Serving 99 to 149 Years for Wearing Butt-Huggers and Resisting to Subscribe to Cable TV:

The Presence of the Law in Chicano Theatre

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In the canon of Chicano theatre, the law holds a prominent role; the relationship between Chicanos and the law is a theme explored widely across Chicano theatre in both comedy and tragedy. This paper discusses how the comedy of Chicano theatre conceals the insidiousness of unchallenged racial stereotypes and acts as a safety valve to release the pressures of an abjected community. Yet, where comedy conceals the structure of abjection, drama critically challenges the status quo Chicano drama is capable of questioning the authority of the dominant hegemony over the cultures it oppresses. Beginning from a framing of the law as the tool through which the dominant culture abjects the Chicano, the law has an always-already assumption of Chicanos as law-breaking and purposely ignores their existence until arbitrary punishment is applied and serves as the site of trauma for Chicanos, this paper considers three Chicano dramas, Zoot Suit, The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales, and Santos & Santos, to interrogate the presence of the law, through the tropes of trials and courtrooms, in Chicano theatre.
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Raúl Sánchez Roquerario de Espírito Santo, A.K.A. Machaca, was charged with assault with a deadly weapon, second degree attempted murder, 1st degree black belt homicide, 3-D battery, and failure to stop at a stop sign. He’s currently serving 99 to 149 years in the state penitentiary. The second suspect a Mario Herendido Torres Denalga, otherwise known as Churro, was caught at a local swap meet two hours later. He was charged with 1st degree attempted cow slaughter, resisting arrest, resisting to subscribe to cable TV, carrying a concealed weapon, wearing butt-huggers, and armed burglary...For myself, Officer Bob Jones, I was given the highest medal for bravery and was given a free paid vacation to Guadalajara, Mexico to learn more about the beautiful Mexican culture. Señoritas and margaritas. 

–Teatro Izcalli acto Real Real Stories of the Highbüey Patrol. (Arteaga 70).

I may be trying [your brother], but by god, you've already judged him. In your heart, he's guilty. A dealer, a crook, a liar, a thief, a traitor, possibly even a killer. But the sin you damn him for is being Mexican. Right, Tommy? We're a pair, you and me; I loathe your kind 'cause I love them, and you love them to bury your loathing.

–Judge in Santos & Santos. (Solis, Santos & Santos 60).

I. Introduction

The strained and dysfunctionally uneven relationship between Chicanos and the law is a recurrent theme explored across Chicano theatre in both dramatic literature and popular sketch comedy. Teatro Izcalli performs a scripted comedic sketch, Real Real Stories of the Highbüey Patrol, where a California Highway patrol officer obtusely narrates a reenacted dramatization of the "crimes" he encounters in a Chicano community (Arteaga). He confronts a woman selling a miracle cough syrup and barks at her in butchered Anglo-accented, staccato Spanish: "Tu tener permiso para sus nalgas?": Do you have permission for your buttocks? Stunned, the woman says nothing and he issues her a citation, then he tells the audience how positively it all proceeded as

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1 Teatro Izcalli is a San Diego-based Chicano comedy troupe formed in 1993 with the mission to address needs of local Chicana/o and Indigenous communities through politically conscious performance, community dialogue, and cultural education. Taking the Nahuatl word for “house of re-awakening”, Izcalli began as a community-based education project committed to the promotion and preservation of Chicana/o art, culture, and history. Teatro Izcalli is a collective company that has performed across the United States in community and educational venues.
the woman simultaneously curses him in Spanish and leaves. In the humor of the sketch, the law, embodied in the bumbling highway patrolman who calls for backup when his doughnut falls to the ground after seeing two Chicano youths painting a mural, is little more than a funny nuisance (Arteaga 69). The comedy conceals the insidiousness of the officer's unchallenged racial stereotypes and acts as a safety valve to release the pressures of an abjected community. This sort of laughter encourages Chicanos to accept their subservient position because it serves to make oppression feel less threatening: by casting the Highway Patrolman as a clumsy fool he is made harmless. However, despite his comedic ineptitude his authority is not challenged; although he is clearly unsuited for the authority he wields, the Chicanos he abuses do not confront him, they only laugh and continue the status quo. Although the humor of the skit may attempt to diffuse and nullify the intensity of the threat of police authority, the menace is not eradicated and critiques of law are presented in placating humor.

Read through a critical lens, Real Real Stories of the Highbúey Patrol demonstrates the dimensions of the law positioned as the sexually violating male and the feminization of the Chicano community through the sanctioning of legal shame and forced submission to Anglo authority. The second suspect, Mario Herendido Torres Denalga, whose last name is a play on the Spanish slang for butt, nalga, eponymously embodies the sexualized violation of Chicanos by the law. The laundry list of absurdly fabricated offenses the patrolman ticks off before the mock camera of a nationally televised program publicly establishes shame. Despite the fact that these accusations are unverified the weight of the officer's authority saturates his words with disgrace and embarrassment. Chicanos are forced into feminized submission as neither of the suspects is allowed to speak against the officer and they are forced to accept the prejudiced authority of the law under the threat of physical violence.
Where the comedy of Tetro Izacalli’s sketch partially conceals the structure of abjection, the dramas I will explore openly challenge the status quo. My approach to abjection is informed by Karen Shimakawa’s concept of national abjection. Shimakawa reinterprets Julia Kristeva’s psychological concept of abjection, as both a condition of being repulsively other and the process through which that distinction is made, into a socio-political term focused upon the position of Asian Americans within U.S. culture. As Shimakawa puts it, “[r]acialized as (always potentially) foreign, [Asian Americans] nevertheless cannot be differentiated from the ‘legitimate’ U.S. American subject with an exclusion carrying the force of law and therefore cannot be openly, completely, or permanently expelled; thus, to maintain the legitimacy of the dominant racial/national complex, the process of abjection must continually be reiterated or re-presented" (10). Shimakawa cites examples of a constantly contradictory history of Asian Americans categorically fluctuating between "foreigners/outsiders/deviants/criminals" and "domesticated/invisible/exemplary/honorary whites" (Shimakawa). Although Shimakawa operates exclusively in terms of Asian Americans, this sociopolitical formulation of abjection can be oriented in terms of Chicano experience. Chicano dramatic literature critically portrays Chicanos as either ignored through judicial invisibility or criminalized through spectacular judgment; in other words, the position of “honorary whites” is not available to Chicanos.

The Chicano dramas included in this essay demonstrate the legal process through which Chicanos are abjected in American society. While the Teatro Izcalli safety-valve comedy sketch does attempt to mollify the menace of the law, it neither assuages the law’s authority and control over Chicanos nor addresses the latent issues of violation and submission; the highway patrolman is a buffoon but retains the power to send two Chicanos to prison for simply painting a mural. Likewise, in the drama Santo & Santos, Chicano playwright Octavio Solis portrays the
dominant population's view of Chicanos as ill-informed and imperfect: the Anglo judge sees Chicanos as inherently other and beneath him. However, Solis’s judge is capable of going further than his basic paternalism to interrogate the Chicano lawyer Tomas about his own self-hatred; the judge’s words are an indictment against the hegemonic perspective rather than an explanation of bad behavior. Without falling into a need to moderate oppression, the Chicano dramas I consider are capable of questioning the authority of the dominant hegemony over the cultures it oppresses. In particular I will examine how the genre of documentary theatre employed by these plays enables a critique of law brought into visibility by the structural similarities between documentary theatre and the law.

I will use three Chicano dramas, Luis Valdez’s Zoot Suit, Carlos Morton’s The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales, and Solis’s Santos & Santos, to interrogate the presence of the law, through the tropes of trials and courtrooms, in Chicano theatre. Zoot Suit, first produced in 1979, marked an important turning point in Chicano theatre towards professionalization and wider-reaching venues. (Huerta, Chicano Drama 1). Produced in regional theatres across the United States, The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales and Santos & Santos reflect the comprehensive appeal of Chicano theatre to Chicano and non-Chicano audiences. Taken together, these three plays restage courtroom trauma in order to intervene in the violation. These plays demonstrate how the law is the tool through which the dominant culture abjects the Chicano; the law serves as a site of trauma for Chicanos through an always-already assumption of Chicanos as law-breaking and through a deliberate ignorance of their existence until the moment arbitrary punishment is applied based on the caprice of the dominant Anglo culture.

I use the term "Chicano" in reference to Chicano identity as an idea pulled from the complexly diverse experiences of self-identifying Chicanos. I use the term as an intentionally
problematic identifier: the identity of Chicanos refers in a sense both to a concrete community of culturally similar people and to a non-identity, to the extent that Chicanos are in a constantly shifting border negotiation between Latino, principally Mexican, and American cultures. W.B. Worthen speaks of a “depthlessness” of Chicano identity yet simultaneously acknowledges the long-standing cultural history of Mexican-Americans; in other words, Chicanos occupy a dually faceted status (Worthen 105). Operating on dual cultural and political foundations Chicano identity cannot simply be classified as either a political movement or a homogeneous cultural category—it must be considered in terms of hybridity and amalgamation of both cultures. I refer to Chicanos and not Mexican-Americans deliberately based on the political nature of Chicano identity stemming from its roots in the Chicano political movement of the 1960s. Chicano awareness of the political struggle of La Raza, the people, towards advancement beyond the dominant culture's oppression is essential to Chicano self-identification and differentiates the identity from the stereotypically non-political or politically conservative Mexican-American. Although Mexican-Americans and Chicanos have a shared cultural background, Chicano political consciousness distinguishes Chicano identity from Mexican-American identity. The plays I have included in this essay are all written by authors who self-identify as Chicanos and write from a perspective informed by this identification.

In addition to the shared genre of Chicano theatre, Zoot Suit, The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales, and Santos & Santos all share characteristics within the category of documentary theatre. All beginning from a basis of factual events, the spectrum of documentary theatre varies in its fidelity to restaging historical and factual events, from verbatim theatre—a form of documentary theatre where characters only speak word-for-word restatements from interviews and public speeches—to plays inspired by actual events but largely interpreted and framed
through the playwright's retelling. Although the factual fidelity of documentary plays may vary, reliance on facts and verifiable evidence of events gives documentary theatre a recognizable truth-value, a feeling that the work speaks to the reality of experience for audiences; this truth-value of documentary theatre is something that is absent in fictional theatre because as a work of fiction it is necessarily detached, or removed, from reality through its foundation in invention. The weight of authority accompanies these stories based on actual events—it is as if because the event occurred in real life it is “more true,” has a greater truth-value, than a fictive story. The authoritative difference between documentary theatre and fictive theatre is similar to the difference between candid photography and staged photography. As Susan Sontag begrudgingly concedes in *On Photography*, there is a noticeable difference in photographs of people who realize that a photo is being taken of them and those who do not realize (Sontag 37). In snapping a candid photo the photographer hopes to reveal something hidden about the subject and overcome the barrier the subject erects upon realizing that he/she is performing for another person. Documentary theatre seems to share this ability to access the truth in the assumption that a documentary play contains truth because it candidly shows audiences “the way it really was.”

Richard Norton-Taylor's verbatim play *The Colour of Justice* uses documentary theatre to interrogate the law and the authority of the hegemony through the lens of the highly publicized, racially motivated 1993 murder of black British teenager Stephen Lawrence. Lawrence was attacked by a group of white teenagers and then bled to death in front of white police officers who responded to the scene; the subsequent police investigation did not turn up evidence to convict the assailants and popular outcry prompted a public investigation, the Macpherson Inquiry, into police handling of the event. Direct statements from the Macpherson Inquiry into the police's handling of the murder and subsequent investigation are repeated verbatim in the
script and the \textit{mise en scène} is designed to replicate the exact physical reality of the inquiry's courtroom, complete with working computer screens to authentically simulate the courtroom of the inquiry (Norton-Taylor). Although the documentary fidelity of the play followed the reality of the inquiry incredibly closely, the playwright did make artistic and strategic choices: he cut away large amounts of the records of testimony and left out many witnesses all together. In purposely deciding to exclude certain elements of the event from the focus of the play, Norton-Taylor, like all documentary playwrights, framed reality; although documentary theatre attempts to re-present reality, it is only capable of representing the playwright's frame on reality. The truth-value of play is not suspect even though \textit{The Colour of Justice} is clearly biased in favor of the victim, Stephen Lawrence, and even though Norton-Taylor caricatures the police as bumbling fools whose incompetence is so great that it raises suspicions of racial motivations. By strategically selecting and ordering the testimony of specific individuals, Norton-Taylor frames the story of a young black man murdered by a group of white boys as a story of institutionally ignored racism in a small English town; his approach intensely distills the tension of the long process of a inquiry and creates the impression his play is capable of exposing a “truth” about the racism behind Stephen Lawrence's murder. The audience disregards Norton-Taylor's strategic choices and is persuaded almost exclusively by the apparent truth-value of the work (Reinelt).

Although \textit{Zoot Suit}, \textit{The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales}, and \textit{Santos & Santos} depart from the sort of photographic realism presented in \textit{The Colour of Justice}, the Chicano dramas each stand as factually realistic depictions of Chicano identity. Each of the plays straddles the line between psychological realism and a symbolic mysticism, all spend time in courtrooms, and all treat facts with artistic license to craft a compelling investigation of Chicano identity in relation to the law. The range of factual fidelity in these plays does not diminish their respective
truth-values because as plays based on factual events, with clear connections to reality, the truth-value for audiences is inherent. Even in verbatim theatre, the form of documentary theatre with the highest level degree of factual fidelity, the playwright creates a story through selecting the materials and perspectives to include and the light in which they are cast. In an interview Max Stafford-Clark, a founder of the Joint Stock theatre company, was asked "Would it be possible to make a verbatim play without a writer present?" to which he succinctly responded: "No, impossible" (Hammond and Steward 53). He signals the necessity of a person to be there to shape the story from the words of interviewees and the necessity to alter the reality of their words to craft the drama. Although the alteration of the reality is visible and recognized, the truth-value of documentary theatre is still unquestioningly present.

In contrast, the truth-value of Zoot Suit is questioned because it openly mingles fact and fiction. Based on the media-sensationalized 1945 Sleep Lagoon Murder of Jose Williams, one-third of Zoot Suit is taken from hard factual documents such as newspapers, court transcripts, and letters but playwright Luis Valdez adds elements like a love story between the two main characters Hank and Alice to fictionalize aspects of the play (O'Connor). Although Valdez spent considerable time researching the history of the Sleepy Lagoon Murder, in 1979, the year the play was first produced, Valdez did not claim his work as a documentary piece but explained it as a "dramatization of the imagination" to a critic for The New Yorker (O'Connor 194). The line between fact and fiction was too blurred for New York theatre critics, and they argued over whether the piece was over-fictive or over-factual (O'Connor 183). Their failure to define the play as either fiction or fact stems mainly from the composite format of play that intermingles events and conflates history, uses a combination of Spanish, English, and pachuco slang (Caló), merges styles of songs, and streamlines 22 defendants into a representational four. Valdez’s
script began workshops in a realistic style but he changed it, at the prompting of a member of the Mark Taper Forum Theatre staff, before a full production was mounted to include mysticism, depart from a naturalistic set design, and incorporate the largely symbolic narrating character of El Pachuco (O'Connor 192). Attilio Favorini categorizes Zoot Suit as a quasi-documentary, a category typified by plays like David Hare's factually inspired Stuff Happens, a play that begins with factually accurate sections from political speeches but then adds wholly created interpretations of what the political figures were doing, saying, and thinking before and after the speeches (Favorini xxx). However, Alice McGrath, on whom Zoot Suit’s main female character Alice Bloomfield is based, commented that Valdez was more accurate in his interpretation of the nature of the events than many of the people who lived through the events; for McGrath the truth-value of the story was revealed in the combination of factual accuracy and artistic interpretation.2

The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales and Santos & Santos share Zoot Suit’s difficulty of documentary classification because of a shared departure from the factual events that inspired the plays. Inspired by a news article on the 1975 murder of a young Chicano construction worker by a Texas police chief in a small rural town near San Antonio, Texas, Carlos Morton heavily researched The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales by reading newspaper articles, courtroom transcripts of both the federal and state trials, looking at autopsy photos, and interviewing the actual residents of the town, the protagonist's real wife, and defense and prosecution attorneys. Specific elements of dialogue come directly from court transcripts and detail the Sheriff's defense and Danny's burial. However, in an interview Morton said that he took artistic liberties with his play: he changed the defense lawyer from a man to a woman, and revealed that when the

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2 George Shibley, on whom the character George Scheerer is based, was upset with the play because he felt it inaccurate about the size of the role Alice McGrath played in the work of the committee (O'Connor 192).
family of the man killed by Texas police saw the play they rejected it saying that the play did not present the events in the manner they had experienced them (Morton). In *Santos & Santos*, playwright Octavio Solis creates a play based on real events of the Chagra family's narcotics trafficking in El Paso, Texas. In Solis’s play, Tomas Santos, the youngest of three brothers, returns to Texas after working as a criminal prosecutor in San Diego to join his brother's criminal defense firm where he discovers and joins in the family's corrupted achievement of the American dream. Real-life Chagra brothers Jamiel, Jimmy, and Joe were Lebanese American lawyers accused and convicted of hiring Charles Harrelson to assassinate the federal judge hearing their narcotics case in 1979 (Cartwright). After pouring over microfiche archives of local newspapers at the El Paso Public Library and reading an in-depth narrative account of the events by an author who personally investigated the story and interviewed the participants, Solis took the parallel immigration experience of the Lebanese family and translated it into a Chicano story (correspondance with Octavio Solis). For Solis the story was not unique to Lebanese experience: the losses sustained in the process of becoming American are universal to all immigrant experiences (Solis, Santos & Santos 1-2).

The departures of *The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales*, *Santos & Santos*, and *Zoot Suit* from their source events, emblematic of much of documentary theatre, is structurally analogous to the law. The law bears a similarity to documentary theatre in the shared focus on "truth," as a singular explanation of the culpability of events, and the assumption of the inherency of truth to the form. Both documentary theatre and the legal system are founded on a belief that its system is particularly capable of arriving at the “truth.” The law is ostensibly built on the search for "truth" and courts hold an almost magical place in society as the possessor and definer of "truth": even when the mechanisms of the system are exposed as flawed the system is
still revered and its capacity for truth-seeking is not questioned (Ball). The courts prove and verify facts insofar as one takes another to court to prove something: to declare the truth of an assertion or the truth of innocence. The litigationally successful set of facts are accepted as the narrative of truth, while the unsuccessful facts are dismissed as argument. The mechanisms of the law complicate the purpose of the judicial system and detach the system from the pure pursuit of factual accuracy. Evidentiary rules keep evidence out of court regardless of the importance of the evidence and complicated rules give more weight to certain forms of evidence over others. The goal of the judicial system shifts from finding the most honestly compelling narrative of factual accuracy to finding a legally regulated impression of "truth"; the importance of discovering the fullest conception of the accuracy of an event is lost in the packaging of the court system. The truth produced by the law is thus a compromised truth-value, an impression inspired by factual fidelity but ultimately independent of the actuality of the event in question.

II. Abjection

The Anglo legal authorities of the epigraph and The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales, Santos & Santos, and Zoot Suit refer to Chicanos as distinctively other and inherently inferior, positioning Chicanos as abject. Similar to Shimakawa’s innovative framing of Asian American abjection in terms of the Asian American body on stage and its permanent foreignness, Chicano identity and positioning within U.S. culture is framed along cultural lines. The detestability of Chicanos is inscribed through the characterization of Chicanos as innate lawbreakers. In popular U.S. culture Chicanos are considered distinctively other through an understanding of Chicano culture as unquestionably foreign and innately tied to illegality. The Chicano is born out of U.S. culture; he is definitionally American. Chicanismo, the ideology of the Chicano movement of the
1960's and 1970's, is the responsive experience of people of Mexican descent living in America (García). Although Chicanismo has expanded to include other Latino nationalities, the American variable of the equation has remained constant: the movement has always been a response directly generated out of a life lived within American culture. Despite the fact that Chicano identity is a uniquely American occurrence, Chicanos are forced to reside in a liminal space outside of both American and Mexican cultures. American culture categorizes Chicanos as refuse and shoves them aside. Mexican American presence in America does not necessitate acceptance into the dominant American culture, which sees them as little more than temporary visitors. The term "illegal alien" signals the assumed transitory temporality associated with the Mexican living in America. Although this term should be applied to any foreign citizen without a documented presence in the US, no other group is more closely tied with the term 'illegal alien' than Mexicans. Within the term itself, the word "illegal" denotes the implicit wrongness of their presence in the United States and "alien" signals the foreignness of the person. The Mexican-American is present and residing in the United States but is assumed to be foreign to the culture, he is no longer Mexican but he is not American; he exists within American culture and yet is not fully a part of it. In explaining the relationship between the dominant white culture, the deject, and the abject Asian American population Shimakawa states:

If an element of abjection is the impossibility of wholly originally differentiating it from the deject, what I am suggesting is that it is an (in)ability shared by the nation in its attempt to concretize national boundaries and that it is this inability that positions Asian Americans as a site of national abjection within U.S. American culture. Racialized as (always potentially) foreign, we nevertheless cannot be differentiated from the "legitimate" U.S. American subject with an
exclusion carrying the force of law and therefore cannot be openly, completely, or permanently expelled; thus, to maintain the legitimacy of the dominant racial/national complex, the process of abjection must continually be reiterated or re-presented (Shimakawa 10).

The abject cannot be completely separated from the deject because on a basic level they are the same. Similar to the vomit and other bodily refuses Kristeva uses for illustration, the abject begins as one with the dominant and is then judged to be loathsome and is separated, but the link between the two is undeniable. Analogously, Chicanos exist necessarily within American culture through an undeniable link yet they are constantly differentiated from dominant American culture. In Carlos Morton's play, Danny Rosales is a Mexican American whose U.S. citizenship is never impugned, but the Anglo Sherriff of the play automatically presupposes Danny's otherness by virtue of his Chicano-ness. The abject culture determines that this single facet of Danny's identity is great enough to eclipse his participation in American culture and label him as abject.

In Chicano drama the dominant culture is represented as viewing the abject Chicano as always-already law-breaking and fluctuates to the extent that his is either spectacularly punished or ignored. In Zoot Suit, Henry's girlfriend Della takes the stand to testify about the events on the night Jose Diaz was killed. Despite the fact that she has not been accused or convicted of any crimes, nor even testified to participation in any crime, the judge excuses her from the stand only to sentence her to a reformatory institution. The court predetermined her criminality and proof, even an accusation, was not necessary. The sheriff who kills Danny Rosales in The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales expresses the dominant opinion that all Mexicans are criminal; without any proof he believed in Danny's intrinsic guilt and was merely looking to find an offense that would
stick to validate his belief. Sherriff Fred began from an assumption of the criminality of Chicanos and, again without justification, enforced punishment in taking Danny to an old deserted road to scare a confession out of him but instead shot and killed him. *Santos & Santos* appears not to fit the mold of the other plays; ostensibly the brother's crimes occur without awareness of the dominant culture, however as the judge later reveals in insisting that prosecutors do not investigate the youngest brother and leave him clean, the dominant culture began interactions with the Santos brothers under the assumption that they were criminal. The judge knew all along that the youngest brother was involved with the other brother's illegalities but deliberately chose not to prosecute; yet, upon hearing that the older Santos brothers had the impudence to call him a racist, he shouts "Those talking Santos bastards, goddamn wetback crud, where do they get off calling me racist!", and then goes after the two eldest brothers with an unmitigated vengeance (Solis, Santos & Santos 67). The caprice of judges is a universal trope in Chicano Drama; each of the judges in these three plays are Anglo and each uses his authority over Chicanos as a means of perpetuation oppression based on the implicit understanding of Chicano criminality. The judge, as the embodiment of dominant white authority, chose when, how, and who to punish; although criminality is assumed inherent to Chicanos, punishment is dependent on the caprice of the dominant culture. In a perversion of the legal system's assumption of innocence, the presumption of Chicano guilt places the pre-determination of guilt in the control of dominant white authority.

Shimakawa argues that minority theatre can be a site for the confrontation of abjection because the theatre is the place where the process of abjection in repeated and re-presented, and in these re-presentations the process can be examined (Shimakawa 77). Plays which concern themselves with the abject status of the Asian American or Chicano perform many functions but
the most progressive use of abjection on stage for Shimakawa is when the process of abjection is portrayed in extremes that create subversion from within because it is this function which is the most capable of breaking the cycle of abjection and re-presentation (Shimakawa). In Santo & Santos middle brother Fernie confronts an Anglo ex-con exclaiming: "You got no idea who you fuckin' with, asshole! I go back to the Aztecs. I got the blood in my veins, goddammit, I got the face, the features, and I got the disposition of my dyin' race all over me. I'm a spic, man. Beans and tortillas through and through" (Solis, Santos & Santos 35). Fernie claims pride in the characteristics that mark him as abject. His subversive reclaiming of the things that denote his disgrace intervenes in process of abjection by highlighting the process of re-presentation of abjection necessary to sustain the positioning of the abject. Shimakawa explains: "abject roles may be profitably exploited, deliberately and insubordinately mimed in ways that may ultimately undermine their abilities to signify effectively" (Shimakawa 120). Plays which simply restage the process of abjection without calling into question the structure of the positioning of the Chicano as abject are not productive because where the base and mean abject status of the abject is accepted as the status quo, even when the inferior position is shown to be unfair or unjust, the simple restaging does not allow any room further than showing "things as they are" (Shimakawa 77).

Zoot Suit, and The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales are two such re-presenting plays. In Zoot Suit process of abjection is re-portrayed in the legal context; the Chicano defendants spend the majority of the play under legal custody constantly subject to the whim of the dominant culture. Even after the defendants are released from jail they are not cleared of their convictions; the law simply reverses its decision to incarcerate Chicanos, the assumption of their inherent criminality is not challenged. Further, in suggestion of the Zoot Suit Riots, a gang of military
service men hunt down El Pachuco, converge on him, beat him, and violently strip him of his zoot suit to reveal a broken man wearing only a small loincloth; the action recalls the indigenous subjugation to the dominancy and the Chicano's historic legacy of abjection in the short stylized re-presentation. Although the didactic The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales presents problems facing the Chicano community and closely follows each problem with a solution calling on audience members to practically jump out of their seats and join a protest, the play is a repetition of the process of abjection (Jenkins). The Chicanos of The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales are uniformly oppressed and sub-humanized through their universal failure to achieve justice; not a single Chicano character sees equality before the law, not even the passionate Chicana defense lawyer whose professional background does not absolve her of her abject status nor grant her access to the justice guaranteed exclusively to the dominant culture. The didacticism of the play does not overcome the character's abjection, they remain loathsome to society.

Santos & Santos attempts to confront abjection through a different tactic than Zoot Suit and The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales: the Chicanos of Santos & Santos inhabit the negative stereotypes that arise from the rhetoric of Chicano abjection. The Chicano characters of Santos & Santos challenge negative stereotypes but not through contradicting the stereotype; rather, they radically inhabit the stereotype, embodying and exceeding them to the point of grotesqueness. Through inhabiting abjection and pushing the tropes of abjection to a point of grotesqueness the playwright can challenge the stereotype. The Chicano brothers, Mike, Fernie, and Tomas, and their wives, Nena and Vicky, embody criminality to a monstrous degree. Youngest brother Tomas is situated as the "good one" but, with his brothers, he takes pride in ingenuity of a smuggled painting of the Mexican cultural icon Emiliano Zapata riding a white horse literally painted with cocaine; the brothers scrape the cocaine from the painting and do lines on their
deceased father's hand-crafted table. The ugliness touches every Chicano in the play: they yell at each other and fight over romantic infidelity in public, they curse at each other and belittle each other over justifiable suspicions, they do hard drugs, and their greed, wealth, and power has blinded them to the point that they feel like they are above the legal system. Tomas narks on his brothers to federal agencies while Fernie and Mike play the go-between for drug traffickers not afraid to get their hands dirty with the criminal underworld of mobsters and Latino drug cartels. Fearing an insider ratted them out, the brothers tie Camacho, a long-time friend of the family, up with bungee cords, douse him in gasoline and throw matches at him while he begs them to stop, they taunt him and reel him around like an animal, and inactively listen to his screams as he is burned alive. Mike's wife Nena shamelessly invents a story of embezzlement and frames Camacho to cover his murder and position her family as innocent victims. After agreeing to the cover-up the family decides to go out for pizza but Fernie cold-heartedly argues over having to pay since he covered the cost of the gasoline used to murder Camacho. Tomas holds Camacho's burned teeth in his pocket and shoves them into the mouth of the man they hired to kill Camacho. Tomas sleeps with his Fernie's wife Vicky and has her get money for him to pay to have the judge killed; when Fernie hears of the missing money he beats Vicky until she miscarries; Tomas confronts his brother and shoots him in the head. Every one of these characters is so grotesquely brutal that the stereotypes of Chicano criminality associated with the foreign other through the process of abjection seem trite: the extremity of the characters shows the weakness of the stereotype.

Grotesqueness is used as a tool in the vein of Brecht's epic theatre; instead of creating a sympathetic story for audiences to enjoy and then forget Solis's characters are so entirely repugnant and alienating that audiences are reticent to identify with them making room for
audiences to become engaged: "In fact, it [Brecht's dramaturgy] has as a purpose the 'teaching' of the spectator a certain quite practical attitude; we have to make it possible for him to take a critical attitude while he is in the theatre (as opposed to a subjective attitude of becoming 'entangled' in what is going on)." (Brecht 78). Unlike re-presenting plays, Santas & Santas goes beyond simply identifying a stereotype, letting the audience feel bad for a little bit, and then encouraging them to process those feelings and move on; allowing characters to inhabit the grotesqueness of the stereotype forces audiences to critically evaluate the truth behind the universal application of negative characteristic to all Chicano. The ways in which Santas & Santas exaggerates the viciousness of the characters and bends the boundaries of documentary theatre are the ways in which it has the most potential to disrupt abjection. The danger of the documentary is that it will only re-present abjection; it is the fictive elements of Santas & Santas that allows the play to stray from the strictures of documentary theatre and the law and intercede in the process of abjection.

Solis uses a legal context to interrogate both assumptions of the truth Chicano criminality and assumptions the inherency of truth in law. The object of the game of law is to find truth; parties come before a court of law seeking a determination of the truth, they want to prove that they were injured and that the other party was responsible. The decision the court comes to, as a jury of peers or by the wisdom of a judge, it received as a pronouncement of the truth; the game aspect of the legal process, with two sides facing against each other and fighting to the best of their abilities, disappears and the judgment takes on a status of an absolute finding of truth not the resulting winner of a game.

Performativity connects documentary theatre and law; a performance before an audience is the essential element of both fields. Law exists in only performance; without performance
legal codes are nothing more than words on paper, the words do not gain the force of law until performance is introduced (Ball). A verbal, unwritten system of laws would raise questions of fundamental fairness but would be more easily accepted as valid and enforced than a set of written laws that has only been read but never invoked and lacks power of enforcement. In documentary theatre an actor stands before his audience as a character and attempts to convey a truth of his character to his audience while in the courtroom a lawyer stands before a jury and tries to convince them of the truth of his words and arguments; at the heart of both performances is a preoccupation with truth. Legal performativity manifests in documentary theatre as courtrooms, lawyers, and law enforcement. Chicano playwrights, Morton, Solis, and Valdez strategically manipulate these elements to question basic assumptions about the courts in performance: the capability of courts to ensure equal justice to all people does not translate into a performance of that the protection of justice extending past the dominant to the abject.

The courtroom, as a locational grounding for law, is a place where the dominant culture makes a show of justice; the courtroom is the stage. In Zoot Suit the courtroom is a central and meaning laden setting: the judge's bench is made of stacks of newspapers, reflecting Valdez's indictment of the press (Valdez 52). The spectacularity of the courtroom is a show only for the dominant culture. Power is localized and limited to white characters; from lawyers to judges, the only hands that access power in the courtroom are white. Chicanos are only present in the courtroom to maintain a surface performance of a fair justice system. Guilt and innocence has already been (pre-) determined by the dominant culture. The bias of the judges in all three plays suggests that each trial is doomed before it ever starts; justice is not a possibility and the truth does not matter because the conclusion has been predetermined. In Morton's play, no Chicanos are ever heard in Danny Rosales's trial: Danny is already dead, his wife Berta is ignored, and his
friend Kiki is made to appear a nothing more than a self-interested traitor whose word cannot be trusted, and the objections of the young Chicana prosecutor are constantly dismissed and ignored. The courtroom serves as a staging ground for the dominant white culture to mount a performance of the pursuit of justice in which the outcome is determined and truth is immaterial.

Lawyers act as conduits to the truth whose channels are too hole-ridden to carry their ideals. The female lawyer of Zoot Suit acts as the "great white savior" who comes to save her "boys"; that a Chicano overcomes adversity is only because a white woman has deigned to take up his plight. Despite her success in getting her "boys" out of prison but failed to secure truth because they are never cleared of the conviction. The lawyers of Santos & Santos are outside the deject's sphere of dominance and removed from truth of the deject's perspective; they are ignorant to the full extent of the judge's bias against them and do not know how he calls them "goddamn wetback crud", "Stinkos", and "turks" and describes them as "invidious, corrupt, treacherous, racketeering", "blandly looking", the butt of jokes, and jail fillers. In demonstrating their lawyering style for their youngest brother, Mike and Fernie, the two oldest brothers, say together: "We believe our clients are guilty of no crime but the crime of Mexican descent, and that, your honor, ain't no crime at all." (Solis, Santos & Santos 8). The brothers are correct in assessing the fact that their clients are judged guilty by virtue of their status as Chicanos, however, they are incorrect in thinking that it is not a crime to be Chicano in American society; the Santoses are ignorant to the inviolability of their abjection. They have attained the prominent position of 'lawyer' but have not been granted access to the privileges the hegemony typically associates with this elevated status: the well-educated professional brothers are marked abject in their demeanor and their language using. Their improper grammar in a statement before a judge shows that they are incapable of using the proper language of the dominant culture and marks
them as the inferior deject. Although they have broken into a field held almost exclusively by members of the dominant culture, the Santos brother's wrongs are not overlooked because they are not able to overcome their status as Chicanos just as the law has not been able to overcome the hegemony's assumptions of their guilt and its enforcement of harsh penalties because of their status as Mexicans.

III. Trauma

Octavio Solis, Carlos Morton, and Luis Valdez each interrogate Chicano abjection in U.S. society through a legal context and challenge assumptions of both the inherency of truth in law and the basic truth of Chicano abjection. The legal context serves well to challenge assumptions of Chicano criminality because it serves as a site of trauma. In the legal system Chicanos are first traumatized with immutable assumptions of criminality; their traumas are then expansively repeated in the courtroom as the law again abjects Chicanos. The abjection is a sprawling, continual trauma that is constantly revisited through trials where old traumas are replayed and new traumas are created but never resolved. The trauma is ignored by the dominant culture similarly to the OJ Simpson and Rodney King cases because courtrooms cannot perceive their own hate biases.

In *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* Shoshanna Felman approaches trauma as a sudden physical and/or emotional injury; emotionally it is an injury that leaves a lasting impression of damage in the psyche that remains hidden only to reappear later (Felman 171). Unlike a traditional injury where one is hurt then heals and moves on, in a traumatic event the shock of the ordeal stigmatizes the event in the mind of the participant and extends its impact beyond the single moment to a longer period of injury. Felman argues that legal trials can both address a traumatic event and be sites of new traumas in
themselves. In trials the event that created the original trauma takes center stage, in criminal
cases the entire trial will center on the crime with only the possibility of slight detours into the
defendants' personal character where the defendant raises it as an issue, the event thus is the
restaged and re-performed in the trial through the exploration of the events and repetition of the
events in witness testimony. Trials because of their ability to reproduce and replay an event
through witness testimony and the presentation of evidence bear the potential to be productive or
unproductive in regards to traumatic experiences.

Productively, a trial has the potential to address a traumatic event for a victim unable to
process the trauma in making the event visible. The trial allows the injured party to share their
injury with an outsider in the hopes that sharing the event with someone beyond themselves who
has not been subjected to the injury will stop the repetitions. Similar to picking up the needle on
a skipping record and moving it past the scratch, a trial can allow the injured party to move
beyond their wounds and victimization through towards achieving a sense of justice when their
injury is recognized by society and the wrongdoer is punished. Felman references the productive
potential for addressing trauma through the legal performance of justice in the Nuremburg trials;
she argues that the Eichmann trial was not about Eichman's individual guilt or innocence rather,
as the first international trial for war crimes surrounding the events of the Holocaust, the trial
served to address the collective trauma of the holocaust inflicted upon the international
community (Felman 4). When contemporary, twentieth-century society has been collectively
traumatized it has turned to legal means of redress to cope with the traumas thus substantiating
the legal system as the dominant culture's method of ensuring justice (Felman). If the goal of the
legal system is to ensure justice, then the purpose of the system must rely on truth; therefore, the
legal system seeks truth to be able to ensure justice. When an injury occurs in American, society
advocates legal redress to right wrongs and regulate exaction the vengeance. The trial becomes the performed embodiment of law in acting as the injured party's means of achieving justice, processing the event, and giving the event a sense of closure.

Unproductively, a trial has the potential to simply repeat the trauma without ever bringing healing. The danger of discussing the traumatic event in a courtroom is that the discussion could be just another painful repetition of the event instead of a digesting and processing of the event. Felman explains: "…when the jury or court confronts the trauma in the courtroom, it is often inflicted with a particular judicial blindness that unwittingly reflects and duplicates the constitutional blindness of culture and of consciousness toward the trauma. A pattern emerges in which the trial, while trying to put an end to the trauma, inadvertently performs an acting out of it. Unknowingly the trial thus repeats the trauma, reenacts its structures." (Felman 5). A criminal trial is framed on a presumption of innocence: the trial exists to prove a defendant is not innocent. However, the assumption of innocence is not extended to the abject and abject defendants are forced to sit through trials where the assumption of their guilt is reenacted before strangers under the full weight of legal authority. For a wrongfully convicted defendant the trial creates wholly new traumas.

Dominant society approaches trials as a place with the potential for healing plaintiffs and victims; however, healing is the only positive option out the many negative possibilities. When an injured party goes to trial he stands the potential for loss. The opportunity to heal a trauma is obscured where either the event is criminally invalidated or the accused is declared not guilty. Additionally, where an injured party does win a trial the repetition of the events in the trial may not bring a sense of healing since the only redress courts typically provide to victims is financial. Although Nicole Brown Simpson's surviving family won a civil suit brought against OJ
Simpson, the monetary recovery did not bring their daughter back to life and could not undo the damage of her traumatic death.

In addition to the productive and unproductive potential of trials, Felman differentiates between private and collective traumas the trials address. Felman focuses on the Eichmann and OJ Simpson trials to demonstrate the differentiation. Felman maintains that the Eichmann trial confronted a collective trauma; from the outset, the internationality of victims of the holocaust and need to assign responsibility to perpetrators who had fled to nations across the globe dictated a collectivity across all of international society (Felman 7). The Simpson trial originated as a private trauma between ex-spouses and became a public collective trauma as the prosecution and defense brought in larger issues of domestic abuse and being black in America within the narrative of the trial; the prosecution was telling the story of the trauma of a battered wife killed at the hands of her husband and the defense was telling the story of a black man accused on the basis of his race; the deep public resonance with the traumas of the case took the private trauma and made it collective (Felman 6). Private traumas can be handled either privately, through a confidential manner such as counseling, or publicly through trials; a collective trauma does not have the option of either private or public management, a collective trauma must be addressed publicly.

Trauma is experienced in Chicano theatre collectively, just as a publicly sensationalized trial serves to make private traumas public theatre also serves to take private cases and make them emblematic of the collective traumas, in Chicano theatre private traumas come to stand in for the collective trauma of abjection. In Zoot Suit the trial became the source of the trauma; the injustice of the wrongful conviction became a traumatic injury to the Chicano defendants, one that was bound to repeat endlessly as they would remain in prison. The private trauma of the
racial bias of the court, the court's denial of clean clothes and haircuts, and the lack of
evidentiary support for conviction was made public only through the work of outsiders, the Press
and the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. These private injuries inflicted against the
defendants transfers to the larger Chicano identity through Luis Valdez's inclusion of
mythologized collective traumas. Valdez mythicizes the historically factual stripping of zoot
suiters of the Zoot Suit Riots in the staged beating and stripping of El Pachuco by a gang of
military servicemen. Valdez's open-ended conclusion of the play that conflates the actual facts of
Henry Reyna's life deemed them unimportant in comparison to the myth of the man and detaches
the play from strict realism and implicates the notion that the injustices inflicted upon the four
defendants extend to the larger Chicano community. In *The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales*, the
private traumatic event is both un-staged and repeated; although he dies several times in the
testimony of various witnesses his actual death is never physicalized on the stage, the trauma is
described but never staged. The private trauma of the death of one man in a small Texas town
was made public only through message of the play and the didactic nature of the play demands a
recognition of the collective Chicano trauma. The character of Bertha, Danny's common-law
wife, is representative of the struggle of La Raza; Bertha's protestations that she has lost before
the trial even started due to the composition of the jury demonstrates the failure of the legal
system to protect Chicanos, her powerlessness in the courtroom as she is told to be quiet and stay
out of the action several times and her accusations against Fred for lying bring the court to recess
is indicative of Chicano powerlessness in life, and her statement that she will wear black to
mourn the death of her husband while the white woman, Debbie, will soon wear white at her
wedding validates the collective nature of the injury against Chicano identity and not just an
individual Mexican-American.
In *Santos & Santos* the trauma is ideological. The trauma is in the failure of the abject to access the dominant: Chicanos fail repeatedly in their attempts to buy into the American dream, most visibly and spectacularly in the courtroom. Nena exemplifies the immigrant desire to be American; Nena says to the man investigating her husband on drug trafficking charges:

Senor, I come from La Colonia, the poorest barrio in Juarez. The streets ain't paved, there's no luz, no gas, no running water. When I got married, I got me a big fuckin' car and a house and two wonderful girls. The local chicks look down their nose at me, but I could give a shit. I take a bath in real porcelain, my floors got real marble, my girls speak perfect English. I'm a pinche American now. No fuckin' lawyer's taking that away from me. (Solis, Santos & Santos 69).

Nena's unyielding pursuit of the American dream is bound for failure; as Vicky points out, Nena will always have to hide her former poverty from her children and will never be white. The assumptions of Chicano guilt are never challenged and their individual status as Mexicans cannot be changed. As the second-generation children of a Mexican furniture maker, the Santos family pursued the American dream and viciously lost. The narrative of immigrants trying to make good in American society is common to all Chicanos, and remains a collective trauma.

Collective Chicano trauma is ignored by the dominant culture in Chicano theatre as it was in the OJ Simpson and Rodney King cases because of the failure of the law to perceive its own biases of hate, thus allowing the abjection to continue unresolved. In the Simpson case the court failed to see Nicole's battered face, they failed to see the evidence of her abuse and found OJ Simpson not guilty of her murder just as the jurors in the Rodney King case did not see the beating of the black Rodney King by white police officers in the tape played back for them in trial and found the officers not guilty of police abuse (Felman 81). In both cases the jury failed to
see the injury that created the trauma and therefore failed to address or remedy the trauma in the trial (Felman 80-81). In *Zoot Suit* the trauma of the abject is again ignored by dominant society. Even though the defendants are released from prison they are never cleared of guilt, society simply undoes a single wrong and washes its hands of its larger responsibility. In *The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales* Fred and his wife get away with incredibly light convictions, although the convictions are later overturned later and replaces with heavier convictions, and the final statement the fact that law enforcement murders of Chicanos still continue; Chicanos remain abject and cannot find justice in the laws or in a courtroom. In *Santos & Santos* the trauma of the inability of Chicanos to achieve the American dream is ignored; the Santoses are never accepted as American despite considerable professional and financial success. The Anglo judge makes a speech where his biased racial comments about the Santos brothers are interspersed with accolades and the difference of tone is never mentioned or even noticed. Even though they are a successful family, this entity cannot exist in America and their corruption becomes apparent. In *Zoot Suit*, *The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales*, and *Santos & Santos* private traumas morph into collective traumas and exemplify Chicano abjection. The abjection is a continual trauma that is constantly revisited and never resolved in the failure to clear the always already assumption of Chicano criminality.

The differences between theatre and real life are complex in ways that documentary theatre only begins to re-present; the court does not operate the same in real life and in stage representations. The failures between the mimetic and the authentic create the possibility for the presence of a re-presentation of the trauma in both the courtroom and the stage. Dramatic restaging of a traumatic event bears the same danger of re-inscribing the trauma as the legal investigation into the traumatic event. In this sense of the presence of potential re-inscription
danger there is little difference between the straightforward interrogative retelling of an attack by a victim seated in a witness chair before a judge and the dramatic interpretation of an attack lit with colored lights and set to haunting music because both situations create the room for the event to become even more reified in the perspective of the victim or witness. Yet, there is a palpable difference between the stage and the courtroom. The courtroom bears a culturally assumed "realness" lacking in the stage. The procedural protections of courtroom coats the walls of the courtroom with an assumption of truth; the American legal system is structured on the presentation of evidence and the discourse of American legal history has been a continual process of refinement of these rules. Evidentiary rules that take law students an entire year of study to gain simply an introduction. The legal rules governing civil and criminal procedure grant the legal system an air of respectability. This respectability translates into a feeling of "realness" imbued into the legal system. The precautions against the admission of the notoriously unreliable spectral evidence of the seventeenth century or biased self-motivated gossip give the impression that the legal system is a safe place for "truth" to be uncovered. Yet, in the cases of "real life" like the OJ Simpson murder trial the traumas I have explored in dramatic interpretations are simply reiterated on another "stage". The Simpson case intentionally ignored the trauma of his battered wife in favor of the sensationalized racial aspects of the case. Nicole Brown-Simpson's repeated appeals to the police for domestic abuse charges were conspicuously absent from the narrative from the trial. The case cleared OJ Simpson of criminal charges just as each of the Chicano dramas examined here condemn Chicanos to the repeated ignorance of their trauma. The law is a capricious arbitrator of punishment. Topics that do not serve the hegemony's narrative are simply excluded in favor of more favorable or salacious themes. Where the story of domestic abuse did not fit within the traditional narrative of the American hero, as
Simpson was constructed as through his experience in the National Football League, it was simply excluded and intentionally and strategically ignored. Despite the potential of documentary Chicano drama to productive challenge Chicano abjection, their trauma remains ignored.

IV. Conclusion

Through an interrogation Zoot Suit, The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales, and Santos & Santos this paper has attempted to demonstrate how the presence of the law in Chicano theatre acts to counteract the safety valve releasing the pressures of the abjected Chicano community while simultaneously serving to conceal the insidiousness of unchallenged racial stereotypes. Chicano drama questions the authority of the dominant American hegemony. The law is the means through which dominant American culture has abjected Chicanos/as. It is itself a site of trauma for Chicanos. The legal construction of Chicano/a identity as always already unlawful premeditatively forecloses any potential for Chicanos/as to gain access to inclusion within the dominate dejecting body of American culture. Instead, dominant Anglo culture continually re-inscribes this abjection though a deliberate disavowal, a conscious forgetting of something that is already known. This ignorance is upheld until the moment arbitrary punishment is applied based on the caprice of the hegemony.
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