Reading O.J. Simpson:
Everyday Rhetoric as Gift and Commodity in *I Want to Tell You*.

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Academic Declaration

This thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

All reference material and sources have been cited. Unless otherwise indicated the following work is the original contribution of the writer, Marise Williams.
Abstract

The "Bronco Chase" and arrest of Orenthal James (O.J.) Simpson for the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend, Ronald Goldman, and his subsequent criminal trial became one of the most captivating, mass-mediated events of the last decade of the twentieth century. Simpson's iconic celebrity status and his race as an African-American inflamed the notoriety of the crime. An insatiable spectatorial desire for Simpson and narratives concerning his alleged involvement in the Brentwood murders engulfed the American public and American culture for thirty-two months. An excessive scrutiny of his identity by the media, law and order professionals and the populace generated a racially charged discursive cacophony.

The memoir Simpson published during his remand to raise funds for his defense expenses, *I Want to Tell You: My Response to Your Letters, Your Messages, Your Questions*, allows for a productive critical study of everyday rhetoric and the commodity fetishism of celebrity. Released in late January 1995, during the first week of the prosecution's opening statements in the criminal trial, *I Want to Tell You* was Simpson's first public comment following the nationally televised reading of his "suicide note" and his spectacular arrest on June 17, 1994.

The intercalation of Simpson's narrative utterance with 108 of the more than three hundred thousand letters he received from June to December 1994 as Los Angeles County Jail inmate 4013970 is a practical manifestation of the use value and exchange value of fame. The reciprocity of the epistolic, the phatic demands of address, the etiquette of fan mail and hate mail, the gift of the written text, vulnerable and resonant, reveal an adherence to the symbiotic dynamic of the
celebrity-fan, writer-reader, dyadic relation and its currency. Plying his trade as idol of
consumption, as spectacle, as genre, Simpson capitalised on the cultural condition of his name
and his face as objects of desire. The racialised flesh of Simpson's African-American male body
became a site and a sight for narrative and inscription within a pay-per-view marketplace of
reification, *prosopopoeia*, gazeability and criminality.
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This work is dedicated to Nicole Brown Simpson (and Ronald Goldman).
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Introduction: Setting the Scene

David Marshall offers the following "Vignette" of an American, fin de siècle moment in the Preface to Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture:

O.J. Simpson, the football star, film actor, and sports commentator, creates a massive media frenzy in Los Angeles as he avoids arrest for the brutal slaying of his ex-wife and a young man. Saturation coverage in the United States transforms the event into something internationally significant. O.J. eventually surrenders, not only to the police but also to his new celebrity status as fallen hero and courtroom defendant in the public consciousness. (ix)

Toni Morrison offers a more potent realisation of the "massive media frenzy" (Marshall ix) in "The Official Story: Dead Man Golfing," the Introduction to Birth of a Nationhood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case:

The media's instant and obvious preference for a guilty man created an early if not immediate public rage at having been deceived, of having profoundly flawed judgment. Mr. Simpson was accused of multiple murder. But he was guilty of personal treason. A woman opens her door, steps out and has her head chopped off. A man performs a neighborly gesture and is cut to pieces. The media response to this obscenity was excessive, manipulative and generally obfuscatory. But the blood it smelled belonged not to the victims but to the prey - a potent sensation aroused by the site and sight of a fallen, treacherous, violent black body, and sustained by the historical association of such a body with violence as dread entertainment. (xiv)

Underneath the commodified story (of violence, sex, race, etc.) is a cultural one.
While it is the commercial value of the story as product that gave the Simpson case its
gigantism, it is the force of the cultural narrative that gives it its staying power. The
spectacle is the narrative; the narrative is spectacularized and both monopolize
appearance and social reality. (Morrison, "Official Story" xvii)

Simpson's arrest on June 17, 1994, for the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson and
Ronald Goldman, and his subsequent criminal trial produced one of the most captivating mass
mediated events of the last decade of the twentieth century. Simpson's iconic celebrity status and
his race as an African-American inflamed the notoriety of the crime. Brown Simpson was a
Caucasian woman. Goldman was a Caucasian man. Simpson-gazing became an epidemic
spread by a ceaseless proliferation of mass media interest and speculation regarding his alleged
involvement in the double homicide. The O.J. Simpson story was a cynosure for the mania of a
transfixed and opinionated American public as Simpson was successively recast from beloved
athlete and grieving ex-husband to murder suspect, alleged murderer, violent and abusive
husband, criminal defendant, civil defendant. Vision, updates, leaks and dramatic revelations
pertaining to the Simpson case streamed daily, hourly, by the minute and live. News reports were
fortified by "expert" debate and public deliberation on television, on radio, in print, on streets; in
workplaces, schools and homes. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "cynosure" as: "1. The
northern constellation Ursa Minor, which contains in its tail the Pole-star; also applied to the Pole-
star itself. [. . .] 2. fig. a. Something that serves for guidance or direction; a 'guiding star'. [. . .]
b. Something that attracts attention by its brilliancy or beauty; a centre of attraction, interest, or
admiration" ("Cynosure," def. 1, 2a, 2b). In keeping with these applications of the word, I use
"cynosure" to describe Simpson himself and the O.J. Simpson story. As the ex-husband of one of
the victims, Simpson became a person of interest to the Los Angeles Police Department in the investigation of the Brentwood murders. Simpson's status as a celebrity suspected of committing double murder attracted the attention of the media and the avid interest of the general public. Simpson's fame enabled the generation of a media spectacle. He had been a star football player. As a public figure and an alleged murderer who was African-American, Simpson functioned as a locus for racial visibility; the unmasking of whiteness and white interest. Simpson's race and his fame guided or directed the Simpson story as a public event and the Simpson case as a courtroom drama.¹

At the time of the murders, June 12, 1994, Simpson was a retired Pro American Football player of high regard. He had played gridiron for the university of Southern California, the Buffalo Bills and the San Francisco 49ers.² In 1968 he was awarded the prestigious Heisman Trophy by the Downtown Athletic Club of New York City, an honour reserved for the best college football player in the country. In 1975 he was named National Football League Most Valuable Player and in 1985 he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Simpson had been loved and cheered by millions of Americans. He had continued to entertain as a television sports commentator, a corporate spokesperson, a film and television actor, and in television commercials for Hertz, the car rental company. Simpson was successful, rich, famous and black. He was a positive role model, an exemplar of a "color-blind" or "race-neutral" society. As metaphor, Simpson's arrest on a double murder charge was the revelation of his tragic failing writ large as the failure of a nation. That he

¹ John Fiske claims: "Racial difference was more explicit in the O.J. Simpson trial than in the trials of the police officers accused of beating Rodney King or in Anita Hill's hearings" (272). Although Fiske means the legal trials, I would add to this Simpson's trial by media and his trial in the courtroom of public opinion.

² See "O.J. Simpson Chronology" in I Want to Tell You (Simpson 205-08).
may have been an innocent man wrongfully accused was not the dominant narrative perpetuated by the mainstream media. Simpson's arrest generated the prolonged interrogation of a baffling and defining moment in the socio-cultural history of the United States of America. His innocence remains an unresolved issue, a problematic and contested site. It remains so not simply because the criminal trial delivered a not guilty verdict and the civil trial did find him responsible and liable, but because of what the event, as an historic socio-cultural phenomenon, articulated about the thoughts and feelings of the American people and media.

Simpson met Nicole Brown in June 1977, when he was married to his first wife, Marquerite (Simpson 206). Brown was an eighteen-year-old waitress at the Daisy, a private Beverly Hills Club Simpson frequented regularly (Weller 122, 105; Los Angeles Times Staff 8). Brown and Simpson began dating almost immediately (Weller 124-27). Simpson and Marquerite separated in October 1978 and filed for divorce in March 1979 (Simpson 207). After living together for six years, Simpson and Brown were married on February 2, 1985, in the back yard of Simpson's Rockingham home in Brentwood, Los Angeles, California (Los Angeles Times Staff 8; Simpson 207). On January 6, 1992, Brown Simpson requested a separation and they were divorced on October 15, 1992 (Simpson 25, 208). Brown Simpson was awarded custody of their two children, Sydney and Justin. In May 1993 Simpson and Brown Simpson began dating again (Simpson 208). A "confidante" of Brown Simpson and Simpson, Faye Resnick claims Brown Simpson terminated the

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3 In Pursuit of Justice reports that Brown Simpson was seventeen years old when she met Simpson (Los Angeles Times Staff 8-9), yet Sheila Weller dates Brown Simpson's move to Los Angeles as two days "after her eighteenth birthday" (122-23). According to Weller's sources, Simpson "fell in love with the beautiful young blond waitress on the red-brick patio of the Daisy during the end of the last week of June and the beginning of the first week of July 1977" (123).

4 The "O.J. Simpson Chronology" in I Want to Tell You lists October 15, 1992, as their divorce date (Simpson 208). Simpson claims their divorce was final on October 25, 1992 (Simpson 25).
reconciliation in early May 1994 (Resnick 171). In *Nicole Brown Simpson: The Private Diary of a Life Interrupted*, Resnick recounts separate telephone conversations with Brown Simpson and Simpson regarding the break up:

Nicole told me: "I finally faced up to him. I told him, 'O.J., I never ever want to see you again. Get out of my life. Get away from me. Get the fuck away from me. And don't ever call me again. You are one sick individual." [.] "If I'm with him, and I complain about his women, he's going to beat me. And maybe someday he'll beat me to death."

She sounded almost resigned. "So that's my choice, Faye. I think he'll kill me if I stay with him, so if he's going to kill me because I'm leaving, I might as well face it now." [.] My other phone line rang. I put Nicole on hold.

It was O.J., yelling, cursing.

"Faye, that fucking bitch, she told me she never wants to be with me again..."

"O.J., listen..."

He cut me off. "If she's really serious about this, and I find out she's with any other man before August, *I'll kill her*!"

"Whoa! O.J., what are you saying?"

"I can't take this, Faye, I can't take this. I mean it. *I'll kill that bitch.*"

"O.J., hold on..."

I punched the other line. "Nicole, O.J.'s on the other line; I'll call you back." (171-73)
Resnick's sensational biography indicted Simpson as Brown Simpson and Goldman's murderer.\(^5\)

Between 9:00 p.m. and midnight on June 12, 1994, Brown Simpson and Goldman were violently attacked and killed on the pathway outside the front door of Brown Simpson's condominium at 875 South Bundy Drive, Brentwood, in West Los Angeles, California.\(^6\) The murders were committed while her children with Simpson, Sydney, aged eight, and Justin, aged five, slept upstairs.\(^7\) Brown Simpson received four fatal knife wounds, including one that had nicked her spinal column, nearly decapitating her (Lange and Vannatter 109).\(^8\) “Because of the large open wound in her neck, Brown [Simpson] had nearly bled out at the crime scene; her body ha[d] retained little blood” (Lange and Vannatter 108). Goldman received numerous non-fatal cuts and four fatal injuries: a severed left jugular vein, a perforated thorax and right lung, a "deep stab wound to the femoral artery in his upper left leg," and his abdominal aorta was cut (Lange and Vannatter 111). In addition, Goldman's body showed evidence of stabbing and slashing wounds inflicted postmortem (Lange and Vannatter 111). Five days later the Robbery/Homicide Division of

\(^5\) The "damaging" release of Resnick's book suspended jury selection for the criminal trial:
On Tuesday, October 18, [Simpson's defense attorneys,] Shapiro, Cochran, and the others arrived early and argued in [Judge Lance Ito's] chambers that Resnick's book would affect jury selection. Judge Ito decided that everyone, defense, prosecution, and the court, should read the published book immediately.
'Something has been brought to my attention regarding this case that is of significant import to the court,' Ito told the jury pool. He then excused the potential jurors and sent a clerk out to buy copies of Nicole Brown Simpson: The Private Diary of a Life Interrupted. (Schiller and Willwerth 296)

\(^6\) "[B]etween 9:00 P.M. and midnight - but closer to 9:00" was the estimate given by Dr Irwin Golden, the medical examiner at the county coroner's office, during his autopsy of the bodies (Lange and Vannatter 111).

\(^7\) Sydney was born on October 17, 1985; Justin was born on August 6, 1988 (Simpson 207).

\(^8\) Brown Simpson was displayed in an open casket at her funeral. "The [Brown] family had selected a long-sleeved, high-necked, loose-flowing black dress for Nicole. The choice was dictated not just by the wounds it had to hide but by the buttresses required to hold her head upon her body" (Weller 29).
the Los Angeles Police Department arrested Simpson for the crime.

Speculation regarding Simpson's possible guilt had surfaced in the mass media and in public discourse prior to his arrest. However, the frenzied and unparalleled saturation coverage that was to follow began in earnest on the day of Simpson's arrest, marked by the media event that became known as the "Bronco Chase." On the morning of June 17, 1994, Case No. BA097211 was filed with the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office and a warrant was issued for Simpson's arrest on two counts of murder (Lange and Vannatter 148). When notified of his client's impending arrest, Simpson's lawyer, Robert Shapiro made arrangements with the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office for the privilege of a quiet booking (Lange and Vannatter 148). Shapiro would bring Simpson to Parker Center, the Los Angeles Police Department office building in downtown Los Angeles at 11:00 a.m. (Lange and Vannatter 148-49). Nothing other than the calm voluntary surrender of Simpson was expected:

WHEN ASKED HOW THEY COULD HAVE LET ONE (sic) of the most famous double-murder suspects in history slip away under their noses, the angry police commander and the tight-faced lawyer and the whole choir of commentators all said the same thing, without a trace of irony: 'We never thought he would run.'

In crisis, people condense into their essential selves. O.J. Simpson was, essentially, one of the very great runners of American football. That was how a bowlegged kid with rickets had escaped the slums where he was born, how a sports superstar had become a national icon, always outrunning his obstacles. (N. Gibbs 55)
By 1:40 p.m., Simpson had not arrived at Parker Center (Lange and Vannatter 154). With his whereabouts unknown by his lawyer and the police, Simpson was deemed a fugitive from the law (Lange and Vannatter 154). Accompanied by his friend, A.C. Cowlings, Simpson had fled in Cowlings’ white Ford Bronco. At 2:00 p.m., the Los Angeles Police Department held a media conference to announce Simpson’s double murder charge and his evasion of police custody (Lange and Vannatter 156-57). At 5:00 p.m., Shapiro and Simpson’s friend, Robert Kardashian held a media conference to beg the still missing Simpson to “surrender immediately” (Los Angeles Times Staff 22). Kardashian read one of the letters Simpson had written earlier that day (Schiller and Willwerth 67). Addressed “TO WHOM IT MAY CONCeRN (sic)” and dated “6/15/94” (Fuhrman 175), the handwritten letter was treated as a possible suicide note. At 5:56 p.m., the Los Angeles Police Department received its “first credible report of a Simpson sighting” (Lange and Vannatter 161). Simpson and Cowlings were “spotted by passing motorists” (Sturken 189) “who had heard the news of Simpson’s flight on their car radio” (Lange and Vannatter 161). Simpson’s location was reported to both the police department and the media (Los Angeles Times Staff 23).

The ensuing slow-speed “30-mile-per-hour” (Thaler 7) to “45 mph” (Sturken 189) police pursuit during the early evening rush hour was filmed by “[s]even [television] news helicopters” (Fiske 255) and broadcast live on several television networks (Thaler 5). “The freeway chase was watched by 95 million viewers, including 68 percent of Los Angeles TV viewers” (Sturken 189).10

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9 See chapter 5 of this thesis for a reading of Simpson’s suicide note. The date discrepancy will also be addressed in chapter 5. See In Pursuit of Justice for a typed copy of Simpson’s letter (Los Angeles Times Staff 23). See Murder in Brentwood for a facsimile of Simpson’s original handwritten letter (Fuhrman 175-78). American Tragedy reports that the letter, “four handwritten pages on a yellow legal pad” was sealed in an envelope marked “‘To Whom It May Concern, press or public’” (Schiller and Willwerth 67).

Fans showed their support for Simpson. They cheered from freeway vantage points and outside Simpson's Rockingham home, "yelling 'Go Juice Go!' and 'The Juice is Loose!'" (Sturken 189-90). They waved cardboard placards with handwritten messages: "WE LOVE THE JUICE," "SAVE THE JUICE" (Los Angeles Times Staff 24). When asked by a Los Angeles television station what her advice to Simpson would be, even Simpson's first wife, Marquerite said, "'Run,"
"Go O.J. RUN!'" (Thaler 12). Talk back radio callers "plead[ed] with O.J. to give up, presuming that O.J. and Cowlings were listening in the Bronco" (Sturken 189). While in negotiation with Simpson via cellular telephone, investigating detective, Tom Lange was able to monitor Simpson live on television from his desk at Parker Center (Lange and Vannatter 162-79). "[A]ll of the information [Robbery/Homicide detectives] Lange and Vannatter [were] receiving [was] coming exclusively from what they [were] seeing and hearing on television" (Lange and Vannatter 179). The live transmission of Simpson's movements took broadcasting precedence over scheduled network programming:

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 between the New York Knicks and the Houston Rockets; and CBS interrupted its featured prime-time program that night called Diagnosis Murder. (Thaler 5)

At 8:45 p.m., Simpson finally exited the Bronco on the front lawn of his Rockingham residence (Lange and Vannatter 179). Under the on-site surveillance of "twenty-three SWAT officers and four sergeants" (Lange and Vannatter 166), a "vehicle assault team," four snipers, a "two-man negotiating team [. . .] and 'one full element' of well-trained Metro officers" (Lange and Vannatter

11 Simpson had been nicknamed "The Juice" during his football career.
police helicopters and media helicopters, "Simpson collapse[d] into the arms of the waiting police officers" (Lange and Vannatter 179).

The police investigation did not result in the discovery of a murder weapon. No eyewitness came forward. Simpson did not confess to the crime to the police. Simpson has never publicly confessed to the double murder. He has continued to assert his innocence vehemently with his catch cry of "I am one hundred percent not guilty" (Simpson 13), first in the courtroom, in his memoir, *I Want to Tell You: My Response to Your Letters, Your Messages, Your Questions*, and in post-trial media interviews. No irrefutable evidence of Simpson's guilt has ever been discovered. Suspicion of guilt, a mountain of circumstantial evidence and Simpson's lack of a corroborated alibi was ruled enough for an arrest warrant to be issued. It authorised Simpson was to be held without bail pending a prompt arraignment hearing (Lange and Vannatter 150). The "Bronco Chase" fiasco demonstrated Simpson was suicidal and a flight risk. At Simpson's arraignment on June 20, "Municipal Court Judge Patti Jo McKay order[ed] that he continue to be held without bond" (Lange and Vannatter 194). Simpson was remanded to police custody at the Los Angeles County Jail to await a Grand Jury trial, a preliminary hearing and the criminal trial. He remained in gaol for 474 days.

12 A statement executed November 23, 1994, and filed November 28, 1994, by Sheriff's Deputy Jeff Stuart contains details of a conversation he inadvertently "discerned" between Simpson and Rosey Grier, a "football player-turned-preacher," while supervising the visiting area of the Los Angeles County Jail on November 13 (Schiller and Willwerth 346-47). The statement was sealed, but it allegedly reports that Simpson confessed to the murder during Grier's visit (Schiller and Willwerth 347; Newton A1). *American Tragedy* reports, despite clergy-penitent privilege, that Grier denied Simpson had confessed to him (Schiller and Willwerth 347). When questioned by Simpson's attorneys, Johnnie Cochran and Carl Douglas, "Grier said it didn't happen" (Schiller and Willwerth 347). The criminal trial prosecution's motion to obtain a copy of the statement was denied by Superior Court Judge Lance Ito (Newton A1).
The media focus on Simpson's involvement in the murder of Brown Simpson and Goldman became an excessive, long-term commitment. What transpired was an unprecedented broadcasting and print *mélange* of reporting, facts and fictions, interviews, comment, debate, public polling, expert and personal opinions, profiles, figurations and representations, audience generating strategies and tactics, career opportunities, cheque-book journalism, mass-market paperback confessions and inflated book publishing advances. The mainstream American media convicted Simpson guilty of murder from the day he resisted arrest with an incriminating spectacular daring, or desperation. Overtly and covertly, the discursive paradigm of the O.J. Simpson story was racially scripted and racially inscribed. The mainstream American media exploited and perpetuated a convenient national agenda: the binary opposition of colour lines of racial identification – whiteness versus black. In its construction of an "official story," in its dramatic re-construction of an official version of events, the media utilised a particular overriding "national narrative" (Morrison, "Official Story" xv):

> A national narrative is born in and from chaos. Its purpose is to restore or imitate order and to minimize confusion about what is at stake and who will pay the price of dissension. [. . .] Government-owned or –controlled press and electronic media carry whatever message is deemed necessary to the health or status quo of the body politic: that the dead are disappeared; that the bloody crisis is the fault of the oppressed; that the problems are alien; that justice is accessible to the deserving and all is well. (Morrison, "Official Story" xv-xvi)

The transparent and opportunistic treatment of Simpson in the media was produced and officiated by the marketplace of the commodity, the cultural and historical inscription of what sells and what is
sold (Morrison, "Official Story" xv-xvii). The commodity in this sense is something that has a commercial use value and exchange value because of its commodious quality or condition:

1. a. As a quality or condition of things, in relation to the desires or needs of men, etc.:
   The quality of being 'commodious'; conveniency, suitability, fitting utility; commodiousness. [..2.] b. Expediency. Obs. [...] c. Advantage, benefit, profit, interest: often in the sense of private or selfish interest. Obs. [...] d. concr. Profit, gain. [..] 5. concr. A thing of 'commodity', a thing of use or advantage to mankind; esp. in pl. useful products, material advantages, elements of wealth. [...] 6. a. spec. in Comm. A kind of thing produced for use or sale, an article of commerce, an object of trade; in pl. goods, merchandise, wares, produce. Now esp. food or raw materials, as objects of trade. ("Commodity," def. 1a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 5, 6a)

As Thaler notes, "[t]he networks lost an estimated $[US]7 million in advertising to air nearly uninterrupted coverage of the chase and Simpson's subsequent arrest. But it turned out to be a small price to pay: The Simpson story would soon yield tremendous dividends" (5).

After his arrest, Simpson's hypervisible commodiousness, his convenient, suitable, fitting utility as a household name and a familiar sight was re-commodified by the media. He was rebranded and his racial identity reproduced to fit his new public incarnation as murderer. The criminalisation and demonisation of Simpson in discursive and visual representations, re-racialised, "blackened," his identity and masculinity as other. Commodification as a process of reification, as a topos of capitalism and celebrity culture is one of the determining elements in my understanding of Simpson as a figure and his figuration or treatment in public discourse. However, it was the potent image of a racialised embodiment, its symbolic and connotative configurations within the
American imaginary that spectacularised the Simpson story and made it fascinating. For this is where the media placed the O.J. Simpson story and this is how it was contextualised. The criminal trial’s prosecution argument, based on gender, power, domestic violence and the escalation of Simpson’s rage, was overwritten by the (successful) criminal trial defense strategy of the "race card." It was, ironically, a strategy that began in the media, and ironic because the media used the "race card" against Simpson, as a prosecuting and a persecuting device.

The media were more than mere storytellers: They were storymakers. They first told - and made - the Simpson story as a tale of celebrity and the fall of a 'great man.' Then they continued to reinvent the story as a tale of domestic violence, wealth, status, and finally, race. Whether such stories actually were tied to the real social fabric of American life was largely irrelevant. The media insisted that the Simpson story contained a lasting narrative about the human condition and, through the sheer pervasive nature of their stories, we mostly bought into it. (Thaler xiv)

The Simpson story exemplifies the use and trade of the human body, particularly a black male known affectionately and notoriously as "O.J.," as both strategies and tactics in the practice of cultural production and cultural consumption. As Michel de Certeau defines the functions of these pragramata: "strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose [...] whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert" (30). He writes:

I call a strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a

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13 Chapter 3 of this thesis reads Simpson's fan mail, published in I Want to Tell You, as the practical demonstration of Certeau's theoretical conceptions of strategies and tactics.
scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed. [. . . ] a tactic is an art of the weak. (Certeau 35-37)

Paul C. Gutjahr and Megan L. Benton explain Certeau’s terms in light of reading practices:

Strategies describe the practices of those who create cultural products like texts or books - how they envision, compose, revise, edit, design, package, price, and distribute them. Tactics, on the other hand, describe how those who receive or ‘consume’ these cultural goods in fact use them, understand them, derive meaning and value from them. (4)

This made-for-television, made-by-media episode in American socio-cultural history symbolically, unashamedly, unconsciously and consciously, appropriated sensitive historical fractures, culturally inflicted, culturally inscribed and never set right. For Morrison, Simpson’s racialised treatment reflected the conditions of a "cultural narrative" (Morrison, "Official Story" xvii):

Early on it began to look like white mischief - the kind that surfaces when the opportunity to gaze voluptuously at a black body presents itself. The narrative of the entertainment media and their 'breaking story' confederates was so powerfully insistent on guilt, so uninterested in any other scenario, it began to look like a media pogrom, a lynching with its iconography intact: a chase, a cuffing, a mob, name calling, a white female victim, and most of all the heat, the panting, the flared nostrils of a pack already eager to convict. For many, black and white, the passion they felt in
the wake of the media onslaught was real, hinging as it did on violence and treachery.

Mr. Simpson became the repository of fear. ("Official Story" xiii)

The most pronounced example of the media’s immediate moral and racial indictment of Simpson was the cover of the June 27, 1994, United States edition of *Time* magazine featuring Simpson’s "mug shot" (see fig. 1). Simpson’s blank face, surmounting his booking number, was deliberately and intentionally darkened (blackened) for effect and for the contagious arousal of affect (*Time* cover; *Los Angeles Times* Staff 25; Simpson 75). The obvious connotations of such an enhancement, or defilement, could not have escaped the publisher’s awareness. Addressing this media depiction in his memoir, *I Want to Tell You*, Simpson states: "it was pure racism! The photo on *Time*’s cover also spoke a thousand words, a thousand words with a twisted meaning. Racist stereotyping. But *Time* magazine was responsible enough to publicly state that they had made a mistake in altering the photograph" (75). However, it was the *Newsweek* article of August 29, 1994, "Day and Night: The Double Life of O.J. Simpson" (Thomas and O’Donnell 43-49), that "really pissed [Simpson] off" (Simpson 73): "that wasn’t lazy reporting. No, it was worse: it was pure racism. By the way I read it, they used me as an example of blacks lusting after a white world. It was racist in its tone and feel. It was the most false, racist article I’ve ever read" (Simpson 73). In an act of verbal self-defense and rhetorical image restoration, Simpson accounts for the photographs of him with white women, cropped by *Newsweek* to construct a meaning far removed from their context (Simpson 73-75). He contends:

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14 The June 27, 1994, edition of *Time Australia* did not feature the same cover photograph. *Time Australia* ran a three-quarter-profile "[c]omputer-altered photograph" (2) of Simpson wearing a white golf shirt, the shirt he wore during the "Bronco Chase." The Australian edition of the magazine did feature the same cover headline as the United States edition: "An American Tragedy."
Fig. 1. *Time* 27 June 1994: cover.
The facts behind this picture [with the stripper] are strictly these: The picture was taken in 1989 in the back yard of my home, with my in-laws, my kids, Nicole, and some 350 of our friends present. It was my birthday and it was Arnelle’s graduation from high school. So we just rolled all these events into one big party. Somebody sent this comic stripper to the party as a joke, as a fun present for my birthday. But now the picture comes out in Newsweek cropped so that it looks like it’s just her right in front of me in some sleazy hangout. (Simpson 74)

And he interrogates the editorial captions that anchor the pictured Simpson to the magazine's critical re-presentation of his new racial and social unacceptability (Simpson 73-75).

The Simpson "story" is a complex site of multiple narratives parleyed in the mass media, and in the public and private discourse of everyday life. It is a cacophonous dialogic and discursive agora that Thaler calls the "great Simpson conversation" (xvi).15 The Simpson case is the legal case, officially denoted and identified by its case file number, BA097211 and title, The People of the State of California v. Orenthal James Simpson. The Simpson case is a subset of the Simpson story. The Simpson case and the Simpson story were porous spheres of interest. The spectacular drama in both spheres was generated by a reciprocal appropriation of discursive strategies and representational tactics. The operative practices of the two systemic spaces of authority re-territorialised and cannibalised one another. The "media did not just report the Simpson case but were instrumental in creating it" (Thaler xv). The mainstream media outlets prosecuted Simpson by presenting arguments and evidence, calling their own experts and witnesses, and polling the

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15 *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines "agora" as: "An assembly; hence, the place of assembly, esp. the market-place" ("Agora").
public as jury. The trial by media was concomitant with the Simpson criminal trial as a telelitigation event. Courtroom proceedings were broadcast live on television by Court TV, CNN and the E! Entertainment channel (Thaler 146). The services of the media were utilised as a tool by both the District Attorney's Office and the defense team to promote their legal strategies. Leaks to the media tainted public perception. Incriminating courtroom evidence was released to the public despite the departmental imposition of gag orders on the Los Angeles Police Department.

On June 22, two days after Simpson's arraignment, the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office released a tape of a 911 emergency services call made by Brown Simpson the year before, on October 25, 1993 (Lange and Vannatter 194). An angry Simpson can be heard yelling in the background as Brown Simpson identifies him as her assailant and pleads with the operator for assistance. An article by Jeffrey Toobin in the July 25, 1994, edition of The New Yorker magazine promoted the theory that Simpson was the victim of evidence planting and a culture of racism amongst Los Angeles Police officers. Based on a "series of conversations" with "leading members of Simpson's defense team" (Toobin 56), Toobin's report outlined key elements in the defense strategy that were presented in court when the criminal trial began six months later. They included allegations of "police conspiracy," "racism" and "official misconduct" (Toobin 56, 58, 59); that Detective Mark Fuhrman, the Los Angeles Police officer who discovered a bloody glove on Simpson's Rockingham property, had removed this glove from the Bundy crime scene and planted it in order to frame Simpson (Toobin 56); that police mishandling of crime scene evidence made it

16 Details of Brown Simpson's 911 call are included in Evidence Dismissed: "'Can you get someone over here now?' a terrified Brown [Simpson] asked the police dispatcher. 'He's back. Please.....He's O.J. Simpson. I think you know his record. Could you just send somebody over here?' Throughout the call, Simpson can be heard in the background, screaming with such rage that most of his words are virtually unintelligible" (Lange and Vannatter 194). Brown Simpson and Simpson were divorced but had begun dating again in May 1993 (Simpson 208).
impossible for the defense to conduct its own forensic tests of blood and hair samples" (Toobin 59); and that the prosecution was unfair and obstructive in its refusal "to share the blood and hair samples that it did seize" (Toobin 59). Toobin also intimated the soon-to-be-confirmed appointment of Johnnie L. Cochran to the defense team. Cochran's notoriety as a "prominent black litigator" (Toobin 59) reinforced the racial intentions of the defense strategy. It also served as a counterpoint to the appointment of Christopher Darden, an African-American Deputy District Attorney, as lead co-prosecutor. The publicity campaign instigated by both the prosecution and the defense was strategic and political. It was obviously designed to influence public perceptions of Simpson and prepare a community of possible jurors. It also "transformed" the case, as Toobin predicted, from "a mere soap opera to a civil-rights melodrama" (58), from the televisual to the cinematic as a narrative sight.

I agree with Thaler's claim that "[m]edia and legal issues tangled, making it often impossible to distinguish the actual murder trial from the larger media spectacle" (xv). The "actual murder trial" (Thaler xv) (the Simpson case) became a subset of the "larger media spectacle" (Thaler xv) (the Simpson story). But I think we can at least distinguish between the legal case, the media story and public discourse by the respective locations of their proper place, by their institutional status and the organisation of their generic operative practices. There are rules, structural elements and paradigms that define and contain each system: the formal, official law and order of the judicial, the factual reporting ethics of the journalistic, and the informal etiquette of the social. Each system is identified by how the type of information with which it is concerned, that it requires and formulates, is generated, recorded, communicated and consumed. But this does not mean that the information and the discursive or rhetorical modalities operating in the legal, the media and the social do not
move between the systems, intertextually or in an interdisciplinary way. Although the legal, the media and the social or everyday are coded as systems, territories of knowledge and networks of power, in the case of the Simpson story they functioned more like genres, each with a repertoire of stylistic conventions endlessly reproduced or "quoted" in a postmodern sense. In the murder trial and the media spectacle, knowledge, discursive arrangements and structural elements were appropriated, trans-systematised for strategic use, for the efficient production of particular readings; a national narrative, an official story, a counter-narrative, a defense.

The competing narratives, revelations and speculations generated by the Simpson story fascinated, distracted and entertained the public and the media for thirty months. Inaugurated by the murder of Brown Simpson and Goldman on June 12, 1994, this regard followed Simpson's dramatic arrest on June 17; his remand to police custody from June 17, 1994, to October 3, 1995; his arraignment on June 20; the Grand Jury dismissal on June 24; the televised preliminary hearing, which began on June 30, presided over by Judge Kathleen Kennedy-Powell, who ruled, on July 8, that Simpson was to stand trial; jury selection and jury sequestration for the criminal trial; and discovery leaks to the media.¹⁷ The criminal trial mesmerised the nation from opening statements on January 24, 1995, until Simpson's acquittal on October 3, 1995. "A reported one hundred and fifty million viewers" watched the courtroom reading of the criminal trial verdict of not guilty, live on television (Schuetz, "Introduction" 4).¹⁸ The "delivery of the not-guilty verdicts at O.J. Simpson's trial was the most watched event in the history of television" (Fiske 255).


¹⁸ Schiller and Willwerth report that "95 million Americans" watched the criminal trial verdict on television (866). Schiller and Willwerth seem to have the audience figures for this broadcast confused with the estimated audience figures for the "Bronco Chase." See Sturken (189).
As it neared 10 a.m. in Los Angeles, work and play stopped. Freeway traffic evaporated. President Clinton interrupted a meeting in the Oval Office. Trading on Wall Street tumbled and long-distance calling dropped 60%. [. . .] Crowds gathered in pensive silence before TVs in offices, cafes, electronics stores and college auditoriums across the country. [. . .] About 9% of the TVs flickering in American homes that morning were not tuned to live coverage of the verdicts in the People vs. Orenthal James Simpson. (Los Angeles Times Staff 79)

"Airline flights were delayed. College classes began late. Medical procedures in hospitals were held up. [. . .] Although the verdict took place during the workday of many Americans, some 150 million stopped everything to catch it 'live" (Thaler 274).

The media and public interest endured Simpson's successful custody trial for his children with Brown Simpson, Sydney and Justin, from August 20 to December 20, 1996. And it embraced the civil trial, which began with opening statements on October 23, 1996, and concluded with the reading of a verdict of conviction on February 4, 1997. The civil trial jury ruled that Simpson did "willfully and wrongfully" cause the deaths of Brown Simpson and Goldman (Schiller and Willwerth 964). The national anticipation of and focus on the civil verdict is recorded by American Tragedy with reference to its effect on the American President's State of the Union address:

In Washington, President Clinton is about to make his State of the Union address.

It is 6 P.M. California time. The President knows the Simpson verdict is due at just

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19 See Schiller and Willerth (904, 947) for custody trial dates and comment.

20 See Schiller and Willwerth (911, 917, 961-64) for civil trial dates, comment and coverage.
about the same time he will begin. The President asks to be kept apprised. If the verdict comes in at 9 P.M. in the East, Clinton can slow down his walk into Congress. He even considers referring to the verdict if it is announced before he starts, then decides not to. (Schiller and Willwerth 962)

President Clinton had just finished his speech when the verdicts were read. Minutes before, stations throughout the country had gone to split-screen coverage of both events, showing both the President and the crowds outside the courthouse. As the President thanked the Congress and the nation and moved away from the podium, the first verdict was read. On most stations, Clinton wound up in the small box in the corner of the screen as Simpson left the courthouse. (Schiller and Willwerth 965)

A television audience in the "hundreds of thousands stayed tuned for the outcome of the civil case" (Schuetz, "Introduction" 4).

The Simpson criminal case was a ready-made marketing extravaganza. It sold newspapers, advertising space, magazines, cable television subscriptions and commemorative t-shirts. Toobin reports: "wares of the T-shirt salesmen in front of the Los Angeles Criminal Courts Building last week [during Simpson's preliminary trial] included 'Save O.J.' and 'Let the Juice Loose!' models, but the same people were also selling shirts that said, 'Remember Ron and Nicole.' One vendor told me, 'It's all about business for us here, not politics'" (58). Pre-criminal trial and post-criminal trial, a plethora of books designed for mass-market consumption appeared on bookstore shelves and in supermarkets across the country. Critical works by legal, media, sociology and cultural studies scholars have followed. The proliferation of testimonies, facts, opinions, confessions, points of view, analyses, re-constructions and fictions about the Simpson story speak to not only a market
demand and over supply but a psychological demand and over supply. Each writer, each author of yet another book about the Simpson story, reveals a compulsion to write themselves into a historic cultural moment, to become a character, a player, within the discursive public imaginary. It is an appropriation of public space for self-excusable (confessional) self-presentation and commercial self-exploration. It is an appropriation of Simpson's involvement in the Brentwood murders. The reality of the Simpson story is that there is no one overriding, grand narrative that is the Simpson story. There is a multitude of stories to choose from. Whatever we may believe, whatever we may think happened on the night of June 12, 1994, we have no way of knowing for sure. Those who did know, who could know, are Simpson, Brown Simpson and Goldman, but only Simpson can tell us.

The amorphous polyphonic tangle of the "great Simpson conversation" (Thaler 5) does make it difficult to localise a story and place it within the sheer discursive force of the narratives that comprise the Simpson story. This difficulty is critical to this thesis. Simpson's defense fundraising memoir, *I Want to Tell You*, is the entry point for my analysis. He claims to have received more than 300,000 letters from June to December 1994, while an inmate at the Los Angeles County Jail. One hundred and eight of the letters are published in *I Want to Tell You*, intercalated with Simpson's narrative. Released in late January 1995, during the first week of the prosecution's opening statements in the criminal trial, Simpson's autobiographical text offers a unique perspective. *I Want to Tell You* was the first public comment Simpson had made following the nationally televised reading of his suicide note and his spectacular arrest on June 17, 1994. Underpinned by the legal case and by the mass media reporting of the event, Simpson's text speaks to and about the official story of his guilt constructed by the media and within everyday discourse.
What interests me and claims the attention of this thesis is the everyday rhetoric of Simpson's defense fundraising memoir, its articulation of self at a particular point in the unfolding of the O.J. Simpson story and the perception of Simpson from a particular set of disparate and private linguistic perspectives. Simpson's text expresses a concomitant profundity and banality (the exemplary realism of a moment of historic cultural import), and an unrepentant opportunism that braces against the media coverage; and the published accounts of the prosecution attorneys, the defense attorneys, the investigating Los Angeles Police detectives, the jurors, legal commentators, media commentators and memoirists. As they talk about Simpson but never to him, the public testimony of trial participants, trial witnesses and trial evaluators comes to resemble a juncture of discursive and cacophonous cultural stammering. What Simpson makes of or does with the epistolary momentum of his fan mail is ingenious and outrageous. The 300,000 letters Simpson received are used as the inspiration for his memoir and its narrative foundation. The 108 letters reproduced in *I Want to Tell You*, positive and negative, function as personal endorsements for Simpson. Simpson's excusatory, self-marketing authorship is a highly questionable and suspect survival tactic. But Simpson is not completely responsible for *I Want to Tell You* as a text and as a phenomenon: it is a collaborative achievement. *I Want to Tell You* is a testament to the discursive power of the "ordinary" person, the fan, the consumer. A material connection comes of writing to Simpson. It is a furtive and compassionate practice that resists isolation and refuses silence. Simpson's mail gives him the opportunity to respond to those who are willing to listen. And Simpson's publishing of a representative selection of his fan mail and hate mail gives each writer a public voice, a public forum in which to speak and be heard as an experiential "I" by an audience of
others. Simpson offers them the opportunity to formally enter the "great Simpson conversation" (Thaler 5); the great Simpson agora. For Simpson's letters speak not only to him, they speak to
the event, through its central figure, through the one they (in a sense) know. The letters to Simpson speak of the impact of the event on the private and social life of each writer. Each letter is the personal articulation of a cultural effect.

The formulation of Simpson's narrative as a thanksgiving narrative, its play of generosities and returns, informs my conception of *I Want to Tell You* as a commodity operating within both a gift and a market economy. *I Want to Tell You* reproduces an economy of the gift. Each published letter writer performs for the reader's entertainment and Simpson's benefit. In chapter 1: "Every Exchange Embodies Some Coefficient of Sociability," the practice of gift exchange as theorised by anthropologist Marcel Mauss, in *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, is adapted in order to understand the symbolic motivations and non-fictional narrative negotiations of Simpson's authoring enterprise. Simpson's justification for the appropriation of the letters as tools to aid in his defense against a double murder charge is to figure the letters as gifts, sacred and invaluable texts given generously and kindly. In chapter 2: "Something Other than Taking," the process of giving-taking-giving exchanges that drive Simpson's text from inception to completion is charted, step-by-step. Such a program critiques Simpson's charitable and commercial appeal.

In chapter 3: "Too Many Letters," I propose a consideration of Simpson's mail, published and unpublished, as exemplary of unwitting, unintentional heroics. In an investigation of the "relationship that links everyday pursuits to particular circumstances" (Certeau ix), I highlight the singularity of the occasional practice of 300,000 "men, women, and children of all ages, occupations, national and ethnic backgrounds, from all fifty states and many countries of the world, who chose to write to a[n incarcerated famous] man they ha[d] never met" (Schiller, "Foreword" vii).
For, as Certeau states in the "Preface to the English Translation" of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, "[t]he characteristically subtle logic of these 'ordinary' activities comes to light only in the details" (ix). "And only in the *local* network of labor and recreation can one grasp how, within a grid of socio-economic constraints, these [daily] pursuits unfailingly establish relational tactics (a struggle for life), artistic creations (an aesthetic), and autonomous initiatives (an ethic)" (Certeau ix). The individual effect of each letter signifies an instance of artful and guileful everyday practicality. Cumulatively, the letters "establish" an effective force. Each letter Simpson receives is an illocutionary act. It opens a dialogue and momentarily frees him from the solitary confinement of his incarceration. *En masse*, the letters have an illocutionary force. They instigate the composition of Simpson's narrative and the production of his fundraising memoir. In his "Foreword" to Simpson's text, Lawrence Schiller provides an account of his role as Simpson's amanuensis. His realisation of the authorial site of the visiting area of the Los Angeles County Jail, and the authorial sight of Simpson as inmate 4013970, places the extra-diegetic elements of the narrative, the production process, within the diegetic frame. Simpson's gazeability is encoded rhetorically by Schiller's editorial action. It is Schiller's introductory benediction for 300,000 letter writers that motivates my consideration of the letters as gifts and as small acts of heroism with cumulative effects.

One hundred and ten first person narrative voices coalesce in *I Want to Tell You* in the guise of Simpson, Schiller and 108 letter writers. This polyphonic textual structure reproduces the spontaneous spoken rhythms and the perpetual giving-taking-giving exchange of conversation. Simpson's textual response is an instance of unequivocal reciprocity, a reply to a demanding, phatic and emphatic regard. Chapter 4: "Fascinating Endorsements," explores the effect of the
antiphonal construction of *I Want to Tell You* on the speaking and reading point of view. The "I" and "you" of performer and audience shifts according to the narrative address of each non-fictional narrator, be it Simpson to reader, Schiller to reader, or letter writer to Simpson. For the reader of Simpson's text, each published letter activates a transitory transition of the first person subjective "I." Reading from the point of view of each letter writer to Simpson, the reader enacts a dramatic *ethopoeia* and rhetorical *sermocinatio*. Reading for another and ourselves, we cannot remain passive, unaffected or uninvolved. The "Q and A," question and answer, rhetorical structure of the text enunciates the effect of the "Q-A adjacency pair" (Cotterill 293) of the legal realm. This interrogative/interlocutory logic is used *epitropically* by Simpson. Although he is the one being questioned, Simpson is always in control. Such a textual reconstruction allows Simpson to present his case co-terminously. Released as the criminal trial began, *I Want to Tell You* is an alternative, preliminary "hearing." Simpson did not take the stand to testify during the criminal trial. His imposing and charismatic silent presence became a tactic of the defense strategy. *I Want to Tell*

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21 Richard Lanham defines "*ethopoeia*" as a "G. 'delineation of character'";
1. Putting oneself in the place of another, so as to both understand and express that person's feelings more vividly, [. . .] this technique [. . .] does not seem too far removed from 'method' acting, or indeed from naturalistic acting of any sort. The term might be used, though to my knowledge it never has been, to describe the 'acting' of a character in a play-within-a-play (*Rhetorical Terms* 71).
Lanham translates "*sermocinatio*" as "L. 'conversation, discussion'; "the speaker answers the remarks or questions of a pretended interlocutor" (*Rhetorical Terms* 138). Two reference sources are used in this thesis to provide definitions for rhetorical terms. The primary source is Lanham's *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*. The secondary source is the online scholarly project, Silva Rhetoricae, edited by Gideon Burton. *Silva Rhetoricae* is referenced in instances when Lanham's *Handlist* does not provide an adequate or useful definition for the term.

22 *Silva Rhetoricae* defines "*epitrope*" as: "A figure in which one turns things over to one's hearers, either pathetically, ironically, or in such a way as to suggest a proof of something without having to state it." Lanham's defines "*epitrope*" as: "G. '[grant of] power to decide'": "1. **Concessio; Permissio**. Conceding argument or permission to an opponent, often ironically" (*Rhetorical Terms* 70). Lanham's translation of *epitrope* seems applicable in this instance but his explanatory definition of the term does not. Lanham's definition of "*anacoenosis*" may be more appropriate: "Asking the opinion of one's readers or hearers" (*Rhetorical Terms* 10).
You was the only site for direct access to Simpson until his criminal acquittal and release from police custody.

Simpson's alleged involvement in the Brentwood murders produced a cultural *mise-en-scène* for the gaze and spectacle. The visual rhetoricality of Simpson's self-commodified presence in the double murder narrative of Brown Simpson and Goldman is the subject of chapter 5: "Playing O.J." The ideas entertained in this chapter were inspired by a comment made by Simpson in *I Want to Tell You*: "I'm the same guy on and off the screen. I don't play O.J. when I'm on TV. I'm always me" (89). This seems to be a straight-faced misreading of the celebrity self, a mis-diagnosis of his professional condition. The celebrity self as commodity is a figurative self, a performance, a reification and an autobiographical *prosopopoeia*. Rhetorical strategies primarily to do with the visual, ways of looking, ways of seeing and being seen identify and determine Simpson as a public figure, as a text and as a genre. Simpson's genre is African-American male sports celebrity. Reading Simpson as text, I poach on Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" and Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. Mulvey's spectatorial structures prove useful for an analysis of active and passive masculinity as performance. There seems to be a strong correlation between cinematic representation and spectator sports in terms of the signification and coding of male desire and spectacle, connotations of "to-be-looked-at-ness" and "display" (Mulvey 19). As the rhetoric of colour also guides a cultural reading of Simpson, I integrate into my discussion

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23 Lanham defines "*prosopopoeia*" as a kind of personification: "1. An animal or an inanimate object is represented as having human attributes and addressed or made to speak as if it were human" (Rhetorical Terms 123). *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines "prosopopoeia" as "1. A rhetorical figure by which an imaginary or absent person is represented as speaking or acting; the introduction of a pretended speaker" ("Prosopopoeia," def. 1). In the celebrity context, I prefer De Man's etymological tracing of the "trope's name, *prosopon poien*, [as] to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*)" ("Autobiography" 76).
Hortense Spillers’ understanding of the African-American body as a captive body. My understanding of the gaze as a kind of rapture and capture, and the tying together of strands of thought from Mulvey and Spillers, allows for the development of the idea of the spectator as captor.

Chapter 5 also includes a textual analysis of Simpson’s "suicide note." Reading Simpson as *scriptor* requires the courtesy of an unconventional critical *theoria*, a special consideration for the phantasmatics of his penmanship. In the vulnerable physiognomy of his handwriting, his parapraxses and his idiosyncratic and creative orthographic style, is the articulation of a utopian longing for liberty, a demonstration of the freedom to write. The letters Simpson received at the Los Angeles County Jail can be read as an immediate epistolic response to the publicised epistolic display of his "suicide note" or "open letter" (Simpson 13) addressed “To Whom It May Concern, press or public” (Schiller and Willwerth 67).

I deliberately choose to read O.J. Simpson as a discursive figuration, as a character, a commodity, a device, a cultural artefact performed and consumed within an imaginary flow of discursive display and knowingness. I choose to explore the vestibular spatial and temporal configurations through which we can grasp popular non-fiction as a praxis that can be identified, defined, approached and appreciated through the interrogative tools of a literary and critical cultural analysis. Although no proof, words, discourse, are our only evidence, as Simpson effectively demonstrates in *I Want to Tell You*. 
This thesis is an inquiry into practices of rhetoricality and everyday rhetoric. It is an "inquiry that seeks to describe the nature of discursive action and exchange" (Bender and Wellbery 34). My critical concern is Simpson's guilt as it functions figuratively and commercially within the "dense tangle of our triviality," the "pragmata of everydayness" (Bender and Wellbery 34). In "Rhetoricality: On the Modernist Return of Rhetoric," John Bender and David E. Wellbery propose:

Rhetoricality names the new conditions of discourse in the modern world and, thus, the fundamental category of every inquiry that seeks to describe the nature of discursive action and exchange. Rhetoricality may be considered as a name for the underlying features both of modern practice and of the theories that seek to account for it. In the modernist phase these structural features, on the whole, had to be inferred from symptomatic social, cultural, and disciplinary phenomena. More recently, in the episode - or episteme - now designated by the term 'postmodernism,' new forms of rhetorical inquiry are emerging that explicitly recognize and analyze features we designate under the term 'rhetoricality.' (25-26)

The everyday rhetoric of Simpson's memoir extends beyond its linguistic and performative capabilities in that it has a behavioral effectiveness: it can make us do something as well as make us feel and think something. It can move us in a spatial way. It has the capacity to generate agora. I Want to Tell You exemplifies the rhetoricality of the marketplace, the unconscious rhetorical spontaneity inherent in language and social relations. It is conversational in structure and tone, driven by gossip and hearsay, "discursive action and exchange" (Bender and Wellbery 26). In the sense of the rhetoricality of the commercial marketplace, I Want to Tell You was
conceived, designed and produced for mass-market consumption. It functioned as a fundraising venue for Simpson to plead his case. *I Want to Tell You* is an amplifier for the effect of the practice of rhetoric as tactics to do with the plausible and the reasonable: the credible.

In "Elegies for the Book," Lanham notes: "Although applied to writing as soon as there was writing, rhetoric was originally a training in public speaking, and more largely in oral culture, in political behaviour" (203). Identifying the "electronic word" as the "movement from book to screen" ("Elegies" 203), Lanham suggests that rhetoricality is the mode of the contemporary cultural condition in which new electronic technologies and the "oldest and most foundational of cultural disputes" converge ("Elegies" 204). Simpson is an oral man and a visual man. These are his preferred modes of expression and presentation. Reading Simpson's text and Simpson as text entails reading from a rhetorical and visual point of view. Simpson as text and as author operates within a culture in which the written, the oral, the image, the political and the social converge.

Rhetoric as a discipline is defined as the "art of persuasive communication and eloquence" (Macey 329). The linguistic elements of Simpson's text are not successful or effective in a formal rhetorical way. They are affecting. Simpson's narrative, Schiller's "Foreword," the letters are not wholly convincing or persuasive as to Simpson's innocence despite their best intentions. And yet they are captivating and fascinating. The everyday rhetoric articulated by and in *I Want to Tell You* is mostly to do with the commodity fetishism of celebrity as a business practice. In this sense Simpson demonstrates, successfully and artfully, a persuasive eloquence. Simpson's text is a practical manifestation of the use-value and exchange-value of fame. The reciprocity of the epistolary moment, the insistent demands of direct address, the etiquette of fan mail, the gift of the
written text, vulnerable and resonant, the symbiotic dynamic of the celebrity-fan (writer-reader, producer-consumer) dyadic relation and its currency are manoeuvred effectively and convincingly by Simpson. This is Simpson's talent and his charm. He capitalises on the cultural condition of his celebrity within a pay-per-view marketplace of reification and desire. The sports marketing logic of Simpson's pay-per-view book publishing mode is a tangible manifestation of the electronic word. The AskOJ website, launched in July 2000, continues this mode of public expression, presentation and access with its $US9.95 registration fee.

The trick of Simpson's memoir is this: at his most desperate moment (murderous, allegedly, and in need of financial resources) Simpson must show he is not heartless or unduly self-serving. And it is the diegetic arrangements this "public appearance" by Simpson requires that concerns me, critically, and fascinates me, personally. Simpson's narrative is not the only story within his memoir. The satellite stories conveyed in the letters, the work of the "Mail Volunteers," Schiller's involvement as amanuensis and the packaging of the text in book and audiocassette form, are engaging and unexpected. The momentum of the 300,000 letters that reached Simpson at the Los Angeles County Jail is remarkable. Schiller's account of the authorial scene and the text's creation described in his "Foreword" and "Acknowledgments" is absorbing. The most captivating aspect of Simpson's memoir is the giving-taking-giving process of production that underwrites I Want to Tell You as a commodity. Its plot, action and characters are embedded in the text.

The structure of this study is of two parts. The first part comprising chapter 1: "Every Exchange Embodies Some Coefficient of Sociability," and chapter 2: "Something Other than Taking," is concerned with Simpson's text as a tangle of voluntary-obligatory negotiations and
spontaneous-calculated gestures. This section identifies and explores the processes of exchange mobilised by Simpson's second reason for publishing a defense fundraising memoir: the financial. The second part comprising chapter 3: "Too Many Letters," chapter 4: "Fascinating Endorsements," and chapter 5: "Playing O.J.," considers Simpson's relationship with his fans and the general public, Simpson's primary reason for "speaking publicly for the first time since [his] arrest": to respond (Simpson 3). Organised according to Simpson's "two reasons" (Simpson 3), each part is an inquiry into the genuineness and ingenuity of Simpson's authorial reasoning.

In some ways Reading O.J. Simpson is not about Simpson as anything more than an object of study and his text as a cultural site and a cultural artefact. As an inquiry it is an attempt to demonstrate the development of a scholarly reading and writing praxis regarding the popular, to articulate more than fascinated observation or description about the everyday or the occasional as a focus for study. The point of the analytical task is its demonstrative potential: what we can do with the "pragmata of everydayness" (Bender and Wellbery 34) and what it can tell us about ourselves, and our cultural practices. Reading O.J. Simpson is about practice and theory. As a mode of inquiry its purpose is to find a critical demeanour that evades the reflex "to question the 'wide-eyed' pose of critical amazement at the performance of the everyday" (Morris 196-97). So, like the analytical task Meaghan Morris sets herself in "Things to Do With Shopping Centres," my methodological approach partly involves on the one hand exploring common sensations, perceptions and emotional states aroused by [Simpson] (which can be negative, of course, as well as delirious), and on the other hand, battling against those perceptions and states in order to make a place from which to speak other than that of the fascinated describer.
– either standing 'outside' the spectacle qua ethnographer, or (in a pose which seems to [Morris] to amount to much the same thing) ostentatiously absorbed in her own absorption in it, qua celebrant of 'popular culture'. (196)

As cruising grammarian I oscillate between the wide-eyed critical gaze of amazement and the scrutinising, sceptical peer. It is under the intensity of a sharpened focus that the popular as an object of study can truly catch our eye and make us think about it in a critical and theoretical way.

What may be apparent in the methodology of my critical approach is my scholarly training as a student in literary and cultural studies. What may not be apparent is my professional experience as a publicist. This practical working knowledge of the machinations of public relations within the entertainment industry, its rhetorical strategies and tactics, is brought to bear on Simpson's "personal" relationship with his fans and his conduct towards the general public. It informs my critical attitude, the way I see Simpson – neither from "outside" nor "inside" the spectacle but as having been one of its producers. I understand Simpson as a particular kind of celebrity located within a particular system of celebrity. Celebrity is Simpson's cultural condition and his profession. His genre of celebrity is sports celebrity, operating within the Hollywood system of fame. His post-football acting career and his Brentwood residence effectively locates Simpson within this frame of reference. Simpson's *I Want to Tell You* is a public appearance and a crisis management strategem - a forum for a revenue-raising image restoration campaign.