**THANK YOU**

A special “thank you” goes to Michael Connor and Zoë Salditch from Rhizome for their assistance making this possible and supporting what many would consider a pretty out-there proposal, and to the Museum of the Moving Image for hosting the launch of the project. NBC and the writers, actors, and crew of *Law & Order* also deserve tremendous credit for creating such a lasting, at times quirky and problematic, but overall amazing document of the past 20 years of American culture.*“You know we're living in the computer age?"*

– Police officer (season 1, episode 13)

In the fall of 1990[[1]](#endnote-1), a television program about crime, police investigation, and criminal trials named *Law & Order* aired for the first time. The show eventually ended in 2010, tied with *Gunsmoke* for the longest-running live-action television show at 20 seasons and 456 episodes[[2]](#endnote-2). With its unique (and consistent) style and trademark “dun-dun!” sound[[3]](#endnote-3), *Law & Order* has spun off several iterations and can likely be found playing at any hour of the day somewhere on cable.

Much has been written recently about how “binge watching” an entire season or even an entire show is changing our interaction with and in some cases the making of television[[4]](#endnote-4). This new TV-watching paradigm is due in large part to Netflix’s streaming service, and around the same time it was launched I started watching a lot of *Law & Order*. With so many episodes available and an easy to digest procedural format, I could just turn to the next episode in line and hit “play”.

Somewhere during this period I started to take screenshots of oddities, moments where the show broke from its usual format into first-person or split-screen views, or frames of unexpected abstraction as the camera panned across a scene[[5]](#endnote-5). But somewhere in all those procedurally-formatted murders, quips, investigations, interrogations, and trials I began noticing computers. At first they were oddities too (characters using computers in funny ways, interesting-looking fake applications or websites), but as many obsessive projects start, the more screenshots I took the more I noticed computers and the cycle fed on itself.

I began to realize that *Law & Order* forms a unique database of images and speech, and one that mirrors the fascinations, fears, and biases of its time. While an investigation of the show could take many forms, as an artist interested in how technology functions and shapes culture, using the show as a means to talk about our relationship to computers made perfect sense.

In the summer of 2012, I received a generous commission from Rhizome, an affiliate of the New Museum in New York City, to more systematically document computers across the entire original *Law & Order* series. I purchased the 120-disc box set and began to record (nearly) every computer from all 456 episodes[[6]](#endnote-6). Now a little more than a year later, nearly 11,000 screenshots have been gathered along with some related (and some not-so-related) data about the show. The project is presented in the form of a blog (computersonlawandorder.tumblr.com) and in the more curated form of this book.

After watching all 319 hours of the show (or the equivalent of about two straight months watching 40-hours a week, though that is not how I consumed it), I think *Law & Order* is an even more interesting cultural mirror than I could have ever expected. What began as a mix of odd artistic impulse and technological nostalgia for blue screens, clunky monitors, and out-of-date references is capable of tracking much more than that. The show’s long run and its “ripped from the headlines” content makes it a useful lens with which to look at a period of great political and economic change in the United States. But the show also coincides with another major cultural shift: the rise and eventual ubiquity of computers and network technologies over the last 20 years.

*Law & Order* spans the emergence of the ever-present personal computer, growing and then widespread internet use[[7]](#endnote-7), laptops and flatscreen monitors, and finally ends as internet-enabled “smartphones” become commonplace. Alongside the actual technology appearing onscreen, the show’s content, ranging from casual conversations to crimes and crime-solving, reflect our fascination with and sometimes fears about technologies like BBS systems, email, online dating and social networking, webcams, privacy and hacking, facial recognition, and search engines.

The archive of screenshots resulting from this project (along with other data including web addresses used on the show, quotes about computers, and a list of “first appearances” – all included in this book) provides a rich data set through which there are many possible lines of investigation. Of those, there are two main trajectories I’d like to trace through the show: the transition of the computer from turned-off background prop, included to lend realism to scenes in the workplace, to its current position as a necessary, always-networked, and constantly used tool. This is followed by a brief analysis of the season-by-season computer count.

**FROM BEHIND THE DESK TO YOUR POCKET**

The first computer on *Law & Order* appears nine minutes into the first episode of the show. A rather small, dull-gray monitor sits on the also-dull-gray box of a computer. The keyboard rests on the desk in front and some kind of peripheral sits to the left. Exact details are difficult to identify: we see the computer as the camera quickly pans the room, obscured by motion blur and the graininess of the film stock[[8]](#endnote-8). Alone, unused and tucked into the corner of the room, this is the state of computers for most of the first ten seasons of the show: a shared resource used only occasionally as needed, turned off more often than not, and dotted with Post-It notes left for other users. Often, these computers are shown on dedicated computer desks or tucked away in corners, below counters, or in other out-of-the-way places.

As computers become steadily more common and used by a single individual (rather than shared among an entire office), they often still remain behind the user’s main desk and turned off. This reflection of banal details is something *Law & Order* excels at (whether intentionally or not) and stands in contrast with one of the show’s spinoffs *Law & Order: SVU,* which often shows computers in police stations that border on the sci-fi. Unlike the smart-boards and touch-based interaction of *SVU* (which is intended to suggest high-tech interactivity while being decided not, sporting instead a clunky and simplified UI with the veneer of corporate design), the original series accepts the limits of blue screens and keyboard-only input, and in doing so is a much better representation of the average computer user in the early 1990s[[9]](#endnote-9).

In fact, it isn’t until nine episodes and 39 computers later that a machine is even turned on, and it isn’t until season five that a computer appears on the front of someone’s desk. This isn’t to suggest computers aren’t being used at all: by the end of the first season, we see both a detective and a victim using a computer, and experience the first crime involving a computer on the show. Rather, this placement and use, though odd to us today, suggests the computer at that time was seen as an only sometimes-necessary and perhaps even intrusive tool, rude to interact with while speaking to another person and relegated to out-of-the-way parts of the room[[10]](#endnote-10).

Of course, as we all know this attitude has changed (for better or for worse), and as the seasons progress computers are seen being used onscreen more and more frequently. City employees look up records for detectives and DA’s, forensics and computer experts are seen using high-end software and even engaging in hacking, and computers dot the background with random programs open as if some important work had been interrupted.

By the tenth season (1999-2000 – halfway through the show’s run), laptops begin to be more prevalent onscreen. At first the detectives share them. *Law & Order’s* first tech-savvy detective Rey Curtiss uses his laptop to look up records and information, even to send goading emails to suspected criminals. Gradually, the laptop replaces the desktop and by the time detective Cyrus Lupo joins the cast in 2008, a heavy-duty Toughbook is almost always on his desk. By the last two seasons, both detectives regularly are seen working on laptops across from each other.

This shift towards laptops marks an implosion of the computer in general. At the show’s start, computers and monitors are large grey or beige boxes. Slowly, these are phased out by smaller white boxes. Computers begin to absorb their peripherals as well: keyboards and mice, modems, and cameras are pulled into the computer. As technology shrinks in size, these computer extensions become assumed, built-in accessories for the laptops and smartphones that dominate the final years of the show. It is no longer a novel story point that someone is online wirelessly or video chatting.

We can also see this mirrored in the transition from large CRTs to flatscreen monitors (first appearing in season nine). CRTs still show up onscreen through the rest of the show, the final one in season 18 and coinciding with District Attorney Jack McCoy finally getting a flatscreen monitor.

The final technological transition begins in season 12 with the first onscreen Blackberry. While internet-enabled mobile devices appear occasionally in the intervening seasons, it is Assistant District Attorney Michael Cutter’s debut in season 18 harkens the era of the smartphone. In his first season he is often seen showing some screen content to another person, an odd pantomime that seems to say: “Look what this can do!” Unlike *Law & Order: SVU*, which makes much more use of smartphones and tablets, beyond Cutter’s showing off and compared with rampant laptop use, the original series quietly slips smartphones into episodes without much fanfare as the show closes its final seasons.

**COUNTING COMPUTERS**

Alongside images of computers on *Law & Order*, counting the number of computers captured per season can give us some insight into their permeation and ubiquity. The chart above shows these counts across the show’s run along with a line tracking the average trend: a steady incline in the number of computers onscreen with a bump in the middle and skyrocketing towards the end of the show’s run.

An overall rise in the count is expected as computers become more common throughout the 1990s and 2000s (the spike in the first season is likely the result of my overzealous capturing of images). But the bump in the middle and the subsequent dip comes as somewhat of a surprise. This shows, I believe, computers coming into daily life (and, for many, near constant use at work and often at home) in the late 1990s. No longer was one computer shared among an entire office and most people were online. Computers, the internet, and computer-related stories and crimes were on everyone’s mind and this was reflected in the show.

The dip that follows in the early-to-mid 2000s shows the result of that ubiquity: we all got used to having and using computers. Computers mediated many daily tasks and the internet matured, giving us a feeling of comfort with these technologies. We had yet to see the explosion of Facebook and smartphones; new technologies breed new fascinations and anxieties, and this is a likely cause for the sharp increase of computers in the final seasons.

This change in the way we communicate online, through different devices and forums, is mirrored in the show’s content. Characters start using smartphones and laptops on a regular basis, and engage more with social networking sites (Law & Order’s fake Facebook is called Faceplace, one of few domains NBC isn’t just sitting on[[11]](#endnote-11)). The second possible reason for this spike is less about computers and than it is about the state of media: Apple became a sponsor of many NBC shows[[12]](#endnote-12). No longer did we see nameless beige computers recycled from previous episodes or devices with their brand names covered. Instead, fancy new computers proliferated, clearly identifiable as Apple products. This consistent brand shift is out of character for a gritty crime drama, but in the end perhaps says more television than it does about computers.

**FURTHER RESEARCH**

*Law & Order* is a data set of surprising depth, and merits further analysis from a variety of fronts. This analysis is represents just a few possible readings and approaches to the show. For myself, the next steps include a text-based investigation of the show using subtitles to digitally gather and parse dialog. Digital humanities techniques like word-frequency and gendered pronoun counting can provide readings of the show that would be difficult or impossible while actually watching. Other tactics from other disciplines will yield very different results: the *Law & Order Database*[[13]](#endnote-13) suggests a few possibilities, including how justice and factors like race are presented in the show. In closing, I would like to encourage fans of the show or those interested in how popular culture can reflect society to consider using *Law & Order* as the source for their next investigation.

**LIST OF EVERY URL ON *LAW & ORDER***

*In order of appearance on the show:*

thebaronmuchhumpin.com

HealthRoad2000.com

OldBookworm.com

upyourbutt.net

getdonner.com

covertcops.com

hiphopnations.com

enditallnow.com

extremetruth.net

snakeboy.net

b-frendz.com

scumwatch.com

toomail.net

gbc.bz

bootyboys.bz

deathjunky.com

noexecutions.org

toomail.net

manhattanhears.org

YouLenz.com

zeroenergyfootprint.com

searchling.org

unraptured.com

paparazziberry.com

zoltz.com

forummail.com

flashposse.net

citysmear.com

therealgore.com

animetothemax.com

urbanexcitement.com

me.com

mootscountdown.com**FIRSTS ON THE SHOW**

*Listed in order of appearance with season and episode*

First computer turned on (1, 9)

First computer interaction onscreen (1, 9)

First personal computer at home (1, 14)

First detective using a computer (1, 15)

First victim with computer (1, 19)

First crime involving computers (1, 22)

First dot-matrix printer (2, 24)

First lawyer using a computer (2, 32)

First laptop (2, 34)

First judge with a computer (2, 35)

First computerized cash register (2, 36)

First criminal using a computer (2, 38)

First instance of hacking (by police) (3, 34)

First mention of computer passwords (3, 34)

First graphics program (3, 49)

First mention of hackers (3, 63)

First mention of BBS (3, 63)

First use of the word “download” (3, 63)

First doctor using a computer (4, 71)

First computer at the front of desk (5, 89)

First person with two computers on one desk (5, 92)

First use of Microsoft Word (5, 100)

First full color screen (5, 102)

First computer video (5, 102)

First “zoom-and-enhance” (5, 102)

First 3D model (5, 105)

First digital photograph (5, 105)

First mention of email (6, 113)

First mention of cyberspace (6, 113)

First lieutenant using a computer (6, 118)

First desktop printer (6, 125)

First tower (6, 127)

First mouse (6, 127)

First definitive computer with Windows 95 (6, 129)

First (confirmed) dot matrix printer (7, 145)

First tablet (7, 149)

First computer in courtroom (7, 150)

First inkjet printer (7, 155)

First computer speakers (7, 157)

First (maybe) CD drive (7, 157)

First instance of cyber-stalking (8, 175)

First flatscreen monitor (9, 188)

First Mac (10, 210)

First direct mention of internet pornography (10, 219)

First mention of chatrooms (10, 219)

First confirmed screenshot of Netscape (10, 222)

First mention of the term “dotcom” (10, 222)

First scanner (10, 226)

First mention of “logging on” (10, 226)

First digitized mugshot (11, 238)

First Blackberry (12, 257)

First computer running Excel (12, 257)

First computer running Word (12, 259)

First computer running Windows 95 (12, 259)

First mention of online auctions (12, 261)

First mention of spyware (12, 268)

First mention of webmasters (12, 270)

First mention of computer science (12, 270)

First mention of online gambling (13, 288)

First use of “Googled” as a verb (13, 301)

First mention of camera phones (15, 346)

First mention of “Buddy List” (16, 363)

First instance of prosecutors using a computer in the courtroom (17, 372)

First mention of blogs (17, 372)

First mention of “social networking” (17, 373)

First mention of WiFi (17, 373)

First laptop in squad car (17, 378)

First Gmail user, though logo is removed (17, 384)

First instant message (17, 393)

First .org URL (18, 394)

First judge with a computer on the bench (18, 400)

First time Jack McCoy uses a computer onscreen (18, 402)

First thumb-drive (19, 417)

First mention of Nigerian email scams (19, 423)

First mention of iPhone (19, 429)

First mention of Photoshop (and “photoshopped” as a verb) (19, 431)

First child using a computer onscreen (20, 456)**QUOTES ABOUT COMPUTERS**

*Listed in order of appearance with season and episode*

"You know we're living in the computer age?" (1, 13)

"Take lotion... papercuts: no computers before 1974." (2, 29)

"Everything's computers now." (2, 42)

"The computer crashed - I lost 40 pages!" (3, 58)

"Even the Cray supercomputer blows a fuse now and then." (3, 62)

"I use a laptop computer to write a thesis, I use tools to fix my VCR and my toaster." (4, 82)

"Your victim had a 486 machine, state of the art." (4, 84)

"We've got all the computer geeks pulling yellows on a kid named Sid." (4, 85)

"There are twelve people in that room, not twelve computers." (4, 85)

"He blanked the screen!" (5, 93)

"My son wants a computer." (5, 97)

"Dave was a lifer, started here right out of grad school before we got computers." (5, 98)

"Now Robby works at a computer, thanks to Dr. Colter." (5, 107)

"My 14-year-old plays spin the bottle on the computer - I'm telling you, anything's possible." (5, 108)

"My kid tells me to computerize..." (5, 109)

"Do not turn off at night." (6, 112)

"Me, I used the computer once, lost 27 straight games of solitaire." (6, 113)

"Mega carnage, piece of crap CD-ROM thrasher." (6, 115)

"AOL, Compuserve, Prodigy, what?" (6, 116)

"When I first started on the internet, there was nobody out there." (6, 116)

"Don't believe everything you read on the computer screen." (6, 116)

"He made em up on the computer and we pretended to take em in." (6, 125)

"I made it up on my computer for the kid." (7, 150)

"Saturday night was very busy. We had a reading of a cyber-novel by Karten van Dusen." (8, 158)

"Type in what we're looking for, 'eagle graphics' and the motto 'audentes fortuna iuvat', search engine does the rest." (8, 162)

"Let's surf the net!" (8, 162)

"Nice computer you got there, is that where you keep your virtual clubhouse?" (8, 162)

"I'm ready, do you know of any websites where I can find out more?" (8, 162)

"They took computer disks!" (8, 167)

"No address book, no appointment book. They're probably all on his hard drive." (8, 169)

"You gotta be some kind of computer whiz to do this erasing trick?" (8, 173)

"She knows all the software." (8, 173)

"Phone sex has been replaced by email sex? Who knew?" (8, 175)

"The guy who bought it installed an 8-gig hard-drive, threw out the old one." (8, 175)

"Cons have got computers?" (8, 175)

"Forensics says the letter is computer generated, printed on a garden-variety bubble jet." (8, 176)

"You know, he gets something off the internet, the toilet wall..." (8, 180)

"Any idiot with a PC and a printer." (8, 185)

"He's on the internet, he's got a newspaper." (9, 191)

"All he did was study or surf the web on my computer." (9, 193)

"Anybody can print this off the net." (9, 193)

"Click on 'Utilities'." (9, 195)

"Computers crash, cars break down - it happens." (9, 197)

"I asked him, what did he think about buying stocks on the internet, he said it was for suckers." (9, 201)

"This is more store, I sell through the classifieds on the internet." (10, 206)

"Hagan was on an online conference to the Philippines, the whole thing was recorded by webcam." (10, 210)

"Computer company from hell - I sent my kids' computer in to get fixed and they lost it." (10, 212)

"I told you those gizmos were trouble." (10, 212)

"The Rite Aid computer says the receipt was for toilet paper, toothpaste, and some cough medicine." (10, 213)

"Oh man, weighs a ton! - Check it out, could be a computer or something." (10, 215)

"It's from a computer game called 'Terror'. John told me he plays it on the internet five, six hours a night." (10, 215)

"Talford emailed somebody named 'Doom Master'." (10, 215)

"She was talkin' internet this, internet that... I don't know much about it." (10, 215)

"Real-time webcast... peepshows on the internet." (10, 219)

"We were going to set up our own site on the web." (10, 219)

"Pentium 3, 24-gig hard drive - it's all state of the art stuff." (10, 219)

"Sean said he had some ideas about the internet, and that he just wanted to take some time to figure out the next step." (10, 221)

"I already had a tech check on his systems." (10, 221)

"It seems they ran a Y2K compliance program a few weeks ago." (2, 221)

"She had this one guy she was chatting up on the internet... She talked to me about email and chats and screen-names - how am I supposed to know about that crap." (10, 226)

"Check the settings for a T3 line." (10, 226)

"All my friends have been telling me to shop online - it's great, don't worry about security." (10, 226)

"I'd say the kid's an internet addict." (10, 226)

"We found them in the Computer Center." (10, 227)

"Computer hackers replicate the code, they can fabricate something that fools the scanner." (11, 239)

"Some computer billionaire." (11, 240)

"I'll get you a printout." (11, 241)

"You know you can get anything you need on the computer with Westlaw." (11, 241)

"My detectives did some digging on the internet..." (11, 249)

"Ok, we're going to try to trace the email." (11, 251)

"Then her cousin Jeff convinced her to jump on the internet bandwagon. It was a disaster." (11, 253)

"The dot-com cousin." (11, 253)

"Boilerplate websites for public schools." (11, 253)

"According to the computer, Mr. Eastman never appeared for his referral to oncology." (12, 255)

"The feds monitor all my calls, read my email..." (12, 256)

"Got it off eBay." (12, 261)

"Simply posts information on the website. - And lets the internet do the rest." (12, 261)

"I met Emily online." (12, 261)

"Let's check out her computer, maybe they had some kind of email thing going." (12, 267)

"Hey, I haven't downloaded the files yet!" (12, 268)

"Reason number 37 for me not to open my email." (12, 268)

"I was here, on the computer." (12, 269)

"Where'd you get these? - We printed them off her laptop." (12, 270)

"How do you defend that awful website or whatever it's called?" (12, 270)

"That's an internet bank, you do all you banking, payments, deposits... everything online." (12, 277)

"Computers, don't you love them?" (13, 282)

"I know somebody, he's a computer genius." (13, 284)

"I can call an 800 number, I log into the internet." (13, 288)

"The computer said the case is closed!" (13, 289)

"If God had wanted man to have fair trials, he would have given the jury Pentium processors instead of prejudices." (13, 289)

"The notes were printed on an HP DeskJet." (13, 299)

"You get wireless internet on that, Sammy?" (13, 301)

"I'd have to ask Mr. Computer." (14, 302)

"Screen name 'LonJack', last logged on two months ago." (14, 307)

"Everything's on the internet." (14, 307)

"Oh, it's not the games, it's the systems they're played on. Those things are just really fast computers. Anything with a speed of over 85,000 MTOPS, US Export Administration's worried the wrong people are gonna use the technology to build encryption machines or missile guidance systems." (14, 315)

"Check out the links on that site." (14, 319)

"We should check his emails - I bet it's all spam." (14, 320)

"On the net. Everything's on the net." (14, 322)

"This website gets 30,000 hits per day." (14, 322)

"This is the homepage." (15, 330)

"Everybody surfs the web, Arthur. Everybody but you." (15, 330)

"Look what I downloaded from the internet." (15, 338)

"How do we counteract corrosive cultural forces like the internet...?" (15, 340)

"It's a glitch in the system." (15, 341)

"No computers?" (15, 343)

"She's huge on the web." (15, 346)

"Most of it's email nowadays. I'll get it printed out for you." (15, 346)

"I think it was an image from her cellphone." (15, 346)

"DeVries received it as an email attachment..." (15, 346)

"He spent hours online." (16, 357)

"We analyzed Emily Newton's web history." (16, 359)

"He just got a new laptop yesterday." (16, 359)

"I'm pretty sure I saw him using our courtesy computer around 7:30." (16, 366)

"You can print them from a website." (16, 369)

"Payroll server logs corroborate the computer search for Dana Baker's info." (16, 369)

"I get 100 emails a day." (16, 369)

"Squad email." (17, 372)

"I was with our girl who runs the fan site and handles the mail." (17, 372)

"You better not be on the computer in there! No internet with the door closed!" (17, 373)

"She's an internet celebrity now." (17, 373)

"We were in Hartford at Molly's gymnastics meet and one of her friends had a cellphone with the internet on it." (17, 373)

"Computers aren't foolproof." (17, 373)

"On the World Wide Web?" (17, 373)

"They put spyware on my computers." (17, 381)

"I think it's in my Blackberry, let me get it." (17, 383)

"It turns out Cantwell has five different email addresses." (17, 385)

"This flyer was created on the defendant's computer." (17, 388)

"That's ridiculous! - Tell that to my computer." (17, 391)

"Now I'm into leisure industry websites." (17, 393)

"Is this your electronic signature?" (18, 394)

"This was streamed from our office in Jersey City." (18, 395)

"What about the local precinct, detective, don't they keep a list of contacts for these stores? - They do, in their computers, but the power is out." (18, 395)

"What about what's in your computer, Mike?" (18, 395)

"You'd need a telescope to read that." (18, 396)

"That's why he stole it by emailing it." (18, 396)

"Anyway, he can't even connect up a computer, you know?" (18, 396)

"It's just rumors, of course. - But you put them on your website? - Of course, that's what the internet is for." (18, 399)

"We ran Langdon's photo through facial recognition." (18, 400)

"I found it on eBay." (18, 401)

"The doc's browsing history... Google search for New York City cyber cafes." (18, 402)

"Brandon's on his webcam! He's webcasting from his room!" (18, 404)

"She told me to get off the computer and do my homework." (18, 404)

"I found a Google Map in his trash." (18, 404)

"We don't intimidate or murder, no matter what you read on the internet." (18, 408)

"Missing: one phone, one computer." (18, 410)

"She's involved with something on the internet." (18, 410)

"I have a friend in the blogosphere." (18, 411)

"Check out this email blast he got this morning." (19, 412)

"The comments were posted on the internet anonymously. If you can subpoena the ISP..." (19, 412)

"No judge is going to allow something we just found on the internet." (19, 412)

"Teenage girls battering each other on internet videos." (19, 412)

"They sent me over the link." (19, 416)

"I started a blog, just got a book contract." (19, 418)

"Let's see a Street View." (19, 420)

"I keep meticulous records of every IP address that drops a comment on my website." (19, 420)

"We monitor his computer use very carefully." (19, 421)

"Want to hear about what he wrote about them on their Wikipedia entry?" (19, 421)

"You that all that with the internet? It says here you're web sleuths." (19, 424)

"And how's a computer supposed to know when the rapture happens?" (19, 425)

"There's a computer power brick but no computer." (19, 428)

"Kernel based, implemented as a rootkit." (19, 428)

"One thing for sure. Nowadays everything ends up on the web." (19, 429)

"I found a FacePlace page she kept under another name." (19, 431)

"The killer was looking back and forth from the screen to the number that he was carving into the bodies." (19, 432)

"Can I borrow your cellphone? It has the internet, right?" (19, 432)

"I see where this is going, Lupes. Next thing you know she'll be friending you on Facebook." (19, 435)

"Not exactly on Facebook up here." (20, 438)

"It's not a blog, it's a forum for corrective social action." (20, 439)

"In China they call it a human flesh search engine." (20, 439)

"That place on the World Wide Web? - Actually, they don't call it that anymore." (20, 439)

"A lynch-mob sitting at computers typing things?" (20, 439)

"Words on the internet have consequences." (20, 439)

"We spend our days in front of computers." (20, 439)

"You ever read the internet, Mr. Cutter?" (20, 439)

"Yogurt, coffee, ink cartridges, cupcakes." (20, 445)

"I kept some old photos on my backup hard-drive." (20, 445)

"Have you seen what's on the internet?" (20, 445)

"Where do the Juggalos hang out? In front of their computers, they're losers." (20, 446)

"The band's website doesn't give a clue what this knife in neck thing is about." (20, 446)

"One hit, it's a link." (20, 446)

"He uses proxies to hide his IP address." (20, 446)

"He was worried about his data being hacked. He told me he got an alert on his laptop. The hotel's WiFi wasn't properly firewalled." (20, 451)

"Homework? All she needed was Google!" (20, 451)

"What are you guys doing on my computer?" (20, 456)

"What were you doing? Exposing yourself to some creep on your webcam. He took a video-capture of it, now it's all over the net." (20, 456)

"They're online computer game weapons." (20, 456)

"This boy Moot's been running his blog through a server in Romania." (20, 456)

"Have you checked the internet lately? It's filled with videos of dumb kids blowing up crap with pipe bombs." (20, 456)

"I also ask that you authorize me to seize all computers that are found on the school's premises." (20, 456)

"I was conducting a computer reading program and this one student was on a game site." (20, 456)**A NOTE ON COPYRIGHT**

All images in this book, with the exception of a few charts, are copyright NBC/Universal. While falling under fair use, if you enjoy these images from the show I encourage you to buy the DVDs and gather your own data!

The project blog contains many more images than are printed in this book, approximately 2,550 screenshots (curated from a total of around 11,000 images). This may seem like a lot, but since the show’s total length is 1,149,120 seconds, if multiplied by the standard video frame-rate of 29.97 frames/second the blog contains only 0.007% of the show’s content. By comparison, that works out to about 100 milliseconds from each episode, or equivalent to taking a ½-second clip from a feature film.

All other content, including the text of this book, are released under a Creative Commons Non-Commercial, Attribution, Share-Alike license – feel free to use but please let me know.**NOTES**

1. The first episode of *Law & Order* aired on September 13, 1990, three days before the first Pizza Hut opened in the USSR (and two days before the first Pizza Hut opened in People’s Republic of China). For a person coming of age in the 1990s, this seems a prescient fact. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. While *Law & Order* ran for the same number of seasons as *Gunsmoke*, it is worth noting that *Gunsmoke* produced 635 episodes, compared to *Law & Order’s* 456. The only show to run longer than *Gunsmoke* is *The Simpsons*, which at the time of writing has produced 25 seasons and 540 episodes.  
    [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The characteristic and variously described “dun-dun!” sound effect was created by series composer Mike Post. The sound was made from “an amalgamation of nearly a dozen sounds, including an actual gavel, a jail door slamming, and five hundred Japanese monks walking across a hardwood floor.”  
   <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_%26_Order#Music_and_sound_effects> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For a quick introduction to the idea of “binge-watching”, including an analysis from Netflix, see this Wall Street Journal article:  
   <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303932504579254031017586624> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. There are a lot of great moments to be pulled from the show, but a few are worth highlighting:

   Detectives on *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* with a computer and “Yes/No” cards  
   <http://www.jeffreythompson.org/blog/2012/11/02/yesno>

   A break from the show’s very definite 3d-person vantage where we literally see through detective Elliot Stabler’s eyes in an episode of *Law & Order: SVU*  
   <http://www.jeffreythompson.org/blog/2011/09/08/elliot-stablers-eyes>  
    [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Close to but not *every* computer. Computers that appeared onscreen for only a single frame and were blurred or mostly cut off were not captured. See the *Computer Count* section for an analysis of the frequency of computers in the show.  
    [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The first episode of *Law & Order* aired just a month before internet pioneer Tim Berners-Lee began his work on the World Wide Web while at CERN.  
   <http://www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee/Longer.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Some internet sleuthing suggests that the computer is either an IBM Personal System/2 (which definitely appears in episode 2) or is a prop. The unidentified peripheral remains a mystery since the first mouse doesn’t appear until season six.  
    [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. There are some notable exceptions, namely that we see very few common peripherals like mice and joysticks, or of CD-ROM’s multimedia and interactive content. Old-fashioned equipment continues throughout the majority of the show’s run. This may reflect the limited budgets of a large-city police force, and in that way is more accurate, but this seems a conversation worth further investigation. Another exception in the opposite direction is, of course, the occasional indulgence in “zoom-and-enhance”, which shows up first in season 5, episode 102 and again nine more times in the run of the show. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. It has been out pointed out that the rise of the computer had a social upside: the clacking of an office full of typewriters made it very difficult to carry on a conversation. Though early computer keyboards were not as quiet as the ones today (to say nothing of dot matrix printers), the computer transformed at least the sonic atmosphere of the workplace.  
     [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. For a listing of all the fake web addresses used on the show, see the *List of URLs* section, or my post about the addresses, which also includes links to Whois lookups for each.  
    <http://www.jeffreythompson.org/blog/2014/01/06/every-url-on-law-order>  
     [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Exact verification of Apple sponsorship is hard to find, but watching NBC shows from this time makes Apple sponsorship pretty apparent.  
    <http://www.brandchannel.com/home/post/Steve-Jobs-Legacy-on-Hollywood-Apple-Product-Placement.aspx> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. The *Law & Order Database* is a crowd-sourced set of data about the show, including conviction rates, providing a useful jumping-off point for further research.  
    <http://www.overthinkingit.com/2012/11/13/the-law-and-order-database-all-20-seasons> [↑](#endnote-ref-13)