before Simpson's defense team introduced the race issue in the trial, people were aware of the possible societal divide his case could trigger in the country.

With dusk approaching, the Ford Bronco came to a halt in the driveway of Simpson's Rockingham estate at around 8:00 p.m. while news helicopters hovered above the scene. Numerous police cars were parked around 360 North Rockingham with their red lights flashing and sirens howling. Hundreds of spectators yelled, laughed, and waved at the news cameras to greet their fellow countrymen at home, adding further noise to the already farcical surroundings. Unbeknownst to Simpson and Cowlings, a SWAT team had arrived and taken position around the premises. As indicated above, uncertainty and vagueness marked the coverage and commentary pertaining to the Bronco Chase on the freeway due to the lack of any concrete information. Similarly, as the vehicle came to a halt, news anchors were obliged to complement the unchanging images on the TV screen with any content to justify further media coverage. Oftentimes, the hosts simply vocalized their own thoughts, being equally perplexed and confused, which established an even tighter bond between the spectators sharing the experience. For instance, even before the white Bronco came to a full stop in the driveway, a young black man ran towards the car and started yelling at and arguing with the driver, which an NBC news anchor acknowledged with a simple "Let's watch" (51:39). He then continued with: "I have a feeling that the car didn't just drive in there to sit there, that something is happening right now. I would suspect there is some kind of communication. […] Some kind of negotiation must be going on" (54:46-55:05).

Continuously, the news anchor described the images transmitted from the helicopter: "Okay, someone just got out of the vehicle approaching the front door; dressed in black. It looks like they entered the front of the house there" (1:00:01-1:00:13). Shortly after, the unidentified person walked back to the Bronco: "Wait, someone came back" (1:01:35). A reporter added: "Okay, that is the man that got out of the car. That presumably is Al Cowlings. From this aerial shot, it looked like that man is bulkier and stockier than O.J. Simpson. But they are pretty much…they're both big men" (1:02:02). At one point, Al Cowlings turned away from the Bronco and started gesturing towards something indefinite in the distance. He had detected an armed member of the SWAT unit who pointed his weapon at the Bronco. The news anchor remarked: "Okay, here's…ah…I believe a man is pleading to negotiate with people here. […] It's obviously very stressful down there from these pictures, as you can see. A very delicate situation taking place as we watch here" (1:04:18). Witnessing

the police negotiations from the aerial perspective of the helicopter cameras further illuminates the voyeuristic appeal of June 17. The news anchors and TV audience followed the events from a safe distance, literally and figuratively positioned above the observed, elevated to a superior status.

The Arrest

At 8:53 p.m., O.J. Simpson exited the vehicle. Holding family pictures in his hand, he stumbled towards the mansion's main entrance and collapsed into the arms of an officer. Shortly thereafter, he was handcuffed and placed in an unmarked vehicle. Since the news helicopters had been banned from using their powerful lights to illuminate the scene, the public never saw Simpson's 'defeat' on television. His final arrest became another piece of the puzzle that was left to the audience's imagination. Escorted by an eighteen-car caravan, he was then taken to his booking at Parker Center, ten hours overdue. O.J. Simpson's arrest did not, however, end the extensive news coverage of the day. In fact, news helicopters followed the police convoy in the dark, commentators baiting the TV audience by enigmatically calling Parker Center "an undisclosed location" ("June 17, 1994 10 pm newscast—KDFW," 07:01) where Simpson and Cowlings were being taken to. Shaky images of Los Angeles' luminous freeways filled the screen, once again creating an almost romantic cinematic picture of the city and heightening "the viewers' emotional connection to the screen" (Thaler, *Spectacle* 9). According to John Ellis, the quality of news "footage is hardly relevant: news will accept poor quality images and poor quality speakers if the immediacy and the importance of the events will justify them" (Ellis 98). Once the convoy disappeared behind the gates of Parker Center, the networks quickly commenced presenting recapitulations of the events to prolong the profitable coverage. Professed legal experts were called to present their post-chase analysis. Some of O.J. Simpson's friends and football colleagues also offered their reactions to the drama. Reporter Shaun Rabb summarized the day's events and concluded with: "An unbelievable day, simply an unbelievable story, and it still continues" ("June 17, 1994 10 pm newscast—KDFW," 7:39-7:41), preparing the audience for the next "episode" of the O.J. Simpson story.

First Arraignment

20 June 1994

In theater and on television, most plays and shows are marked by a balanced sequence of exposition, rising action, climax, and falling action, until the final denouement is presented to the audience, marking the end of the play or the show. This process is known as the "dramatic curve" (Pavis 119) and is a reliable structure to keep viewers interested in the respective story without either boring or overstimulating them. The O.J. Simpson case, I argue, is no different in its structure. The surreal and galvanizing Bronco Chase was the story's climax up to this point. Simpson's

arrest and subsequent arraignment[7] in the Los Angeles Municipal Court on June 20 represent the element of falling action in the dramatic curve.

Simpson's flight from the police had introduced the public to elements of commotion and unpredictability. Hence, viewers curiously tuned in to watch his arraignment which was broadcast live on television. The first unanticipated image was the mere sight of the defendant in a courtroom, facing Judge Patti Jo McKay and first-degree murder charges. The second astonishment came with a closer look at Simpson: there was no sign of the vital and good-humored O.J. the public expected to see. Consider, for instance, Jewelle Taylor Gibbs' description of Simpson before his arrest:

> O.J. wore the mantle of his celebrity status with charm, grace, boundless enthusiasm, and that self-effacing humor and humility that had so endeared him to the press and the public. He always seemed to have the right word, the right smile, and the right style for all occasions. He seemed the embodiment of self-confidence, self-control, and self-discipline, the very antithesis to the usual stereotype of the inferior, aggressive, and unmotivated black man in our society. (Gibbs, *Race and Justice* 129)

In the courtroom on June 20, however, Simpson was dressed in a dark suit and white shirt but had been denied a tie, belt, and shoelaces for fear he might utilize them to hurt himself. There was nothing affluent about his appearance. Instead, O.J. Simpson looked tired and broken as he stood at the long wooden table in the center of the courtroom. Drawing on Erving Goffman's analytical thinking, the public's astonishment over Simpson's appearance derived from a break in the football star's expected demeanor. Goffman defines demeanor as "that element of the individual's ceremonial behavior typically conveyed through deportment, dress, and bearing, which serves to express to those in his immediate presence that he is a person of certain desirable or undesirable qualities" (Goffman, "Deference and Demeanor" 489). Instead of implying self-confidence and wealth, Simpson's overall demeanor suggested the polar opposite of the desirable qualities he had previously embodied. David Shulman calls such expectations of meeting preexisting and established social conventions the "social defaults" (Shulman 9) or "factory specs" (9):

> All kinds of prevailing social norms, roles, and structural arrangements can affect what content audiences expect to observe in a person's impression management.

7 During an arraignment, a defendant is brought before a magistrate judge for an initial hearing on the case to learn, among other things, about the charges against them, and whether they will be held in prison or released on bail until the start of the trial (due to the inclusion of "special circumstances" in Simpson's arrest warrant, bail was ruled out, however). Further arrangements are made, and the defendant is asked to plead guilty or not guilty to the charges ("Justice 101," *Offices of the United States Attorneys*).

> Agency and autonomy can exist in how people perform their roles, but social conventions already preexist that shape how people are instructed and judged to perform roles appropriately. (9)

O.J. Simpson's first arraignment was short and only lasted about ten minutes but succeeded in painting a distorted picture of the athlete. When prosecutor Marcia Clark began the indictment process by asking the defendant, "Mr. Orenthal Simpson, is that your true name, sir?" ("Simpson/2:30 Arraignment," 0:27), Simpson looked overwhelmed and confused and seemed unable to answer the question. Robert Shapiro hastily whispered words of advice in his client's ear, which distracted Simpson even further. After a few seconds of confusion, Judge McKay ordered the defendant to speak up so that she and the other trial participants (and by extension everyone who was watching the proceedings via television broadcast) could understand him. Hesitantly, Simpson answered: "Ahh…yes" (0:35), but his statement sounded closer to a question, and his raised eyebrows suggested that he was not sure what the question was anymore. Throughout the hearing, people's "customized social flash cards" (Shulman 61) were not at all reconcilable with the person that appeared in court, merely looking like a "common thug" (Clark 54) and unable to answer simple questions. David Shulman explains that "[t]he social attributes that someone thinks he personifies must connect to the expectations that other people have for how someone with those traits appears. The person then must perform to those expectations adequately enough to demonstrate them convincingly" (Shulman 6). If expectations are not met, disruptions arise, and it becomes harder for the audience to recognize previous claims of identity. One day after the arraignment, for instance, *The New York Times* described Simpson as "looking haggard and grim" (Ayres Jr., *NY Times*, 21 June 1994), while, according to William Claiborne from *The Washington Post*, the athlete appeared "exhausted and at times impatient" (Claiborne, *Washington Post*, 21 June 1994). Regardless of one's opinion about Simpson, there was an evident tragic and degrading aura around him. Novelist Toni Morrison explains: "The gap between these two opposing and mutually cancelling perceptions forms an unbreachable chasm, and the need to know which label is correct ought to stimulate a search for reasonable explanations of such shape-shifting behavior" (Morrison xi). Thus, public and media interest in the case continued.

Despite O.J. Simpson's behavior before and during the Bronco Chase and the fact that he had arguably embarrassed the Los Angeles Police Department as well as the District Attorney's Office in front of the world, his celebrity status had not been completely abolished. In an unusual decision, Judge McKay granted Shapiro's request to "start all over again" ("Simpson/2:30 Arraignment," 0:39) and undo Simpson's first incoherent attempt to confirm his own name. In this regard, the proceedings were reminiscent of a pre-recorded show, where the defendant could rectify his perfor-

mance. Due to the courtroom camera's sole fixation on Simpson, the TV audience was unable to see Marcia Clark's reaction to the judge's decision. The prosecutor paused for approximately ten seconds before repeating her question: "Mr. Orenthal James Simpson, is that your true name, sir?" (0:50), to which the defendant immediately and audibly stated, "Yes."

While it seemed as though O.J. Simpson had regained his posture, this impression quickly faded when Judge McKay initiated the next step in the arraignment proceedings: the official indictment. As prosecutor Marcia Clark began reading the charges out loud, the courtroom camera solely focused on the athlete. Simpson did not look at Clark but slightly tilted his head sideways towards her voice:

> You're charged in this complaint in case number BA097211 in Count 1, that on or about June 12, 1994, in the county of Los Angeles, you committed the crime of murder in violation of Penal Code section 187(a), […] and that you did willfully, unlawfully, and with malice aforethought murder Nicole Brown Simpson. It is further alleged that in the commission and attempted commission of this offense, that you willfully, [… and] personally used a deadly and dangerous weapon; a knife. (0:54-1:24)

The uninterrupted close-up shot of O.J. Simpson during this part of the proceedings allowed viewers to analyze his facial expressions, or "facial gestures" (Schechner, "Magnitudes of Performance" 29), in search for any sign that would reveal the truth about his guilt or innocence. In the legal field, this intense scrutiny of the defendant is called "demeanor evidence" (Williams 267) and considered a crucial part of court proceedings: "Juries and audiences scrutinize demeanor for the most subtle signs of lying—a blink, a twitch, a pause that is a fraction too long or too short" (267). These "kinemes" (Schechner, "Magnitudes of Performance" 29) are always an expression of meaning, particularly since one has no conscious control over them (29). Thus, an individual's expressiveness does not only derive from "the expression that he *gives*" (Goffman, *Presentation of Self* 2, emphasis original) but equally as much from the "expression that he *gives off*" (2, emphasis original). The latter assumption includes the messages one conveys through body language which is perceived to express "the 'true' or 'real' attitudes, beliefs, and emotions of the individual [as they] can be ascertained only indirectly, through avowals or through what appears to be involuntary expressive behavior" (2). In this sense, the audience tries to differentiate between an individual's authentic and performative identity, looking for "ungovernable aspects" (7) in the presentation. This is why Performance Studies put great emphasis on the body, for it is more than a physical structure. In fact, "[o]ur bodies both form and are formed by our identities; our identities, in turn, citationally reflect our surroundings and circumstances. As we negotiate life as social beings […] we perform. *As we perform, we are also historical*" (Davis 7, emphasis original).

At this point in the Simpson trial, turbulent action sequences were inessential to ensure interest in the case, merely watching the defendant's features created a high degree of fascination and tension in the spectators. Through the courtroom camera, the television viewers as voyeurs were enabled to watch, analyze, and judge Simpson's behavior and expressions without him or anyone in the courtroom knowing who was watching and what they were thinking or saying. Borrowing from Roland Barthes, media scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff asserts that "[t]he fetishistic viewing of celebrities creates a *punctum* effect […]—a personal attraction to particular aspects of the image that is derived from whimsy, desire, and memory" (Mirzoeff 240, emphasis original). For instance, Simpson moved his head to the right and away from Clark as she mentioned the date June 12, 1994 ("Simpson/2:30 Arraignment," 1:02), while a hint of anger seemed to fill his eyes. When the prosecutor directly accused him of murder, his face remained expressionless, however (1:05). It was only when Clark referenced Nicole Brown Simpson's name that a hint of a grin appeared on Simson's face (1:15), which seemed to express both pain and bitterness at the same time. Meanwhile, he continued to stare into blank space. In onlookers, the questions were possibly raised whether Simpson was trying to disconnect from the pain about his ex-wife's death or was reliving the crime in his thoughts. Schechner writes that "the face is not only a truth-teller but a liar without peer. And lying, as much as truth-telling, is the stock-in-trade of theatre" (Schechner, "Magnitudes of Performance" 37). This very uncertainty about the meaning and veracity of certain trial elements and the participants' emotions contributed to the overall appeal of the Simpson case and allowed everyone to construct their own dramatized version of the events.

The critique of encouraging blatant voyeurism is one of many elements telelitigated trials share with traditional reality TV formats. The reality genre was dubbed "voyeur TV" (Hill, *Audiences* 10), and particularly in the 1990s, "audiences were caricatured as dumb, or as voyeurs" (Hill, *Reality TV* 19). Janet Cotterill, who provided a linguistic analysis of the Simpson case in *Language and Power in Court* (2003), also refers to the spectators as "voyeurs of the trial" (Cotterill 107) who were required to "observe the proceedings *in silence*" (107, emphasis original). Historically, the increasing popularity of reality shows marked the transition of modern society into a "voyeur nation" (Hill, *Reality TV* 67), wherein "reality television has voyeuristic appeal in the form of exhibitionism and self-disclosure" (65). Thereby, Hill argues, "[v]iewers as voyeurs are co-opted by the entertainment industry into surveillance economy" (65). Indeed, apart from voyeurism, surveillance is the second strongest feature on reality television. While George Orwell's *1984* describes the tyrannical nature of omnipresent government surveillance, new societal developments reveal that viewers, in fact, take pleasure from surveillance culture as the audience is "invited to pass judgment […] in the form of interactive voting and public debate" (65) without fearing any repercussions or consequences. Almost poetically, Yi-Fu Tuan writes about the appeal of voyeurism: "Because they cannot see us, we who can see them feel like

gods; and what lie open to our gaze are the unguarded and unrehearsed–hence vulnerable and genuine moments in people's lives" (Tuan 238). While viewers can be characterized as voyeuristic, the people being observed on a reality show often display signs of narcissism, which crystalize when they are filmed for a longer period of time. The reason why many participants voluntarily allow cameras into their homes or their private lives to be displayed to millions of spectators seems to lead back to "a fantasy of the self to be validated through the media, to show we exist through the camera's gaze on our social life" (Hill, *Reality TV* 65–66) and the deep "desire to be seen and recognized in a mediated public space" (66). This realization helps explain why O.J. Simpson never vehemently insisted on the removal of the courtroom camera although he had the right to.

The voyeuristic lens of the courtroom camera also demonstrates a new development in the understanding of performance and involvement. Based on the findings of Philip Auslander, Tracy C. Davis argues that "the 'liveness' of performance is a question of degree, not an either/or, and that presence is no longer a limiting condition for performers any more than for witnesses to a performance" (Davis 4). Consequently, non-verbal communication and cues are to be considered part of a greater performance equally as much as traditional verbal expressions in face-to-face interactions. Simpson's mere presence and seemingly mental absence can, in this context, also be understood as part of his staged persona. In addition, audiences that are not necessarily in the immediate presence of the performer(s), as in this case the television viewers, are equally as much a co-performing audience as the jurors and spectators inside the courtroom. They, too, can witness the proceedings live and interpret the received messages immediately, moving "between expectancy and observance, between attentiveness to what happens and astonishment at what appears" (Blau 264).

Back in the courtroom on June 20, Marcia Clark concluded the prosecution's indictment with three more questions, and, despite his weak state, Simpson's succinct answers clarified that he and his defense team would fight the allegations, and there would be no guilty admission from his side:

Marcia Clark: *Mr. Simpson, do you understand the charges as I read them to you?*
Robert Shapiro: *(audibly whispering into Simpson's ear) Yes.*
O.J. Simpson: *Yes.*
Marcia Clark: *And have you discussed those charges with your lawyer, sir?*
Robert Shapiro: *(audibly whispering into Simpson's ear) Yes.*
O.J. Simpson: *Yes.*
Marcia Clark: *At this time, do you wish to enter a plea—guilty or not guilty?*
Robert Shapiro: *(audibly whispering into Simpson's ear): Not guilty.*
O.J. Simpson: *Not guilty.*
("Simpson/2:30 Arraignment," 2:13-2:26)

It is noteworthy that Robert Shapiro not only assumed the role of a legal representator for Simpson but, by whispering into Simpson's ear, likewise that of a prompter who supplied his actor with a forgotten word during the performance of a play. This, in turn, illuminates the scripted and rehearsed nature of trial proceedings despite the fact that they happen live and appear spontaneous.

The last seven minutes of the ten-minute arraignment consisted of various requests and motions on part of the defense and gave the audience a first impression of the main trial that was yet to come and court procedures in general. First, Robert Shapiro requested to set a date for a preliminary hearing within the next ten days as was guaranteed by law. While everyone was waiting for McKay to check her schedule, a silence befell the courtroom that was only occasionally interrupted by the judge's whispering with her assistant and the rustling of paper documents. The camera operator used this opportunity to film the main trial participants and provide viewers with wider images of the courtroom: Marcia Clark was wearing a white shirt under a matching dark blue jacket and skirt. The permanent wave in her shoulder-long hair would soon become her signature look and often overshadow her work as a prosecutor. Robert Shapiro was dressed in a light grey suit and a matching tie. As had become apparent during numerous interviews he had given prior to the arraignment and Friday's press conference, Shapiro appeared calm and attentive. Whenever he addressed the judge, he spoke slowly and chose his words carefully. Apart from the key figures, for the first time in the Simpson case, the television audience also saw a courtroom from the inside. Numerous bailiffs and deputies from the Sheriff's Office were positioned along the wall of the courtroom. In the back, the few available seats were taken by spectators, most notably by Robert Kardashian. While the minutes passed, during which Judge McKay looked for an agreeable time slot for preliminary hearings, Simpson grew noticeably impatient. He watched the judge for a few moments before turning his head towards Shapiro and raising his eyebrows, blinking rapidly, as if he was thinking, "How long can this take?" (03:26).

Once preliminary hearings were set for June 30, the arraignment proceedings continued with a quick back and forth between Shapiro, Clark, and McKay. Meanwhile, O.J. Simpson looked very out of place. He resumed staring vacantly at something in front of him that only he could see, with narrowed eyes and his head tilted sideways (8:23). The man who was used to getting and taking what he wanted relied on other people's voices to speak for him. Despite all the privileges he had been granted so far, at the end of the proceedings, Simpson was led away by deputies through the same door any other defendant is.

Final Arraignment

22 July 1994

Over a month had passed since O.J. Simpson's first appearance and arraignment in court on June 20, during which he had seemed confused and oftentimes mentally absent. On July 8, after six days of preliminary hearings, Judge Kathleen Kennedy-Powell ruled that there was enough evidence to justify a criminal trial in the Simpson matter. Before the main proceedings began, there was one last step to take, however. O.J. Simpson was brought before Judge Cecil J. Mills at the Downtown Criminal Courts in Los Angeles on July 22. By this date, his defense team had been expanded by the renowned criminal lawyer Johnny Cochran whose name would forever be associated with the Simpson case. Similar to the first arraignment process, the proceedings were short and served the purpose to give the defendant an opportunity to respond to the charges as well as resolve any pending legal issues and motions and make necessary arrangements for the case to proceed. This hearing was likewise televised nationally, being another episode in this new popular reality show. Unfortunately for the television audience, the hearing was visually restricted, as the courtroom camera was positioned to the right-hand and behind counsel's table. Thus, it was impossible to directly watch the trial participants' reactions to certain statements and procedures, in particular those of O.J. Simpson. Although various elements reminded the TV audience of the first arraignment a month prior—Simpson wearing a dark suit and white shirt, the setting with the wooden table and blue seat covers—his body language had completely changed: Simpson assumed an upright posture while facing the judge and the accusations brought against him. When Kennedy-Powell addressed the defendant with the same questions Marcia Clark had asked the celebrity suspect on June 20, the answers were clear and plainspoken. This time, Robert Shapiro did not whisper the correct responses into his client's ear, Simpson seemed eager to speak for himself:

Judge Mills: *Do you understand the charges against you, sir?*
O.J. Simpson: *Yes, Your Honor.*
Judge Mills: *Had an opportunity to discuss those charges with your attorneys?*
O.J. Simpson: *Yes, Your Honor.*
Judge Mills: *And are you ready to enter a plea at this time?*
O.J. Simpson: *Yes, Your Honor.*
Judge Mills: *How do you plead to Counts 1 and 2?*
O.J. Simpson: *Absolutely, 100 percent not guilty.*
Judge Mills: *And you deny each of the special allegations and the special circumstance that is alleged?*
O.J. Simpson: *Yes.*
("OJ Simpson Arraignment," 1:35-1:59)

Prosecutor Marcia Clark describes this moment in her book, *Without a Doubt*, as "Simpson, drawing on the thespian skills doubtless honed by his work in *The Towering Inferno*,[8] reached down inside himself and hit the mark" (Clark 55). In response, Robert Shapiro patted his client on the shoulder ("OJ Simpson Arraignment," 2:10), "congratulating him on his improved performance" (Clark 55). In the spectrum of the following trial proceedings, the televised arraignments served as a final stage on which Simpson 'locked in' the persona he aimed to portray. Sociologist Erving Goffman explains this process as follows:

> The individual's initial projection commits him to what he is proposing to be and requires him to drop all pretenses of being other things. As the interaction among the participants progresses, […] it is essential that […] later developments be related without contradiction to, and even built up from, the initial positions. (Goffman, *Presentation of Self* 10)

The detailed analyses of the main court proceedings in the following chapters of this study will demonstrate the protective practices employed by O.J. Simpson and his team to safeguard the defendant's image of being innocent.

The Bronco Chase Revived

1996

In November 1996, while in the midst of O.J. Simpson's civil trial, the Los Angeles court released a previously undisclosed transcript of phone calls that occurred between the athlete and LAPD Detective Tom Lange during the car chase in 1994. Thus, two years later, the American people received a partial answer to the question of what had been going on inside the Bronco as it had sped across the city's freeways on June 17. An audio recording of the telephone conversations was subsequently obtained by the media and played on television as, once again, the familiar images of the white Ford Bronco appeared on the screens. A seemingly suicidal O.J. Simpson was heard pleading with the detective to "[j]ust let me get to my house" ("O.J. Simpson Trial: Transcript of Bronco Call," *CNN.com*) while Lange attempted to persuade the murder suspect to throw his gun out the car window. O.J. Simpson, however, did not consider disposing of the weapon, claiming "This is for me." He only became doubtful when Lange repeatedly assured him that there were a lot of people who loved and admired him, pleading "Don't throw it all away." Thereupon, the athlete released a loud and desperate sigh, indicating that he felt trapped and did not know what to do. The overwhelmingly serious conversation took a slightly comical turn when O.J. Simpson proclaimed: "I can't take this." In an attempt to distract him from further

8 *The Towering Inferno* is a 1974 disaster film, in which Simpson starred alongside Steve McQueen and Paul Newman as the character Jernigan.

focusing on the implications of this statement, the detective quickly and reassuringly stated the opposite: "Oh yes, you can. Yes, you can" ("OJ on the Run: The Bronco Chase," 2:53). Simpson was subsequently heard chuckling sarcastically, repeating "I can't," as if slightly irritated that Lange assumed he could "take it" while he insisted that he could not. The conversation then continued in a repetitive pattern: Lange assured O.J. Simpson that he was loved, and everything was going to be alright while Simpson cried out that he deserved to get hurt and repeatedly released despondent sighs. Although the audience could see images of the Bronco on the television screen and, with the addition of the newly released audio tapes, hear the conversations that took place at specific times during the Chase, there was never visual footage from inside the Bronco. It is a piece of the Simpson puzzle that is non-existent and can only be fictionalized and reenacted (see chapter 1.4, "Adapting the Adaptation: The Bronco Chase on *American Crime Story*").

The rebirthed TV recapitulations of the Bronco Chase in 1996 also ended at Simpson's Rockingham estate, where the ride turned into a stand-off. Once more, the familiar still images of the Ford appeared on the television screens as the phone conversations between Lange and Simpson revealed how, at one point, the situation in the Bronco threatened to escalate. Seconds after the car pulled into the driveway, Simpson's oldest son Jason ran towards it, screaming at and wrestling with Al Cowlings through the open window of the car. Meanwhile, O.J. Simpson was still on the phone with the detective who tried to ascertain who the unknown person was and to prevent the murder suspect from shooting himself or anybody else. Panic audibly filled Lange's voice as the screaming around the Bronco intensified:

> Who is that out there? Just toss it, Juice. He's just trying to help. He's just trying to help, man. He's just trying to help. Juice, come on. Just toss it. It's OK. Hey! Don't! Hey, man, don't! Don't! Don't! Juice! […] Juice! Juice! You there? Hey, pick it up, Juice! ("O.J. Simpson Trial: Transcript of Bronco Call," *CNN.com*)

It is noteworthy that Detective Lange repeatedly referred to Simpson as "Juice," indicating how urgently he wanted to establish a connection with the seemingly erratic suspect. Amidst the screaming, the audience perceived another voice, presumably Al Cowlings', pleading with Simpson. Although the viewers had no opportunity to look directly inside the car, it seemed certain that the athlete, unaware that his phone call with Lange was still being recorded, was pointing the gun at either himself or his friend when Cowlings begged: "Don't do it, O.J.! Don't! Don't! […] Listen to me! Listen to me, O.J.! […] O.J.! Please, O.J.!" Meanwhile Detective Lange urged Simpson to pick up the phone again. However, the connection ultimately cut off and could not be reestablished.

1.3 The Rise of Personality Journalism: Robert Kardashian on *20/20*

In the same year the phone calls between O.J. Simpson and the LAPD were released to the public, Robert Kardashian granted an interview to Barbara Walters on ABC's newsmagazine program *20/20*. The interview serves as a rare source that provides information on the events prior to Simpson's disappearance in the Ford Bronco and offers the television audience a look behind the scenes and insight into his plans to run away. Although news cameras had filmed every moment of the car chase, nobody, except for a chosen few, really knew what had occurred behind closed doors in the morning. Kardashian's interview helped put the Chase into new perspective and explained how this 'American tragedy' began to unfold.

According to Richard Fox, Robert Van Sickel, and Thomas Steiger, television news programs such as ABC's *20/20*, NBC's *Dateline*, and CBS' *60 Minutes* have become an integral part of telelitigation (Fox, Van Sickel, and Steiger 84), as they enjoy the largest audience numbers of any other news programming. Television writer Robert Hughes' 1995 article in *The New York Review of Books* offers a somber assessment of this hybrid TV genre:

> There [is] the voyeuristic interest in confession of sins. There [is] the fixation on celebrity. There [is] the almost total absence of any serious news—by which I mean narratives and explanations which enable viewers to get a handle on the world in a rational way. There [is] the phony sentimentality, the mock humanism. Above all, there [is] the belief that reality must always take the back seat to entertainment, so that the audience must not be overtaxed, so that they will come back for more of the same Twinkie. (Hughes, *NY Review of Books*, 16 February 1995)

Barbara Walters, *20/20*'s main host, was one of the first key personalities on American television to change celebrity culture in the early 1980s with the popularization of personality journalism (Sternheimer 217), making celebrity news stories increasingly ubiquitous on TV, thus further blurring the previously distinct line between hard facts and superficial entertainment.[9] As I will demonstrate in the following, her interview with Robert Kardashian was set up to create high degrees of mystery and suspense with the goal to entertain and not to educate her audience on the lessons learned from the O.J. Simpson case.

The introduction to the first segment of the show was filmed inside a television studio and throughout the episode, the interview with Kardashian was repeatedly interrupted for in-studio narration by the hosts. This is noteworthy, for the well-

9 In the field of Media Studies, one often encounters the hybrid, pejoratively connotated term 'edutainment' as a means to describe the fusion between media entertainment techniques and public service channels/programs. Edutainment, also known as infotainment, suggests a loss of qualitative educational substance for the sake of ratings and profit (Hartley 125).

lit, yet dark and plain ambiance played a crucial part in establishing a visual identity for the program that is marketed to audiences as a news format, whereby the term 'news' suggests an impartial reporting of facts. The professional setting and utilized props—a plain grey desk, pen and paper for the hosts—were complemented by a dress code audiences associate with news media formats: Robert Hughes wore a dark suit, white shirt, and a red-brown tie, while Walters was dressed in a grey pullover and blazer, round up with gold jewelry. Furthermore, the TV personalities were captured in a medium shot characteristic of news programs, for it creates contiguity to the hosts while maintaining efficient distance to uphold their authoritative appearance (Selby and Cowdery 17). The presenters' narration, however, was replete with emotionally charged adjectives such as startling, confidential, secret, and dramatic. For instance, they labelled the upcoming report Kardashian's "startling confession" (*ABC News*, 00:03), in which he revealed "confidential details of this murder case" (00:29) that "have Simpson and his lawyers […] concerned" (00:33). Compelling to the curiosity of the viewer, Walters claimed that her audience "[would] be the first to hear a secret audiotape, a dramatic message that Simpson recorded presumably on the morning of the Bronco ride" (00:51). Fox, Van Sickel, and Steiger assert that "[r]arely is there an attempt to place [the true crime stories] into context of the real workings of the legal system, the findings of scholars, or general trends in US society" (Fox, Van Sickel, and Steiger 86). Rather, the crime is commodified, i.e., specifically packaged and marketed for entertainment purposes as it goes through the processes of selection and deconstruction.

To take the audience back to the day of the Bronco Chase, the *20/20* report opened with snippets of the defense team's evening press conference on the evening of June 17, 1994, where Robert Kardashian was first introduced to the American public as he "stepped from obscurity into the national spotlight" (*ABC News*, 01:09). Calmly, yet authoritatively, Walters guided her audience through the first pieces of actuality footage presented on screen and provided the necessary context. In the subsequent shot, back in 1996, Kardashian was depicted sitting in an armchair, seemingly lost in thought as he gazed to the side. In the background, a framed picture of him and O.J. Simpson, subtly displayed on the corner of a table (01:12), served as an implicit reminder of the close friendship that had once connected the men which, in turn, connoted that the information provided in the episode was authentic and personal. As intimated above, the setting of the interview, namely Kardashian's San Fernando home, was likewise of major significance in the narrative encoding of the episode: Barbara Walters met her interviewee at the very same house where O.J. Simpson had first hidden from the public and later disappeared in the Bronco. The choice to record the episode at the mansion, the original place of performance, allowed the producers to establish an atemporal verisimilitude that further contributed to the exclusivity of the interview. Furthermore, the following analysis of where and how

the interlocutors were positioned inside the house reveals how significantly settings structure performances.

Following the establishing shots, Robert Kardashian and Barbara Walters took the stairs to the upper levels of the house to commence their dialogue. In her distinguished narrative style, the TV personality simultaneously teased the audience in a voice-over: "Kardashian thinks that what he is about to say, may destroy his 25-year friendship with Simpson" (02:31). From the stairways, Walters was led into the bedroom that had served as a place of refuge for Simpson two years prior but simultaneously constituted the main stage for the events leading up to the Bronco Chase. Kardashian sat down on the bed while Walters took a seat on the couch facing him. It is noteworthy that although the bedroom was well illuminated, it was likewise shrouded in dimmed light, with grey shadows contouring the furniture and the interlocutors in order to reflect the gloomy subject of the interview. According to Performance Studies scholar Xi-Fu Tuan, light impacts the disposition of space (Tuan 239). He argues that where bright lights diminish the feeling of depth, semi-darkness seems like "an enveloping medium, like mist" (239), adding profundity to a performance. Thus, due to the absence of noticeable artificial lighting in the bedroom, the audience was under the impression that the conversation between Walters and Kardashian took place naturally and organically. The fact that the production crew first arranged the set by adjusting the lighting and camera angles, providing microphones, controlling sound settings, and taking care of makeup and seating positions went unnoticed and ascribed the *mise-en-scène* a more spontaneous and unpretentious feel than it effectively had.

Once they were comfortably seated, Walters initiated the main phase of the interview by inviting Kardashian to recount the day of the Bronco Chase (ABC News, 06:36). The latter explained that on June 17, 1994, he received a call from Robert Shapiro,[10] who informed him of the arrest warrant. An hour later, both lawyers walked into the room where Simpson and his then-girlfriend Paula Barbieri were accommodated. Sitting on the bed, O.J. Simpson was watching an old movie (07:02), which conveyed an odd impression of normalcy. After learning about the pending arrest warrant, Simpson reacted with a blank stare (07:16) as he tried to process the new developments. He was urged to get ready and given some privacy. At this juncture, Kardashian's description of Simpson's reaction and *American Crime Story*'s adaptation significantly diverge, effecting an equally divergent understanding of

10 Robert Shapiro is an American lawyer who was one of the first attorneys to join O.J. Simpson's defense team. After the trial, he publicly criticized his colleague's approach to race in their defense strategy and vowed never to work with any of them again. In 2013, Shapiro was named one of the 100 most influential lawyers in the United States by *The National Law Journal* (www.law.com/nationallawjournal/almID/1202593197565/the-100-most-influential-lawyers-in-america/).

the situation and impression of the athlete. I will explain the result in detail in chapter 1.4, "Adapting the Adaptation: The Bronco Chase on *American Crime Story*."

Returning to the *20/20* episode, Walters went on to inquire what had happened when Kardashian walked back into the bedroom after informing Simpson about the arrest warrant. The lawyer recalled that he found his friend sitting on the couch, staring at pictures of his children and ex-wife. The seemingly innocent scene threatened to escalate when Kardashian noticed a gun, wrapped in a towel, laying on Simpson's lap (07:42). To complement and amplify the increased tension in the lawyer's narrative, the camera angle switched almost unnoticeably from a two-shot view (07:43), whereby Walters and Kardashian were filmed from the side, to an over-the-shoulder shot (07:45) that brought Kardashian into main focus as he recounted praying with Simpson to keep him from committing suicide (08:05). In response to Walters' question whether he believed that O.J. Simpson had serious intentions of killing himself, the lawyer determinedly responded: "Oh yes, oh yes. Just looking at the face of this man. He was not here. This was not O.J." (08:09-08:17). Once again, the camera perspective was altered, establishing an ambiguity between Kardashian's verbal statements and his body language, which is symbolic of the conflicted position he assumed in the Simpson matter for years: In the over-the-shoulder shot in question, the viewers' gaze was directed towards Barbara Walters, obscuring the lawyer's face from the camera and making it impossible for the audience to take any cues from his facial expressions. Hence, when Kardashian answered Walters' question with the repeated and determined "Oh yes" while simultaneously shaking his head left and right which, in Western cultures, represents disagreement, it remained unclear whether he answered truthfully. Considering Kardashian's publicly established personal conflict to come to terms with Simpson's possible involvement in the murders, the aforementioned scene is a telling example of how the show's producers conveyed the ambivalence to the audience.

The next part of the interview is likewise of importance in understanding how media representatives achieved a greater sense of authenticity and dramatic impact for their desired story. Approximately ten minutes into the episode, the face-to-face interview between Walters and Kardashian was interrupted by a short narration: "Worried that Simpson was determined to kill himself, Kardashian persuaded him to leave the bedroom and go outside, away from the attorneys and experts, who were also in the house but unaware of the tragedy that was unfolding" (09:43-09:55). Walters' commentary was visualized by use of a Steadicam, which allows a camera man to move freely and smoothly in all directions as the camera is strapped to the operator's body. Instead of having numerous shots from different fixed camera angles, the Steadicam provides one fluent shot, as if the camera is floating. In the aforementioned example, Walters' detailed description of how Kardashian and Simpson went outside was accompanied by Steadicam shots that took the audience from the upper-level bedroom down the stairs, through the kitchen, and outside the backyard

by the pool, where, in Barbara Walters' words, the tragedy continued to unfold. The Steadicam perspective was useful in creating a sense of authenticity, as it allowed the audience to trace the path Kardashian and Simpson took in June of 1994 through their figurative eyes. Since there were no other distractions in the shots (e.g., other people), the viewers could solely concentrate on the details of the house and were actively drawn into the moments leading up to the Bronco Chase. The same technique was employed again when Kardashian claimed he and Simpson "walked around to maybe five different locations on the premises" (10:37) as the latter was looking for a suitable place to end his life. Once more, Steadicam shots of the mansion were inserted to visualize Kardashian's narrative.

Shortly after, the *20/20* conversation switched to O.J. Simpson's presumed suicide note, which the football player had allegedly written to the public on the morning of his arrest (for a detailed analysis of the letter see chapter 1.2, "The Press Conference as Performance Stage"). Walters and Kardashian were now seated in armchairs in what appeared to be the mansion's living room (11:17). As the former lawyer recounted how he got ahold of the letter, the camera repeatedly alternated between medium close up- (11:11), close up- (11:17), and medium long shots (11:21) to add dynamic to the dialogue. It is noteworthy that in this particular sequence, Kardashian was the sole speaker shown in close up shots, i.e., from a perspective that tightly framed his face, allowing the audience to catch a more intimate glimpse at his features, emotions, and reactions as he described reading his friend's suicide note to almost 100 million Americans during the press conference on June 17. Archive news footage from that day was inserted into the *20/20* program to further heighten the emotive impact (11:38). At one point, Walters asked her interviewee: "Didn't it surprise you that he wasn't saying, you know, 'Can't go on without my wife, what's going to happen to my children?'" (11:43), referring to the public accusation that O.J. Simpson's note appeared self-centered with little focus on or pity for his murdered wife or young children. To that question, Kardashian responded: "That is O.J. He has…he's got an ego. You're aware that athletes are catered to. Athletes have the world by the tail in many instances and that's what O.J. had. And as a result, I believe he only thought of himself at that time" (11:47).

Kardashian's perception that Simpson was seemingly not as humble as he wanted to be perceived in public was visually illustrated by means of a photograph of the former football star that was inserted on the TV screen as Kardashian spoke. In the selected picture, Simpson is leaning on a wooden scaffold. In contrast to the many pictures circulated in the media in which he is seen smiling at the camera, waving at the crowds, or shaking hands with fans, in the selected photo, Simpson is frowning and appears unsatisfied (11:56). His gloomy mood is further emphasized by the overall color scheme of the picture, consisting of cool greys and greens (e.g., Simpson's t-shirt or the wooden structure that casts shadows in the proximity). As Robert Kardashian proclaimed that "he only thought of himself at that time"

(11:56), the camera slowly zoomed in on Simpson's face, bringing his frown and cold expression to the forefront, thereby visually establishing a preferred reading of the photograph that encouraged audience positioning in favor of Kardashian's assessment.

The next *20/20* sequence referenced the secret tape Barbara Walters had teased in the introduction to the episode. The playful anxiety of suspense, however, was first alleviated before any content was revealed. Interposed between images of an unidentified male hand inserting a tape into a black recorder, Barbara Walters' narration instead repetitively highlighted the exclusivity of the tape: "But it wasn't only a suicide note that O.J. Simpson left behind. He also left a tape. […] Lawrence Schiller discovered it long after the trial was over, and he believes Simpson made it […] the morning of the Bronco ride. […] Until tonight, it has never been heard publicly" (12:00-12:17). Instead of releasing the growing arc of tension, Walters and Schiller (who had worked with O.J. Simpson on a book called *I Want to Tell You* during the trial) transitioned to a discussion of general information pertaining to the audio recording, leaving room and time for the audience to speculate whether Simpson had possibly recorded a murder confession. Walters also clarified that only a short excerpt would be presented to her viewers. This fact obviates the editing process of the show despite its attempts to create authenticity and a natural flow between shots. Lacking enough airtime to play the entire tape, only a passage was selected. The audience did not receive the full context of the recording but a small sample, which was embedded into a TV show that wanted to paint a certain picture and relay a particular narrative. The viewers never learned what criteria determined the choice of the played excerpt, what was said before and after it, nor the length of the entire tape. In the selected portion, Simpson is heard saying:

> I don't know how I ended up here. […] I…I thought I lived a great life. I thought I treated everybody well. […] I don't want anybody to feel sorry for me. I feel sorry for myself that I…despite everything that I had, I let myself get depressed. […] Look where I am, I'm…I'm the Juice, whatever that mean, but I felt at times like I was… [Simpson sighs], I felt the goodness in myself and the goodness that I gave people. I don't feel any goodness in myself right now, I feel emptiness. I feel totally empty. (12:39-13:22)

Although Walters concluded that "He does not, in this tape, ever say 'I'm guilty'" (13:37), there exists a link between the chosen passage and the characterization of O.J. Simpson that Kardashian had provided only minutes earlier on the show. Simpson admitted that he felt sorry for himself and not for the victims or his children. He also alluded to the notion of "being the Juice," which suggests that he was aware of the heroic status he held in the public and the impact he had on people when he "gave goodness." The most noteworthy aspect about the audio recording is, however, that despite the producers' repeated attempts to create a fog of mystery around the tape,

the actual content revealed little to no new information. In fact, it is barely distinguishable from the writing in Simpson's suicide note and is far from a murder confession. Nevertheless, using the audio recording to enable the audience to hear the celebrity speak the words was a pivotal technique to draw the viewers further into the story and take them back to 1994. The repeated insertion of bedroom shots in between further enhanced the throwback effect.

Robert Kardashian's interview with Barbara Walters on ABC's *20/20* is a prime example of the workings of personality journalism. Instead of providing concrete facts and context, television news magazines of this kind blur the lines "between personalized tabloid titillation and substantive legal or political information" (Fox, Van Sickel, and Steiger 63). Andrea McDonell alludes to the tabloid style reporting inherent to personality journalism when she writes that "[h]uman-interest narratives, storytelling, and emotion are the core elements of 'soft' news, and celebrity news in particular. These formats celebrate the ambiguous and the uncertain, flaunt their opinions, and revel in their own point of view; they are considered an anathema to hard news" (McDonnell 33). Oftentimes, little to no new information is revealed; instead, it is, as was the case with the Simpson tape in 1996, reframed to suggest novelty. Furthermore, by holding a prime-time air slot (the show currently airs on Fridays at 9/8c), *20/20* competes with fictional formats, sitcoms, and dramas, which is indicative of the exploitative and sensationalizing intent behind such TV news magazines as they capitalize on emotional accounts and narrations for greater audience numbers.

1.4 Adapting the Adaptation: The Run of His Life on American Crime Story

In 1994, the television viewers solely relied on helicopter images, the commentaries of the news anchors, and their own imagination to make sense of the Bronco Chase and O.J. Simpson's behavior. Two years later, with the release of the audio recording and Robert Kardashian's interview to Barbara Walters, they were granted an extension to a significant moment in contemporary American history. In addition, that same year, journalist and former assistant US attorney Jeffrey Toobin published a true crime bestseller titled *The Run of His Life: The People v. O.J. Simpson* in which he recounted "the alternative realities of the Simpson case" (Kaminer, *NY Times*, 29 September 1996). Published by Random House Books in 1996, the book became a *New York Times* bestseller and served as the literary basis for *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story*, the first season of FX Networks' 2016 anthology series. Any discussion and understanding of the television show would be flawed without considering the author's style of writing and personal attitude towards the Simpson case. For instance, by his own declaration, Toobin does not believe in the concept of ob-

jectivity, stating: "I really dislike the word objectivity. I think objectivity is a phony concept. The idea that you as a journalist can look at a situation with some sort of perfect remove from your own beliefs and prejudices" ("A Conversation with Jeffrey Toobin 2013 2014 HLS," 8:29-8:46). This attitude is certainly an important factor to contemplate when reading his account of the events surrounding the 'Trial of the Century.' The journalist for *The New Yorker* never concealed his belief in O.J. Simpson's guilt. In a 2014 interview with CNN, he reiterated: "I thought then and I think now O.J. was completely guilty of killing those two people and I thought the jury got it wrong" ("Toobin: 'I was horrified, frankly'," 0:27-0:36). His own position is clearly reflected throughout *The Run of His Life*, not only with regard to the murder suspect but to every other character involved in the case. With objectivity untenable, Toobin names the creation of interesting stories his goal as a journalist by explaining:

> I am interested in telling you a story that you will want to read. […] The concept of […] keeping a story going and keeping you metaphorically, if not literally, on the edge of your seat, to see how it's going to turn out, that I think is what I aspire to be as a journalist. […] [M]ostly, I'm interested in storytelling. And, you know, one of the things, to be honest, I'm proudest of, is the ability to take what can be a dry story […] and turning it into a narrative. […] I want to try tell a story […] with a beginning, a middle, and an end, that will keep people interested. ("A Conversation with Jeffrey Toobin 2013 2014 HLS,"10:48-12:33)

Knowing his approach to journalism, *The Run of His Life* can thus be understood as an account of the Simpson story that clearly seeks entertainment value. Nevertheless, or perhaps precisely for this reason, Toobin worked as a consultant on *American Crime Story*, which was developed for television by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski and executive produced by Ryan Murphy. In an interview with Vegas Film Critic Jeffrey K. Howard, Toobin praised the accurateness of the television show while simultaneously distinguishing between the nature of his account from 1996 and the seriality of *ACS*:

> My book is journalism and […] a good-faith attempt to be a 100% accurate to what happened. The dramatization on ACS is different. It is certainly […] very true to the spirit of the times, to the personalities of the people involved, to the truth of what went on in that courtroom, but they don't use the exact court transcript, there are certain events that are combined and foreshortened. I think it's a very fair dramatization, but it is a dramatization. ("Jeffrey Toobin Interview: American Crime Story: The People vs. O. J. Simpson," 2:11-2:47)

According to the information provided in his true crime account, Toobin interviewed more than 200 people in the process of writing the book, although he does not specify to whom he had talked. In addition, Toobin relied on his own observations (he had access to the proceedings from inside the courtroom) as well as

official court transcripts, police reports, trial testimony, and the extensive media coverage of the case. Newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *The Washington Post* also served as sources to put together his 458-page account. Despite the dramatizations on *ACS*, Toobin claims that "if you watched *American Crime Story*, all ten episodes, you really understand what happened in this case and why. And that's factual" (*ACS*, disc 4, 27:34). I can only partly agree with Toobin's statement, for this study lists numerous crucial divergences which distort the essence of the Simpson story and misinform viewers who were previously unfamiliar with the case. Nevertheless, one can speak of an adaptation of an adaptation with regard to *ACS* as I will show in detail below, as the show's producers did oftentimes rely on Toobin's point of view for their screenplay despite the availability of original material.

From a New Historicist perspective, it is crucial to note why, how, and when the producers decided to reinterpret the Simpson case and address the communal social issues connecting the US of the 1990s and 2000s. In *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want*, James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine assert that the notion of authenticity is often pursued in the past with the goal to revive it as vividly as possible in the present:

> Where do people, and business, turn to satisfy their desire for authenticity? One place is to the past. Being forever gone and unalterable, the past represents an ideal form of authentic experience—the *pure*. Of course, just as travel to past times is impossible, such purity is unattainable. Yet people do gain a measure of this pure past through a whole host of here-and-now experiences. (Gilmore and Pine 45, emphasis original)

In adapting and thus reinterpreting the O.J. Simpson trial, *American Crime Story* successfully drew on the concept of "referential authenticity" (50), dialectally bringing one of the nation's most memorable events into the 21st century by offering informed viewers feelings of nostalgia while opening the case to a new and younger audience. In addition, the Simpson case served as a contemporary reminder of the racial tensions that have continuously quaked the United States and reached a new peak in the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century with repeated instances of police brutality, shootings, and institutionalized racial profiling.

The Bronco Chase on *The Run of His Life*

Being an indispensable part of the O.J. Simpson saga, the Bronco Chase is addressed in Toobin's narrative in great detail, specifically in chapter five, titled "Mr. Simpson Has Not Appeared," referencing the words of LAPD spokesman David Gascon, who was the first to inform the public and media about Simpson's failed self-surrender and subsequent disappearance. Before taking his readers back to June 17, 1994, however, Toobin provides extensive background information and addresses the events

preceding the slow-speed chase. Throughout the account, the author also focuses on selected individuals to tell specific parts of the story through their eyes, allowing his readers a glimpse behind the proverbial scenes.

Chapter five opens with Detective Tom Lange's call to Robert Shapiro on June 17, ordering the attorney to bring in his client to the police station. After a short conversation, Shapiro promises to make his client available and bring him in on schedule. There is a sudden jump in time in the narrative, and the reader is taken back to the days preceding the arrest warrant (June 13–16). Toobin explains how Robert Shapiro came to represent O.J. Simpson in the first place and how he arranged a polygraph examination for his celebrity client who "scored a minus 24—total failure" (85). By mentioning the polygraph test, Toobin not only provides the reader with additional information about the case but reiterates his own belief in Simpson's guilt. His position is further highlighted in the following pages, when he recounts the psychological evaluation of O.J. Simpson by defense psychiatrist Saul Faerstein:

> Faerstein went to the house on Rockingham and joined Simpson on the couch in the living room. Simpson talked and talked—about himself. The press was out to get him now; his image would never recover; it was all so unfair. What struck Faerstein most were the gaps in Simpson's narrative—there was no sadness for the loss of the mother of his children, no concern for his children's future, no empathy for Nicole. Simpson worried only about himself. (86)

It is noteworthy that the reader never learns how Toobin authenticated the information provided in the passage. It remains obscure whether the talked to the psychiatrist in person, read about Faerstein's assessment, or simply used a character in the story to express his own opinion about the suspect. Indeed, it is difficult and sometimes even impossible to draw a line between Toobin's own assumptions and the factual statements of those involved, which should be considered in the evaluation of the delineated events.

The narrative switches back to early June 17 and detailed descriptions of the last-minute examinations Robert Shapiro ordered before Simpson's arrest. The reader learns that thanks to an "elaborate ruse" (87) and an LAPD sergeant, who "was moonlighting as a security guard for the murder suspect" (87), Simpson found refuge at Robert Kardashian's villa in San Fernando Valley. The next paragraph takes the reader to the press conference of the Los Angeles Police Department at around 2:00 p.m. and the moment chief spokesman David Gascon stepped to the podium. Jeffrey Toobin quotes the original statements of the Commander who admitted that the murder suspect was on the run. The journalist characterizes Gascon as "fairly relaxed and approachable" (91) and points out that "[h]e seemed shaken, and his voice quavered slightly" (91), offering a rare favorable assessment of somebody involved in the Simpson saga. In fact, when reading Toobin's true crime account, one immediately notices that the journalist takes a critical stance towards the actions

of many of the main players in the case. In the Bronco chapter, e.g., Toobin claims that Robert Kardashian found O.J. Simpson's presumed suicide note in his house, showed it to Shapiro and Saul Faerstein, and allegedly made the conscious decision not to turn the letter over to the police: "Though the letter was clearly important evidence of Simpson's state of mind and his possible plans, Kardashian took it with him rather than mentioning it, much less giving it to the police, who were looking for O.J." (92).

Toobin is even more critical of Robert Shapiro's behavior, writing: "From the moment Simpson vanished, Robert Shapiro focused on his top priority: Robert Shapiro" (92), thereby implying that everything the lawyer did was led by egoistic motives. This is further reiterated when Toobin assesses the defense team's press conference on June 17. He accuses Shapiro of only talking to the press to protect himself: "Whatever else had happened today, this mess was not going to drag him down with it" (95), and even goes as far as to say that the celebrity attorney broke one of the most important principles that exists between a lawyer and a client: "Indeed, […] much of what had gone on that morning at Kardashian's house may have been protected by attorney-client privilege—a privilege that only Simpson had the right to waive. Yet Shapiro told all. He had hung his client out to dry in order to save himself" (95). In this light, even Shapiro's remarks about Simpson's fragile state of mind—he stated, for instance, that his client "was wailing" after receiving the news ("June 17, 1994 10 pm newscast—KDFW," 08:54)—resemble another attempt to deny any responsibility in Simpson's and Cowling's disappearance.

Toobin's account partly reads like a venture to expose the various mistakes he believes were made by the main characters in the Simpson story, which ultimately led to the not-guilty verdict (a conclusion of the trial he does not agree with). In addition, his assessment—considering Toobin is himself a graduate from Harvard Law School who followed the events closely as a reporter—gives the reader the necessary context to understand the actions that were taken in 1994 and which had not yet been known as the events actually took place. For instance, in the above analysis of the archive footage of Robert Shapiro's press conference, I indicated that the attorney had seemed aloof or emotionless at times while he was speaking. In combination with Toobin's description, Shapiro's reaction to his client's disappearance makes new sense. If one is to believe the journalist's assessment of the attorney's character, Shapiro was anxious about losing his good reputation in the legal community and Los Angeles' High Society. In chapter five, Toobin also provides his readers with a piece of information that has not often been publicly discussed, but rather, as existing news transcripts show, concealed: O.J. Simpson's poorly written suicide note. As already indicated, most reprints of the letter Robert Kardashian found at his house are edited versions of the note (e.g., "O.J.'s Suicide Note," *CNN.com*). Toobin, however, exposes that "Simpson was a terrible writer and speller" (Toobin 98) and nearly illiterate. He explains references in the note that were left unaddressed in

1994, giving background information on the people who had played a major role in Simpson's life.

After almost twenty pages of introductory passages, the author moves on to describe the first sighting of the Ford Bronco on a Los Angeles freeway by the young couple Chris Thomas and Kathy Ferrigno (103, 104). Toobin points out that when the Bronco was spotted it was heading north on the Santa Ana Freeway, i.e., "away from the Mexican border" (104), confuting accusations that Simpson was trying to go into hiding in Mexico. Later, however, Toobin notes that after Simpson's arrest police found his passport, a fake goatee and mustache as well as $8,000 in cash in the Bronco (110–111), thereby supporting the conjecture that Simpson had made plans to disappear for good. Subsequently, the readers are left to come to their own conclusions about the suspect's true intentions, which, similar to the original coverage of the chase, creates opportunities for speculations and discussions among them.

Jeffrey Toobin also describes the first encounter between Simpson's friend Al Cowlings and the LAPD on the freeway, a confrontation the television audience did not see, as news helicopters had not yet sighted the vehicle at that point. When traffic grew heavier, the Bronco came to a complete standstill, and two police officers, who had followed the fugitives for a short while, approached the car with their weapons drawn, ordering the driver, Cowlings, to turn off the engine: "Cowlings started screaming and pounding his left hand on the side of the door. 'Fuck, no!' he said. […] 'Put away your guns! He's in the backseat and he's got a gun to his head.' Fearing bloodshed, the officers held their ground and watched Cowlings drive off as the traffic ahead of him cleared" (105). Notably, Toobin makes use of direct speech to drive and breathe life into the narrative. In addition, he does not censor slurs (example above) and racial profanities (e.g., the "n-word" in connection with the Fuhrman tapes[11] on page 107). This choice can be understood as an attempt to create greater verisimilitude and to emphasize the seriousness of certain situations. It does, however, also allow to draw conclusions about the intended audience of the book. While Toobin cannot influence the explicit nature of the general story (the gruesome murders and violent acts of domestic abuse, the sexual revelations in court and in the media as well as the degrading remarks about African Americans on the Fuhrman tapes), his decision to reflect these details and statements in all their offensiveness suggests that *The Run of His Life* was intended for an older audience

11 The Fuhrman tapes encompass 13 hours of interviews between LAPD Detective Mark Fuhrman and screenplay writer Laura McKinny, which were recorded between 1985 and 1994. On the tapes, Fuhrman is repeatedly heard using racial and misogynist slurs, among other things. The tapes were introduced by O.J. Simpson's defense team as a key piece of evidence to raise doubts about the practices at the Los Angeles Police Department. Judge Ito admitted portions of the recordings to be used in court. Although Fuhrman insisted that he had only acted out a character for a screenplay, his reputation shattered, and the validity of the evidence he had discovered was questioned.

and less for adolescents and teenagers. The account is more likely aimed at adults that are already familiar with the case but are interested in additional information and context.

Chasing the Bronco on *American Crime Story*

The premiere episode of *American Crime Story*, titled "From the Ashes of Tragedy," first aired on February 2, 2016. On the night of its debut, 5.12 million US viewers tuned in to watch the Simpson story begin. The first sequence opens with archive footage of the Rodney King beating in 1991. The violent scenes are followed by a newscaster's announcement in 1992 that the white officers involved in the abuse were acquitted of any wrongdoing in a court of law by a jury of mostly white Americans. Additional archive footage then paints a disordered picture of Los Angeles in the aftermath of the acquittal: massive and volatile riots ensue all over L.A. Enraged African American citizens set buildings on fire, overturn cars, and hurl trash cans through windows. The rising noise in the scene unexpectedly culminates in silence, and a black screen appears with three words inscribed in the middle: "Two Years Later."

The original footage used in the beginning of the episode sets the tone of the series: *ACS* is going to be a story about violence, anger, frustration, racism, inequality, and injustice. King's abuse is not explained by means of narration or text overlays. Instead, the images speak for themselves to imply that his experience with the police was not an isolated incident but instead emblematic for the historical continuity of African American oppression. Bernard Parks, who served as chief of the LAPD from 1997–2002, calls the video tape "exhibit one for every mishandled abuse and excessive force incident that anyone had ever experienced" (*O.J.: Made in America*, disc 1, 2:13:37). Particular focus should, however, be placed on the idiosyncratic features of the Rodney King video utilized in the series. According to John Fiske, there exist at least two different variations of the recording that were circulated in the media: the first was the original "low-tech video shot by George Holliday" (Fiske, *Media Matters* 127). Fiske refers to this recording as *videolow* (127). The second one was used during the prosecution of the police officers on trial. In this digitally enhanced *videohigh*, "technology froze its individual frames, slowed or reversed its motion, and inscribed explanatory arrows and circles upon it" (127). The observation that *ACS* depicts segments from the original recording speaks for the series, as it provides the show with a more authentic discursive frame. Fiske notes that videolows offer much more than grainy pictures. He believes that they are indicative of the complex relationship between social power and disempowerment:

> The videolow was characterized by its poor and unsteady focus, its unplanned camera position and angle, and its subservience to "real time" (no editing). This low-technicity meant that it was low in clarity but high in authenticity. The "lowness" of its technology indexed the "lowness" of the social position from and for

> which it spoke, and carried a sense of authenticity that depended upon the videolow's apparently continuous and metonymic relationship with the experiential truths (or "true" experiences) of the socially disempowered. (127)

By editing original snippets of the Rodney King beating into the series, *ACS* preserves the underlying social authenticity observable in George Holliday's home video, which is further accentuated by the contrast arising between the shaky and oftentimes chaotic images taken in the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots and the subsequent smooth and high-tech shots of *ACS*. The scene following the archival footage, for instance, consists of a professional camera panning from the Rockingham mansion towards the limousine driver Adam Park who was waiting for O.J. Simpson to come out of the house (*ACS*, disc 1, episode 1, 01:16-01:22). This particular sequence also lacks any turbulent sounds in comparison to the all-encompassing noise that reflected the public uproar during the riots, further stressing the high discursive technology employed in the television series.

Lastly, the significance of the archival footage was even more impactful considering the TV show aired in 2016, in a year that also registered massive protests and violent altercations with the police after repeated unwarranted police shootings of young African American men in the cities of Ferguson (Michael Brown in 2014), Baltimore (Freddie Gray in 2015), Chicago (Laquan McDonald in 2014), and Staten Island (Eric Garner in 2014), among others. Although twenty years have passed since the Simpson trial, the underlying societal issues are still as relevant as in the 1990s and therefore struck a chord with a new audience in 2016.

"The Run of His Life"

The second episode of *American Crime Story*, "The Run of His Life," first aired on February 9, 2016, and attracted an audience of almost four million viewers. It is entirely dedicated to the events leading up to and surrounding the Bronco Chase. The cinematic conversion of that summer day in June 1994 was noticeably influenced by both the original media coverage and the descriptions in Jeffrey Toobin's true-crime account, although the producers implemented artistic elements that emphasize the show's fictional and dramatizing nature as well. In 1996, for instance, Robert Kardashian claimed that O.J. Simpson was sitting on the bed and watching a movie when he learned about the LAPD's pending arrest warrant. In contrast, Toobin claims that "Shapiro and Kardashian woke O.J. and told him that they would be taking him to Parker Center to surrender" (Toobin 88). The descriptions of Simpson's reaction to the bad news are noteworthy because the football star is portrayed quite differently in both stories. Kardashian asserted that his best friend had a blank stare on his face, suggesting that Simpson stayed calm while he processed the information. Jeffery Toobin, and subsequently *ACS*, depicted the alleged murderer as hysteric and aggressive. In episode one, "From the Ashes of Tragedy," and the

scene in question, Simpson is woken by Shapiro and told that he needs to get ready for his arrest:

Robert Shapiro: *They issued a warrant for your arrest. You have to be downtown at eleven. It's fine. I'm gonna fix this.*
O.J. Simpson: *No…NO! I can't do that, Bob! I can't go to jail!*
Robert Shapiro: *We'll just work through this together.*
O.J. Simpson: *Oh God!*
Robert Shapiro: *Now listen to me. It's very important that you understand this, O.J.*
O.J. Simpson: *I can't go to jail, Bob!*
Robert Shapiro: *Yes, you can. And you have to understand one thing. This may be the last time we get to speak without anyone eavesdropping, so if you have anything to say, I'll clear the room.*
O.J. Simpson: *What are you saying to me?! (The doorbell rings.)*
O.J. Simpson: *Who is that? What is that? They're already here?!*
Robert Shapiro: *No. They're just friends. They're here to look at you. We have this planned. We're here to help.*
(ACS, disc 1, episode 1, 45:25-46:00)

During the emotional dialogue in the series, Simpson displays a fight or flight response as he jumps out of bed with his eyes wide open and full of dread, throwing his hands in the air, blinking rapidly in panic upon the realization that his days as a free man are coming to an end. A television viewer who is aware of both possible accounts of the situation (Kardashian's and Toobin's) is hence left to decide which story they choose to believe and what characterization of Simpson seems more plausible. Moreover, this divergence raises the question why *ACS*'s producers adapted Toobin's account to the screen, considering they had access to the recollections of Kardashian; someone who had verily been there with the athlete in that moment. Conclusively, this example illustrates anew the ways in which Simpson's story was deliberately molded to create opportunities for speculation and dramatization.

One of the most noticeable differences observable between the original media coverage in 1994 and the TV show (and by extension Toobin's book), is its continuous focus on specific characters. As demonstrated above, in 1994, the media's and the public's point of convergence was exclusively O.J Simpson. His involvement in the murders, his motives for evading arrest, and later on his whereabouts and suicidal intents, were the focal points of interest and speculation. *ACS*, however, offers its viewers a different perspective. Although the audience is likewise taken inside the Ford Bronco to witness Simpson's backseat meltdown, other key players move to the foreground, in particular Robert Shapiro and Robert Kardashian. The second episode, for instance, opens with Robert Kardashian praying for his best friend's salvation. His words foreshadow the role he later assumed in the story: "A friend who loveth at all times, and a brother who is born in adversity" (*ACS*, disc 1, episode 2,

00:02-00:10). Indeed, the episode "The Run of His Life" shows more insight into Kardashian's state of mind than Simpson's and gives prominence to his internal struggle to come to terms with his friend's possible involvement in a double homicide. In one particular scene, Kardashian breaks down in tears in his car when the impact of the events finally overwhelms him (13:00). In showing these private moments in the series, *ACS* succeeds in humanizing Simpson's friend and challenges the attorney's colder and emotionless image in the 1990s, when it was publicly suspected that Kardashian had helped Simpson dispose of the evidence by discarding the latter's Louis Vuitton bags (Margolick, *NY Times*, 31 March 1995).

The other main character who dominates the narrative in the second episode is Robert Shapiro, and the contrast between both Roberts could not be any more palpable. Reflecting Jeffrey Toobin's negative portrayal of Shapiro in *The Run of His Life*, the attorney is likewise depicted as selfish and ruthless on *ACS*. Repeatedly, the attorney denies any responsibility for his client's disappearance, focusing solely on himself and his own reputation. When he talks on the phone with District Attorney Gil Garcetti, e.g., Shapiro apologizes by pointing out that his client caused them both unwanted trouble:

Gil Garcetti: *I wish I could reach through this goddamn phone and strangle you!*
Robert Shapiro: *I am so sorry he did this to us. I mean, you know that I'm a fixer of things. I-I-I don't tolerate this kind of stuff.*
(ACS, disc 1, episode 2, 0:30-0:40, emphasis added)

Later, while watching Garcetti's press conference on television, Shapiro bitterly exclaims:

Robert Shapiro: *I don't like the subtext of this one bit. There's an unspoken villain here.*
Robert Kardashian: *Who, A.C.?*
Robert Shapiro: *Hmm? No. Me! Everyone's blaming me for everything. I've a very clean reputation. What we need is our own press conference.*
(06:20-06:26)

In an almost comical way, *American Crime Story* takes Shapiro's insistence on having a clean reputation quite literally. The aforementioned scene takes place in the attorney's white kitchen (06:17). Modern spotlights shine from the ceiling and illuminate a place that looks immaculate, but vacuous. The shelves are empty, and there are no groceries or utensils anywhere. In fact, the only indicator that this room is part of a home is a single fruit basket (01:04), placed on the luxurious kitchen unit in the middle. However, even the basket resembles a decorative item. The apples, bananas, and oranges are carefully stacked in a big, black bowl that has the same color as the counter. The scenery emphasizes Shapiro's reserved nature, which became the center of speculation during the defense press conference, and amplifies his seemingly shallow, capitalistic goals in life (in contrast to Johnnie Cochran's social ambitions).

Later in the episode, Marcia Clark even directly accuses the attorney of pretentiousness when she angrily exclaims: "It's friggin' Shapiro. He screwed all of us. God forbid a celebrity should do a perp walk" (02:21). Noticeably, even on *ACS*, little blame is put on the person who caused the uproar in the first place: O.J. Simpson.

To further amplify Robert Shapiro's supposed narcissistic tendencies, *ACS* deviates from the original course of the defense press conference. Instead of opening his speech with a plea to O.J. Simpson, as Shapiro did in 1994, actor John Travolta's character commences with a reiteration of his impeccable reputation:

> I must make one thing perfectly clear: I am as shocked as anybody is at this turn of events. Over the past 25 years, on numerous occasions, I have made similar arrangements with the LAPD, with the District Attorney's Office, and Mr. Garcetti. They have always kept their word to me, and I have always kept my word to them. (06:41-07:04)

A little later, Shapiro is asked by a reporter what Simpson's last words were to him, whereupon the attorney answers: "Oh. Well, they were of a complimentary nature. He thanked me for everything I did for him" (07:56-08:00). As the camera turns towards the reporters, the TV audience looks into the surprised and skeptical eyes of the journalists who do not seem to believe Shapiro's self-centered response (08:01).

From the conference room, the viewer is translocated into Johnnie Cochran's law offices, where Simpson's future defense attorney is watching Shapiro's interview on television, commenting on his behavior and foreshadowing the subsequent conflict that will arise between the two during the trial:

> What a prick. Robert Shapiro is focused on his number one priority: Robert Shapiro. […] I wouldn't be falling back on the pronouns "me," "myself," and "I." People, when you take these jobs, you have only one role: You are in service to your client. Never betray that individual. Never. (07:09-07:31)

Even when Robert Shapiro learns that O.J. Simpson did not, as suspected, kill himself, but had instead fled with Al Cowlings, the attorney is not relieved for the reason that his client is still alive but because he does not have to admit defeat and face further humiliation in front of the nation, saying: "Good for you, O.J. Good for you. We're still in the game" (14:51-14:57).

Whereas Robert Shapiro is portrayed in a consistent negative light, his partner Robert Kardashian enjoys a more flattering characterization on TV. Kardashian constitutes the sensitive, religious, and moral opposite of Shapiro. In contrast to Toobin's description, which resonates accusatory notes, Robert Kardashian is the moral compass in the television series, wondering, for instance, whether he should turn over Simpson's presumed suicide note over to the police, when he finds it, before ultimately being convinced by Shapiro not to do so. It is also Robert Kardashian

that O.J. Simpson talks to on the phone from inside the Bronco, begging for help (32:30) and asking him for one last favor:

> I just wanted to tell you I love you, Bobby. Bobby, you're the best. […] I want you to tell everybody that I love 'em. Say goodbye for me. Say goodbye to Don Omair, Skip Taft, Wade Hughes, Louis Marx, Marcus Allen, Cathy and Reggie. If I'm forgetting anybody, please let 'em know. (20:32-21:26)

Towards the end of the episode and the Bronco Chase, it is also conveniently Kardashian who reaches Simpson on the phone in the exact moment the latter puts the gun in his mouth to shoot and thereby saves his life (32:26). This particular scene illustrates the fictional nature of the series, for the director makes use of a common technique where a fatal or grave action in the plot (in this case the impending suicide) is interrupted and prevented by another action (the call) at the precise time. It is unclear whether the calls between Simpson and Kardashian ever took place as depicted on *ACS*. On the contrary, Toobin claims that it was SWAT Officer Pete Weireter who talked Cowlings and Simpson into surrendering; a detail that was also confirmed in newspapers after the Chase:

> As he walked to the waiting police car, Mr. Simpson was escorted, at his request, by SWAT Officer Pete Weireter, a 17-year-veteran who spent 50 tense minutes talking with Mr. Simpson over a cellular phone as helicopters buzzed overhead and the world-famous athlete sat in his best friend's car, cradling two pictures of his family, a rosary and a gun. (Newton, *Baltimore Sun*, 19 June 1994)

Indeed, it appears more probable that the series' depictions of the phone conversations were liberties the producers took to condense the timing of events and further illuminate Kardashian's role as Simpson's guardian angel. Both explanations are corroborated by other scenes: First, Simpson asking Kardashian to say goodbye to his friends on his behalf, which can also be understood as an attempt on the producers' part to include more elements of the suicide letter in the series, since its content was barely addressed during the fictional defense press conference. Second, Kardashian's supporting role in Simpson's life is stressed when Jason Simpson, O.J.'s oldest son, calls him "Uncle Bobby" (22:14), suggesting that Kardashian was an integral part of the family. In the same scene, Kardashian is holding a bible, which points to his virtuous nature anew (12:37).

The assessment that *ACS* is a TV show of the new millennium is particularly reflected in the ironic way the producers chose to present the Kardashian family. Whereas Simpson's friend and attorney died of cancer in 2003, his remaining family went on to establish the biggest, although most controversial, reality television empire since the breakthrough of the genre. The ironic nature lies in the almost saint-like portrayal of the head of the family in the series and the public fact that one of his daughters came to fame with the leaking of a sex tape. In the 1990s, how-

ever, the name Kardashian was not as significant and powerful as it is nowadays, so when Robert Kardashian stepped to the conference podium in 1994 to read Simpson's suicide note, the journalists in the room asked him to spell his name for them. In fact, during an evening recapitulation of the Bronco Chase on *News 4 Texas: Nightbeat*, e.g., his name was repeatedly misspelled and faultily displayed on the screen as "Cardashio" ("June 17, 1994 10 pm newscast—KDFW," 9:33) or "Kardishian" (1:54), which also points to the rush with which the news segments were produced. Fact-checking names, a seemingly basic task, became negligible. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, theorist Guy Debord points to this very decline in qualitative information when he explains:

> The loss of quality so obvious at every level of the language of the spectacle, from the objects it lauds to the behavior is regulates, merely echoes the basic traits of a real production process that shuns reality. The commodity form […] is exclusively quantitative in nature: the quantitative is what it develops, and it can only develop within the quantitative. (Debord 26–27)

The confusion over the attorney's last name is reflected on *ACS* as well. In addition, the audience is also taken inside a living room where Kardashian's children, Kourtney, Kimberley, Khloé, and Robert, react to seeing their father on television:

Reporter 1:	*Who are you?*
Robert Kardashian:	*Robert…Robert Kardashian.*
Reporter 1:	*Kazany?*
Reporter 3:	*Rakashian? C-Can you please spell that?*
Kourtney Kardashian (spells):	*K-A-R-D-A-S-H-I-A-N.*
All children:	*Kardashian! Kardashian! Kardashian! Kardashian!*
	(ACS, disc 1, episode 2, 08:59-09:12)

All four continue to enthusiastically clap and chant their name. In the overall picture of *American Crime Story*, the most obvious reason for the inclusion of this particular scene is to let the new generation of viewers know in an entertaining and slightly sarcastic way that there was a time in American history when the name Kardashian did not dominate media headlines on a daily basis. From a New Historicist perspective, however, the comical addressing of the now imperative name on the reality TV world demonstrates the "concerted effort to make American representations of its […] past more usable to its present population" (Thomas 25). In contrast, Arnold Palmer's[12] last US Open on 17 June 1994 was merely mentioned for a second in the series by prosecutor Christopher Darden's father, since Palmer's name does not possess the same cultural capital in the 21st century as the Kardashians do (*ACS*, disc 1, episode 2, 05:50).

12 Arnold Palmer was one of America's most famous professional golfers in the 1990s.

Television, or the television set to be more precise, is a recurring symbol in the second episode of *ACS* that is not merely an ironic reference to the dominant role the media played in the Simpson story, and in particular in the events surrounding the Bronco Chase, but it is also the key element that interconnects all characters in the series. Using a fluent transition between TV sets on screen, the episode's director, Ryan Murphy, takes his audience from one place to another without disrupting the viewers' attention. One scene in the beginning of the second episode, for instance, takes place in a grocery store. Customers stop in the middle of their errands and stare at the small black television set placed in the corner of the supermarket, where NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw is announcing O.J. Simpson's possible involvement in the Brentwood murders (01:41).[13] There is a sudden cut from the television screen in the grocery store, and the next shot of *ACS* begins behind another small and black TV set (01:55). The camera swiftly pans to the left, revealing Gil Garcetti, Marcia Clark, and William Hodgman[14] as they are watching the same news broadcast on NBC at the District's Attorney's Office. The host's narration continues without any noticeable break between the two scenes. The same technique is used a little further into the episode in transition to Garcetti's press conference. Noticeably, a small, turned-off black TV is placed to the DA's right side (04:51). It is again an evident reminder of the dominant presence of television in the case. This assessment is further emphasized by means of an iris shot during the press conference, which envelops Gil Garcetti (04:58). On the one hand, the cinematic technique allows the director to illustrate the pressure the DA was under as the whole world focused on his office to provide an explanation for Simpson's disappearance. On the other hand, the iris shot is a powerful instrument to visually adapt the fact that most of what the public learned about the events was transmitted through the filter of a TV camera, and the people on the other side of the end followed a specific agenda (damage control in the case of government employees). Thereby, the argument that the camera neutrally informs the people is visually nullified.

It is noteworthy that the LAPD's press conference, led by Commander David Gascon, is completely omitted from the TV series. Considering that this conference set the framework for the public hunt for O.J. Simpson and the ensuing Bronco

13 The camera then shortly pans away from the TV screen to the people inside the store to capture their faces and reactions to the news in a swift movement from left to right (02:00-04). The director's intention in this particular shot is unmistakable as both men and women from different ethnicities are depicted unitedly glancing toward the television screen in awe and disbelief. It elucidates the deep social gulf, which tested the foundation of the American people during and after the main proceedings, was yet to form. In the beginning, Simpson's story was simply one of a celebrity on the run.

14 William Hodgman is an American lawyer and prosecutor. In collaboration with Marcia Clark, he initially served as a co-prosecutor during the O. J. Simpson murder trial but consigned his position to Christopher Darden after a health-related hospitalization.

Chase, the choice seems negligent; in particular in view of the numerous trivial and often fictional elements the show's creative team decided to include (such as the Kardashian children cheering their name when they see their father on television). However, there is a conspicuous reference to the consequences Gascon's press conference entailed. As police sirens commence howling and LAPD officers swarm out to find the murder suspect, so do the media. News reporters and their cameramen are depicted sprinting to their trucks and chasing off in search of Simpson (03:05), creating the impression that the news media vehicles have the same alarm system as the police do. It is a subtle, yet powerful hint to the power of the media in general and the Simpson story in particular. The criminal case was not only held in the court of law, but first and foremost, in the court of public opinion, illustrated by the simultaneous pursuit of O.J. Simpson by the media *and* the police.

Although LAPD Commander David Gascon did not make an appearance on *American Crime Story*, Gil Garcetti's press conference serves to connect the story's main characters to each other. At first, Johnnie Cochran and his team are shown watching Garcetti on TV (04:58). Two of Cochran's assistants, an African American man and woman, discuss Simpson's involvement in the murders. What initially appears to be a simple conversation between two colleagues, reveals a strategic and ironic move on the producers' part, since it is the African American woman who proclaims during the conversation: "I hope they catch him. You know he did it" (04:44), to which her male colleague responds: "You don't know that. They're just tearing down another black man" (04:47). The irony lies in the fact that it was ultimately an overwhelmingly female jury of African Americans who acquitted Simpson of the murder charges.

From Cochran's offices, the viewer is then taken inside Christopher Darden's car. The scene opens with a close-up shot of his radio, where Garcetti's press conference is also transmitted. Once again, there is no break or interruption in the District Attorney's speech from one scene to the other. Darden parks his car in his home driveway and rushes inside to continue following the press conference (05:14), where Garcetti appears on a small, black television (05:25). The subsequent scene opens with a medium shot of yet another TV set and the DA's frowning face (05:58). This time, Robert Kardashian and Robert Shapiro are shown watching the very same press conference which continues to progress in synchronization with the changing shots. This particular technique is repeatedly used throughout the episode to present visual cohesion while events occur simultaneously. In addition, the continuous demonstration of TV sets can be interpreted as a powerful symbol for and reminder of the power of television.

In line with these observations, it is easy to point out the prominent dramatizations in the fictional series for emotive impact, most notably towards the end of the episode, when O.J. Simpson finally exits the parked Bronco. Prior, Robert Kardashian had instructed his friend to leave the gun inside the car (35:16). Simpson

obeys but decides to take a framed picture of his family with him. As he steps outside of the vehicle, harsh, glaring lights illuminate him. Seconds pass with Simpson standing in one spot, looking at the officers, before one of them screams, "He's got a gun!" (35:47), as he was unable to differentiate a weapon from a rectangular photo frame. Immediately, the tension of the episode rises, although the audience knows that Simpson will make it through the night unharmed. The illogic of the sequence is taken even further when Robert Kardashian, who is *inside* the house, shouts: "No, no! Those are pictures! Those are framed pictures of his kids!" (37:05), although it was visible in the prior scene that Simpson was pressing the photo side to his chest and not the other way around. Kardashian could not have known who was in the photograph, and the probability that he was able to see clearer from inside the house than the police facing Simpson outside just a few feet away illustrates the director's blunt attempt to dramatize the arrest.

Despite such liberties taken by the creative team, there are various scenes and sequences that illustrate an aspiration for authenticity and accuracy. Most importantly, all scenes in and around Robert Kardashian's house were shot at the actual location, much like *20/20*'s producers did in 1996. In one of the first scenes of the episode, Kardashian walks into a room, where Robert Shapiro is having a drink after learning about Simpson's disappearance. Although it is sunny outside, the blinds are lowered, letting little light into the room which is instead illuminated by two small lamps (01:06, 01:09). Shapiro is wearing a black suit while Kardashian combines his dark pants with a dark grey t-shirt (01:26), adding further darkness to the scene. In this gloomy atmosphere, both sit down to discuss the suicide note Simpson left before running. The arrangement of the film set is reminiscent of the subdued layout during Barbara Walters' *20/20* interview with Kardashian in one of his upstairs bedrooms in 1996. The conversation in both cases seems intimate and enclosed by an emanation of secrecy. In the series, Kardashian hands Shapiro the letter, and the camera zooms in on the note (01:38). A comparison between the original letter and the movie version reveals a striking similarity in paper and handwriting. The latter mirrors the numerous spelling errors that can be found in the original note. Although the general viewer is certainly unable to assess all these factors, since the camera shot only lasts for a few seconds, this detail does indeed add further legitimacy to the fictional series.

Throughout the episode, the audience also observes original news footage and images from the news helicopters. Examples include NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw's report on Simpson's possible involvement in the murders (02:20), sports broadcaster Bob Costas' coverage of the NBA finals and subsequent interruptions of the game by Simpson updates (15:17) as well as helicopter images of the Bronco Chase along the Los Angeles freeway (15:33, 15:44). Apart from adding validity to the TV show, the archival footage also provides the audience with an idea of what news

media coverage consisted of in the 1990s by demonstrating the quality of TV images before the creation of High-Definition Television.

Attention to specific details with regard to the filmic recreation of the Chase adds further authenticity to the second episode. According to cinematographer Nelson Cragg, the show's locations department secured a two-mile stretch of the 710 freeway for a weekend to shoot the needed sequences. Typical (police) cars of the era form the background of the shots. The Ford Bronco used for filming closely resembles the original vehicle in terms of wheels, tires, bumpers, and license plates as well as the color schemes of the interior (*ACS*, "Special Features," disc 4, 16:07). The filming process of the Chase itself, however, could not be further from the original. As elaborated above, the original media coverage mainly consisted of helicopter images and the narration of news anchors. The creative team behind *ACS*' Bronco Chase, in contrast, consisted of 170 crew members and 200 extras (Fernandez and Jung, *Vulture*, 9 February 2016). An event that unfolded over a few hours in reality, encompassed two days of filming and the employment of different filmic devices and techniques to capture the evening from all angles. A rig was attached to the front of the car, for instance, to allow a look inside, while crane shots provided a more general overview of the location from above. High-paced and emotional scenes were filmed with body cams to create a more realistic and intimate atmosphere.

Another small, but quite accurate detail can be observed during the defense's press conference. A side-by-side analysis of the original recital of the suicide note by Robert Kardashian and the filmic adaptation reveals that the actor playing the attorney, David Schwimmer, placed emphasis on the same specific passages in the letter by looking up from the note to face the reporters as Kardashian did in 1994, for instance: "Please think of the real O.J. [*looks up*] and not this lost person" (*ACS*, disc 1, episode 2, 08:47). Schwimmer's grey suit, white shirt, and tie also match the one Simpson's friend was wearing during the press conference, adding further *bona fides* to the scene. The creative team behind the show did, however, incorporate an exaggerated cinematic element to the shot in order to illustrate Kardashian's discomfort in the situation. In *ACS*, Kardashian is sweating profusely, and beads of sweat are running down his forehead (08:24). In the original footage, even though the attorney is also visibly uncomfortable, physically, he is less affected.

In other instances, the dramatizing nature of the fictional series dominates the narrative, distorting events and personalities as it deviates from its literary source *The Run of His Life*. One of the most striking discrepancies results from the portrayal of Al Cowlings during the Bronco Chase. The filmic interpretation of him appears, similar to other TV versions of the main characters such as O.J. Simpson himself, much more aggressive and short-tempered than the real-life counterpart. An analysis of Cowlings' phone call to 911 proves this assumption. At 6:46 p.m., with the Bronco Chase well underway, Cowlings called the authorities and asked them to keep their distance to the car because Simpson was growing increasingly suicidal. The

conversation with the Highway Patrol officer was tense but respectful. Instead of anger, there was desperation and pleading in Cowlings' voice:

Officer: *911. What are you reporting?*
Al Cowlings: *This is A.C. I have O.J. in the car.*
Officer: *OK, where are you?*
Al Cowlings: *Please, I'm coming up the 5 freeway.*
Officer: *OK.*
Al Cowlings: *Right now, we're OK, but you gotta tell the police to just back off. He's still alive. He's got a gun to his head.*
Officer: *OK, hold on a minute.*
Al Cowlings: *He just wants to see his mother. Let me get him to the house.*
Officer: *Hold on a moment.*
("Complete Transcripts of Emergency Calls," Associated Press, 20 June 1994)

The officer proceeded to contacting another colleague to lead the call, and Cowlings was waiting patiently while the sound of police sirens filled the silence of the phone conversation.

Officer: *OK. Where are you? Is everything else OK?*
Al Cowlings: *Everything right now is OK, officer. Everything is OK. He wants me to get him to his mom. He wants me to get him to his house.*
Officer: *OK.*
Al Cowlings: *That's all he asks. He's got a gun to his head.*
Officer: *OK, and sir, what's your name?*
Al Cowlings: *My name is A.C. You know who I am, Goddamn it!*
Officer: *OK. All-righty, sir, hold on just a moment.*
("Complete Transcripts of Emergency Calls," Associated Press, 20 June 1994)

In the original recording, Cowlings seemed to be the one to mitigate the situation by repeatedly affirming that everything is okay. In addition, he expressed respect for law enforcement when he addressed the operator with "officer." Cowlings only grew impatient as the conversation dragged on and the emergency operator failed to provide any satisfactory answers. He finally hung up when he was transferred to yet another officer. The TV series condenses the aforementioned event and paints an aggressive and impertinent picture of Al Cowlings. Instead of expressing respect, he cusses at the operator, ultimately calling her a "stupid ass" after hanging up (*ACS*, disc 1, episode 2, 17:15):

Operator: *This is 911. What is your emergency?*
Al Cowlings: *Hey, this is A.C. I have O.J. in the car!*
Operator: *Who is this?*
Al Cowlings: *You know who this is, goddamn it! I have O.J. in the car! You tell the police to back off! He's got a gun to his head!*

Operator: *Hold on a moment. Where are you? Is everything else okay?*
Al Cowlings: *What? No! What kind of stupid-ass question is that?! Everything is terrible! You just clear the freeway! We're going to Brentwood!*
(16:51-17:13)

This particular scene notably demonstrates the manipulative powers of television. With a character such as Al Cowlings, who has not spoken openly about the events on June 17 and tried to avoid the spotlight from the very beginning, it is easy to construct a narrative that supports the pace of the series instead of establishing an authentic representation of the personality involved.

A similar deviation from the source material concerns Gil Garcetti's reaction to Simpson's disappearance. In the scene in question, the District Attorney is on the phone with Robert Shapiro who tries to explain that it was not his fault Simpson disappeared. In *The Run of His Life*, Jeffrey Toobin quotes Garcetti to say: "Just get him in here, Bob. That's all we're thinking about now" (Toobin 93). In the filmic adaption, however, the DA is considerably more threatening and less understanding. Furiously, he exclaims: "I wish I could reach through this goddamn phone and strangle you!" (*ACS*, disc 1, episode 2, 00:30). His anger and inner furor are further emphasized with a quick zoom shot in combination with a slight low angle shot. This technique allows the camera operator to rapidly reduce the distance between the camera and the object being filmed without physically moving the camera. Due to the rapid magnification of the frame, the audience if forced to fixate on a single object or person. In this instance, Gil Garcetti and his rage move to the foreground, which increases the audience's emotional response to his reaction. The zoom shot can also be understood as a cinematic symbol for the District Attorney's accelerated pulse and unrest. The complementary low-angle perspective forces the audience to look up at Garcetti as the camera is placed below eye level. The arrangement thereby creates an additional level of intimidation and places the audience in the same position as Robert Shapiro on the other end of the phone line. Furthermore, the low angle shot places emphasis on the gravity and intensity of what is being said. Nevertheless, the show's creative team deviated from their source material to accelerate the pace of the episode, putting the "threat of strangulation" in Garcetti's mouth which he might not have used in real-life.

The second episode of *ACS* offers a rich pool of examples for how the O.J. Simpson story was not only hyped up visually, but maybe even more so, linguistically. One finds repeated use and embedment of superlatives and exaggerations to amplify the sensationalization of the events. In the archival footage inserted into the episode, e.g., news anchor Tom Brokaw claims to be making "one of the most stunning announcements you're ever gonna hear on live television" (01:53) with "one of this country's best-known personalities [as] a suspect in a double homicide" (02:00). Later on, Brokaw and his audience "are witnessing tonight a modern tragedy and

drama of Shakespearian proportion being played out live on television in Southern California" (20:04). And without knowing the details of the case, Johnnie Cochran claims that "something big's happening here" (05:05), and the chase itself is titled "the world's longest Ford Bronco commercial" (19:04). Mirroring the medial characterization of O.J. Simpson in the 1990s, *ACS* also makes use of superlatives and exaggerations when its characters refer to the athlete. Marcia Clark is certain that "everyone knows his face" (02:40), and District Attorney Gil Garcetti acknowledges in Simpson "the falling of an American hero" (05:48). According to one of Christopher Darden's neighbors, "nobody could catch the Juice" (26:06) at the height of his career. Even during his fall, he claimed "the big screen" (17:46) for himself, and "[t]he entire world was focused on this one man" (05:57) as he fled from "half the police in California" (16:43). In taking up and building on these overstatements and magnifications, the anthology series helps viewers understand how the case morphed into the so-called Trial of the Century. Visual and linguistic choices work together to imply a uniqueness and cultural significance that most criminal trials do not possess. In his 1944 essay, "The Triumph of Mass Idols," sociologist Leo Lowenthal elaborated on the use of language as a stylistic device in mass culture to "achieve[…] the transformation of the average into the extraordinary" (Lowenthal, *Literature and Mass Culture* 232) and to produce "all around alertness" (234). Readers and viewers are constantly encouraged to consume and to divert their attention to media reports about specific events due to their implied singularity. In the same way, public attention is directed towards personalities who, through their "accomplishments and experiences, their friends and acquaintances, are characterized as unique beings and events" (232).

Music of the Decade

Ever since the replacement of the silent cinema with sound motion pictures in the 1920s, music has played a significant role in supporting and clarifying the meaning of cinematographic images. In *ACS*, one can observe a complementing use of songs to either emphasize the seriousness of a particular situation or, on the contrary, to create humorous effects. In other instances, the show's music comes at precise moments to support the visual depiction of a character, i.e., to illuminate their vulnerable or contending side. As will be shown in the following analysis, the creative team around Ryan Murphy and musical supervisor PJ Bloom chose defining anthems of the 1990s to immerse their audience in the era. In 2016, the series even received a Primetime Emmy Award for the "Outstanding Sound Mixing for a Limited Series or Movie."

The show's premiere episode, "From the Ashes of Tragedy," ends with a captivating cliffhanger, and the utilized music contributes its share to ensure the audience returns for the next episode. At the end of the pilot, O.J. Simpson threatens to commit suicide in Robert Kardashian's home after learning about the LAPD's pending arrest warrant. When Al Cowlings arrives at the house, a panicking Kardashian storms

down the stairs pleading for help with Simpson. In the next scene, a patrol car, on its way to the hideout with howling sirens, appears behind the hills of San Fernando Valley while Nina Simone's gospel-jazz rendition of Bob Dylan's 1967 classic "I Shall Be Released" begins to play (*ACS*, disc 1, episode 1, 52:43). Taken independently from the series, the song creates a rather calm and bluesy vibe and might seem like a peculiar choice to accompany the chaotic scenes of the episode. At a closer look, however, the song is a felicitous selection in many ways. As indicated above, the calming melody stands in stark contrast to the fast-pacing events transpiring at Kardashian's house. In fact, it is this very contrast that highlights the tension of the episode's last scenes: When the police arrive, Robert Shapiro attempts to appease the impatient police officers while Robert Kardashian is running back upstairs to get O.J. Simpson. Moments later, he returns without the suspect, proclaiming with terror-stricken eyes, "He's not there" (53:04). While chaos ensues and everyone spreads out to locate the alleged murderer, Nina Simone continues singing to the rhythmic melody of the song. Simpson and Cowlings, however, are long gone. In the final scene, the white Ford Bronco sways into the shot, already on a Los Angeles freeway, heading towards the unknown (54:08) and accompanied by one last repetition of the line "I Shall Be Released."

Although Bob Dylan wrote the song more than two decades prior to the 1994 events, the lyrics apply to Simpson's situation astonishingly well. The third verse in particular seems to have been purely written for O.J. Simpson, considering he always stressed his innocence in public and in court:

> Yonder stands a man in this lonely crowd
> A man who says he's not to blame
> All day long I hear him hollering so loud
> Just crying out that he's not to blame

According to music critic David Yaffe, Dylan's "I Shall Be Released" was originally composed as "a song about redeemed prisoners" (Yaffe 15). Nevertheless, the title can be read as an ironic reference to Simpson's acquittal on October 3, 1995, the day he walked out of Judge Ito's courtroom as a free man; redeemed, if only primarily in the eyes of the law. Like an oracle, Nina Simone sings in her rendition:

> I see my light come shining
> From the west down to the east
> Any day now, any day now
> I shall be released

The second verse offers a powerful hint to the tragic character of the athlete's story—his public fall from grace after being worshipped as an American hero—and sets the tone for the future episodes of the series:

They say every man needs protection
They say every man must fall
So, I swear I see my reflection
Somewhere inside these walls

The first episode concludes with Nina Simone's singing and Simpson and Cowlings on the run. The second episode, "The Run of His Life," then depicts the infamous Bronco Chase in detail and is especially rich in musical arrangement, allowing the audience to immerse themselves in the tension-filled time period that were the 1990s in the US. When Chris Thomas and Kathy Ferrigno first spot the white Ford Bronco on the freeway, the camera and subsequently the viewers are positioned in the backseat of the couple's old Volkswagen Bus (*ACS*, disc 1, episode 2, 09:40). Thomas' and Ferrigno's excitement and youthful carelessness are accentuated with Beastie Boys' "Sabotage." The track was released in May 1994 by one of the oldest and most successful New Yorker hip-hop bands in the US and constitutes one of the era's most defining compositions. "Sabotage" mirrors the band's experiments with Hardcore music and is featured as number 480 on Rolling Stone's "500 Greatest Songs of All Time." In the series, the rock metal sound and the 'screaming' of the lead singer encapsulate the chaos and confusion that surrounds Simpson's disappearance, but also illuminate Al Cowlings' panic and desperation as he is driving the Bronco. When the white car catches up to the Volkswagen, Thomas and Ferrigno start honking and yelling at Cowlings to catch his attention. The latter, busy swerving between lanes, notices the couple and furiously screams at them: "What are you looking at?" (10:08). "Sabotage," combined with the loud sounds made by the cars and the people in the scene, creates a noise overload, thereby inundating the viewers with the overwhelm Al Cowlings felt in that very moment.

Beastie Boys' "Sabotage" continues playing when a police squad car initiates its pursuit of the Bronco. Police sirens are howling, tires screeching, and horns honking (10:28). The track enhances the rush, the agitation, and the anger of both the police and the fugitives inside the vehicle. As the white car comes to a halt during a traffic jam, the police officers approach it with their guns drawn and pointed at Cowlings, commanding him to step out of the vehicle. Furiously, Cowlings responds: "No, no. Hell, no! Do you know what's going on here? O.J.'s in the back seat with a gun to his head!" (11:08-11:17). Then, for the first time, the viewers are taken inside the Bronco, where they see O.J. Simpson—in panic and indeed pointing a gun to his temple—screaming: "No! I ain't speaking to nobody!" (11:20). The police officers carefully step back and let the Bronco drive away. Masterfully, the show's musical team build up the tension by use of one particular song and simultaneously provided their audience with an insight into the defining music of the era.

Thematically, these sequences surrounding the standing car also reflect and reveal the biased position of the police when it comes to famous people. Watching

the fugitives drive away, one policeman asks his colleague, "Do we shoot?" whereupon the other states, "I'm not shooting at O.J. Simpson unless somebody authorizes it" (11:40). References to the preferential treatment of celebrities in general and O.J. Simpson in particular abound in the series. Gil Garcetti, for instance, furiously lashes out at prosecutor William Hodgman who is unsure what protocol to follow with a celebrity on the run: "The protocol? I don't know, Bill. What is the protocol for an armed celebrity fugitive being chased by 12 police cars and seven helicopters? Christ" (15:35). Furthermore, towards the end of the Chase and episode, the SWAT commander instructs his snipers: "No hotheads. We're on TV. Don't fire unless you're fired upon first" (35:40). Before being escorted out of the house, Simpson is also shown sitting in the center of his brown sofa, requesting a glass of orange juice ("Of course, O.J.") while the police and SWAT team patiently stand around, waiting for him to finish the phone call with his mother instead of arresting him on the spot (38:14).

In the series, music also plays a significant role in highlighting the image or particular characteristic traits of the main players involved in the case. Robert Shapiro, for instance, is shown driving home in his expensive Mercedes Benz after the defense's evening press conference on June 17 while Al Jarreau's 1981 smooth jazz ballad "We're in This Love Together" is playing on the radio. The selection of this song emphasizes Shapiro's rather calm and almost emotionless reaction to the volatile events surrounding his client. The harmonious and polished sound of the track is also a fitting choice to highlight Shapiro's wealth and status in Los Angeles, and the song continues playing as the attorney pulls into the spacious driveway of his luxurious white mansion, which is surrounded by big green trees and a well-maintained lawn (14:16).

The 1980s also marked the beginning of a music genre nowadays referred to as "West Coast gangsta rap," and Los Angeles-raised rapper Ice Cube became the most successful artist of this sound. One of the genre's goals was to "communicate a strong sense of street authenticity" (Quinn 2), and it was therefore appropriate to include Ice Cube's 1994 single "Bob Gun" in the second episode to establish veracity. In the scene in question, Christopher Darden discusses the racial context of the Simpson case with his neighbors while they are barbecuing outside. At this point, Darden was not yet professionally involved in the prosecution of the case. The funky beat of "Bob Gun" is unobtrusively playing in the background as if a part of the barbecue, quietly whirring on somebody's stereo (25:56). Ice Cube's West Coast gangsta rap played in the backyards of many African American homes of South L.A. communities in 1994, which is particularly important considering Christopher Darden, an African American man himself, was labeled an 'Uncle Tom' and traitor during the trial for supposedly representing the interests of the dominant white culture (i.e., the government) and seemingly being disloyal to his own people. *American Crime Story* paints the opposite picture of him. Before coming to wealth due to his involvement in the

Simpson trial, Darden and his parents lived in a comfortable middle-class home in a clearly African American area (05:58). All the houses stood close together and Darden enjoyed over-the-fence conversations with his neighbors and friends, indicating that he was an active and accepted member of the community. Even the conversations he has in the series suggest that Darden was proud of his roots and felt a strong sense of allegiance towards his African American peers. In one scene, he and his father Richard are watching Gil Garcetti's news conference as the disgraced District Attorney comments on Simpson's disappearance. Richard asks his son: "You think he's gonna get away?" whereupon Christopher Darden answers: "No way. O.J. humiliated them. He's dead meat" (05:58), assuming an African American perspective when he speaks of "them." Later in the episode, returning to the barbecue scene, Darden expresses his displeasure with black people idolizing O.J. Simpson as a hero: "O.J. never gave back. Well, you see any parks around here named for him? Any children's centers? […] Once O.J. made his money, he split and never came back. He became white" (26:39).

American Crime Story aims to contradict the prevalent negative perception of Christopher Darden in the American public in 1995 and beyond that. The use of "Bop Gun" helps ground the aforementioned scene in reality and emphasizes the prosecutor's sense of belonging. Subtly, and with the hindsight of two decades, however, the creative team behind the series still visually alluded to the division that would arise between the prosecutor and the African American community over the course of the trial, when a high crane shot contrasts Darden's green lawn to the concrete backyard of his neighbors (26:40). On the one hand, the rich color and softness of the grass could be read to symbolize the prosecutor's belief in the criminal justice system, hope, and perhaps as an expression of a certain degree of naïveté when it comes to racial questions. His neighbors, on the other hand, are standing on hard concrete, which is reflective of their negative attitude towards law enforcement. As a prosecutor, they seemingly believe, Christopher Darden does not have to endure the same oppression as they do.

Inside the Bronco

As previously mentioned, O.J. Simpson's seating position in the Bronco and, most importantly, his emotional state are only revealed a fourth of the way into the second episode. In ironic reference to the fact that the events of the Bronco Chase involved his disappearance, O.J. Simpson only makes rare appearances in the episode in question. Indeed, the focus lies on the cultural implications and reactions to the day's events, and the series succeeds in covering different areas of public life and details that the TV audience was not aware of in 1994. E.g., viewers learn how Simpson's close family reacted to Robert Kardashian's premature conclusion and announcement that the athlete had committed suicide (13:53). This scene establishes, on the one hand, that many people, even those closest to the athlete, oftentimes acted on

hearsay or their own theories, making an issue of unverified information. On the other hand, it irradiates the family that often stayed in the background during the trial: Simpson's siblings and older children, who always believed in his innocence, and, regardless of one's own opinion about the celebrity defendant, were hurting in the process of the story as well.

On a more humorous, yet telling level, *ACS* references Domino's Pizza's record sales on June 17 as millions of Americans were glued to their screens, watching the Bronco Chase unfold on live television. According to Tim McIntyre, Vice President of Corporate Communications for Domino's Pizza, it was a "record night" (Boyette, *CNN.com*, 10 June 2014). In the series, an overwhelmed pizza worker exclaims in disbelief, "Aw, this is crazy, man! We ran out of cheese!" (20:09) while the phones continue ringing relentlessly. What can be understood as an amusing element of the episode also corroborates the assessment that the events surrounding the Brentwood murders were perceived as entertainment from the very beginning, and there was an apathy towards the victims. The same indifferent attitude was displayed by the news media who prepared a eulogy for O.J. Simpson even before his supposed suicide was confirmed in order to "stay ahead of the news" (22:41). Similarly, the NBA finals were not interrupted to keep the public informed about the potential danger Simpson posed by being on the run but, rather, because he was "news, entertainment, and sports" (17:53).

The events taking place inside the Ford Bronco are among the most dramatic and captivating of the second episode as the audience witnesses O.J. Simpson's mental breakdown and Al Cowlings' desperate attempts to de-escalate the situation. In their interpretation of the Chase, the creative team behind *ACS* was able to offer viewers a glimpse into a world, to which cameras had no access to in 1995. However, precisely for this reason, many aspects, such as conversations or even Simpson's position and gestures in the car, are necessarily a subjective exposition rather than a meticulous rendering. Consequently, the director could foreground the fictional Al Cowlings whose real-life equivalent remained silent throughout the events. The series explores not only the emotional turmoil of O.J. Simpson but likewise that of his friends who is presented as the voice of reason inside the Bronco. For instance, it is Cowlings who directly stares into the muzzle of an officer's handgun when the car comes to a halt in a traffic jam and he is directed to step out of the vehicle while Simpson is panicking in the backseat (11:37). It is also him who has to deal with O.J. Simpson's eldest son, when the latter rushes towards the driver's side to appeal to his father as soon as the Bronco comes to a halt on the driveway of Rockingham.

Director Ryan Murphy covered the sequences inside the car from all perspectives (front, back, side) and predominantly employed close-up and medium shots, which were often shaking to simulate the car's movement on the road (e.g., 23:55) and create a higher degree of scenic intimacy and urgency. Thereby, the viewer is placed directly inside the Bronco, which, in turn, insinuates an atmosphere of exclusivity,

particularly when compared to the original footage taken from distant news helicopters in 1994. In reference to the extensive media reports about Simpson having a gun in the car, *ACS* accentuates the weapon through close-up shots, and it becomes a constant reminder of his irrationality and part of almost every sequence that features O.J. Simpson. The first scene taking the viewer inside the car spotlights the athlete holding the gun to his head and threatening to pull the trigger (11:50). Later on, the weapon becomes the sole visual point of focus when Simpson starts talking to Detective Lange on the phone (25:27), indicating the power this piece of metal had to stop the police from intercepting the fugitives. In stark contrast to other cases, where police officers had shot African American suspects on the mere assumption that they carried a weapon,[15] O.J. Simpson's celebrity status levered out the treatment many low-profile black citizens have been facing by law enforcement in the US.

Furthermore, Simpson's responses to Detective Lange are put in an ironic context when framed against the close-up visual of the gun. In one scene, for instance, Simpson indicates that he is sorry for causing all this trouble, but the detailed and frame-filling image of the gun almost serves as a symbolic question mark, challenging the celebrity's statements to the police (25:29). Later on in the conversation, Tom Lange hesitantly asks Simpson: "So, uh, I understand you have a gun" (25:07). Equally, a close-up shot of the deadly weapon fills the screen as Simpson assures the detective, "Don't worry. I would never hurt any of you guys. This gun's for me" (26:00). The series' sequence covering Lange's and Simpson's phone call ends with a last close up shot of the weapon, when the latter solemnly proclaims: "I deserve to get hurt" (26:50). Lastly, with the gun pressed to his cheek, Simpson calls Robert Kardashian from inside the Bronco and, seemingly unable to assess the severity of the situation, innocently asks his friend if he had heard about what was going on and then proceeds to reminisce about the good old times with a smile on his face while a dozen police cars are following the Ford Bronco (21:10-22:01).

The last third of the episode predominantly takes the audience to the streets of Los Angeles. The TV sequences depict people standing on overpasses and the sides of the roads, musically accompanied by Bad Influence's hip-hop track "What Flava" (27:41). A reporter approaches a group of young, African American men and asks them why they are cheering for O.J. Simpson, a suspected murderer of two people. To this question, the young men reply: "We're not cheering for O.J. We're boo-

15 One notable example is the 1994 shooting of 13-year-old African American Nicholas Heyward Jr. by a white police officer, who mistook the child's plastic gun for a real weapon. Heyward Jr. was shot in the stomach with the officer's .38-caliber service revolver and died in the hospital hours later. The boy's death drew intense nationwide news media coverage. Citing Nicholas' realistic-looking toy rifle as his rationale, Brooklyn district attorney, Charles J. Hynes, declined to press charges against the officer in question.

ing the LAPD! […] He's a black man being hunted by the police. They pick you up for anything! I'd run!" (28:53-29:08). With these scenes, *ACS* attempts to mirror the social atmosphere in 1990s Los Angeles, indicating that O.J. Simpson's flight touched and exposed a sensitive nerve in the community, and that his story was perceived as more than a celebrity anecdote. Inside the car, Cowlings and Simpson interpret the cheering differently, however. Cowlings claims that "[t]hey're out because they love you. They still love you, Juice" (29:34). In the background of the scene and to indicate a memory, the distant voice of a sports anchor announces one of Simpson's many accomplishments in American football: "64 yards! O.J. Simpson! 80 yards for O.J. Simpson!" (29:43). Just as distantly, yet passionately, one can hear people cheering, again in Simpson's memory, calling his name not because he is on the run but because he broke records in sports many years ago. Back in the present and with the gun still pressed to his chest, Simpson starts crying bitterly at the realization why people are cheering for him now (28:42).

As the Chase comes to an end and the car finally approaches Rockingham, the audience is once again placed inside the Bronco as Cowlings attempts to make his way through the crowd of people gathered around Sunset Boulevard. This scene is quite powerful and accentuates the advantages of adapting true events to the television screen. While the spectators on the street as well as the audience watching from their homes only had the outside impression of the events, the series' audience is able to experience the chaos in Los Angeles from inside the car and the fugitives' perspective. For instance, *ACS* offers a view outside the windows and of the masses closing in on the Bronco as well as the loud thumbing noises heard inside the vehicle as fans bang against the doors and windows to catch Simpson's attention (30:49). Images of the Bronco making his way to Rockingham are once again repeatedly intertwined with archival footage to complement *ACS*' medium and close-up shots of the events with the original wide aerial shots of the news helicopters (e.g., 31:47).

The last phase of the June 17 events is visually initiated when daytime turns to nighttime within a cut (32:38). Helicopter lights shine on the parked Ford Bronco until the SWAT commander suddenly orders to "kill the lights." In conjunction with his image as a civil rights attorney, it is Johnnie Cochran who comments on this decision with, "They don't want us to see" (33:11), hinting at the police's alleged plan to shoot O.J. Simpson rather than arrest him. In the next scene, however, this notion is subtly refuted, when a news anchor explains that these precautionary measures had been taken for public protection in case Simpson decided to kill himself (33:19). These sequences are exemplary of how information was manipulated or at least interpreted differently, enabling both the media and spectators to develop different narratives about the events with different social implications.

The second episode of *ACS* concludes with Franz Schubert's "Piano Trio No. 2" softly playing in the background. It is a favorite piece of cinematographers for its unobtrusive, yet aching melancholy and a fitting closing theme for the day of the

Bronco Chase. After almost thirty minutes of enthralling scenes and passionate dialogues, O.J. Simpson quietly surrenders to law enforcement. While on the phone with his hospitalized mother, tears stream down his face as he tells her he loves her (36:51). Schubert's timeless composition musically supports Cuba Gooding Jr.'s portrayal of a mentally and physically exhausted O.J. Simpson who is escorted out of his house in cuffs in the darkness of the night (37:43). After he is placed in the backseat of a waiting police car, the camera is adjusted to and remains in a close-up shot of Simpson's face as the piano continues playing. The former American hero, who was always surrounded by friends and admirers, is now all alone and surrounded by darkness (38:09). The finale of "The Run of His Life" marks the beginning of the O.J. Simpson story. In the same way that he would manage a year later with the announcement of the verdict, for a day, Simpson succeeded in making the Unites States stand still and rush at the same time.