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The Sun is Crooked in the Sky; My Father is Thrown over my Shoulders

A performance art work by **Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa**

June 29, 7pm - July 3, 10 pm 2005
Implant (58 Wade Ave. Unit 12)
Toronto, Ontario

- [images from The Sun is Crooked In the Sky...](#)

Text by Irene Loughlin

Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa's performance **The Sun is Crooked in the Sky; My Father is Thrown Over My Shoulders**, is an intimate investigation of the process of duration in the creation of performative acts. Over one hundred sleepless hours, Ramirez-Figueroa worked through actions, quiet contemplation, and active interpersonal dialogues while engaging a fluid gathering of viewers. Within the work, Ramirez-Figueroa meditated upon "a genealogy of absent white fathers", and the socio-political condition of "whitening" inherited from the colonial process in Guatemala. The performance was an attempt at developing a visual language for and of the self, as a means of arriving at a particularity of meaning found in the body. By attaining a definition of the self through the language of performance art, the power inferences of the "super ordinate culture" ⁽¹⁾ are challenged.

Formal choices made during the performance actions assumed a kind of automatism attributable to the exhaustion that pushed Ramirez-Figueroa beyond pre-contemplated devices. The state of exhaustion was used as a material towards the enactment of altered realities undefined by dominant signs and symbols. The



photo: Miklos Legradý

"Horkheimer and Adorno (<1944> 1987) wrote a two- page note, appended to The Dialectic of Enlightenment entitled "On the Theory of Ghosts." ... [T]hey believed we needed some kind of theory of ghosts, or at least a way of both mourning modernity's "wound in civilization"⁽⁴⁾ and eliminating the

meditative and spiritual processes of "working with the dead"⁽²⁾ through ritual is defined in the Western aesthetic as a "shamanic" state; however, the shamanic act also carries a particular referentiality of exoticism imbued with colonialism and racism. Ramirez-Figueroa works through compromised referents of ritual in relation to his practice as a Latin American artist, arriving at a place of visual tension where "everything is an exercise to get to the place to forget."⁽³⁾ In this work, he was willing to work through the pain and vulnerability of embodied clichés, which were broken down by the expanse of time and by physical exhaustion. His desire was to arrive at a new corporeal/aesthetic meaning that reached beyond the internalized and compromised realm of colonial influence.

The work is informed by familial genealogy, the non-linear and spectral quality of traumatic memory, childhood memories of the 36 year war in Guatemala, the movements of art history and contemporary art, Mayan practices, and the political/environmental influences that formulate 'mestizo identity'. This 100 hour durational performance took place at Istvan Kantor's studio (a.k.a. Implant), an open garage/studio facing a side street near Bloor and Lansdowne. The interior room was painted white, and the concrete floor contained a ramped platform leading to the "performance space." The artist used various materials he found in surrounding areas, such as bricks and the branches of trees, in order to manifest 100 hours of sleepless actions.

The wrapping of the tree resembled the bandaging of a sprain or wound. The formal associations between bandaging and post-war embodiment in sculpture may be further evidenced as occurring in the post World War Two works of Arte Povera precursor Piero Manzoni. Manzoni used medical bandages, imprints of pliers and tweezers, white linen, and cotton balls as the sculptural materials with which to create associations between bandaging, sterilization, aesthetics and traumatic history.

All the weight of the bandaged tree balanced precariously on its stump, recalling an action/image from one of Ramirez-Figueroa's previous performances, **Original Banana Republic** (2002, grunt gallery). The artist bound

destructive forces that open it up over and over again: Only the conscious horror of destruction creates the correct relationship with the dead: unity with them because we, like them, are the victims of the same condition and the same disappointed hope...from a certain vantage point the ghost also simultaneously represents a future possibility...⁽⁵⁾

"Finally, I have suggested that the ghost is alive, so to speak. We are in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory out of a concern for justice." ⁽⁶⁾

100 hours of sleepless actions by Naufus Ramirez-Figueroa (numbered 1 to 21)

1. bandaging

He laid branches on the ground in descending order.

The configuration resembled the assemblage of tools for an operation or excavation.

A kettle boiled – the hot water was mixed with beet juice.

Using powdered milk that acted as glue when it dried, he soaked the linen.

banana stems to his legs with saran wrap; eventually, his legs resembled amputated limbs. He then managed to raise himself from the floor with extreme effort, using the strength of his arms and upper torso. Upon standing, he stumbled around on these lumbering sculptural constructions. The action spoke of the loss of limbs generated by the 36 year war, and U.S. genocidal labour and land acquisition tactics related to the banana trade — particularly the acquisition of Mayan land by the United Fruit Company.

Within the western canon, the bandaging action also summoned associations to the post-War paintings of Otto Dix. In the 1934 work **Flanders**, Dix "reveals a scene from the Western Front, where dead bodies float in water-filled shell-holes while those soldiers still alive resemble rotting tree stumps."⁽⁷⁾ The work was inspired by the novel *Le Feu*, written by French novelist Henri Barbusse. The main character declares a kind of unromanticized shamanic reference that rejects the human/animalistic distinction created by tropes of "civilized" society. He states, "War is something so animal-like: hunger, lice, slime, these crazy sounds. To see people in this unchained condition is to know something about man"⁽⁸⁾. Later in the performance, the artist embodied visual imagery that evoked associations to birds and monkeys. He also adapted items of clothing to double as a balaclava and traditional mask, thus referencing the militarization of both domestic and cultural life.

Post-war artist Otto Dix created representations of veterans who were frequently socially de-valued and made invisible. The situation in post-war Germany found veteran amputees "left to beg on streets where they were frequently stepped over, ignored, or erased from the visual field."⁽⁹⁾ Post-war modernist painters also drew parallels between the mutilated and mechanically enhanced bodies of veterans and the city as a marked and wounded site."⁽¹⁰⁾ Joseph Beuys' dictum "show your wound"⁽¹¹⁾ is also suggestive of a European post-war operative, and was an invitation to precipitate communication through the exposed vulnerability of the artist. Perhaps Ramirez-Figueroa, from his vantage point as a child survivor of war, reconstituted Beuys' vulnerability with an added child-like element. I am reminded of poet Alejandro Rual Mujica-Olea's comment during a radio interview with the artist, where he stated that Ramirez-Figueroa "sticks his

Later, torn linen strips were used to bandage the skeleton of a tree.

The skeletal tree embodied the physical presence of the family tree. The tree was whitened through the application of the linen.

2. scrubbing

Ramirez-Figueroa washed his chest with a scrub brush dipped in the boiling water. His skin reddened, the artist later described this act as attending to the site of trauma, which he experienced in his chest at that moment.

3. pooling

Particular attention was paid to wrapping linen around the severed end of the tree, which resembled a bloody stump after beet juice was applied to it repeatedly. Viewers were invited to dab the tree with beet juice as if tending to wounds. The beet juice dripped and pooled beneath the tree from where it hung. The bandaged stump of the tree reached the ground.

finger in the wound of Latin America".⁽¹²⁾ The remembering/forgetting traumatic impositions of war from a child's perspective contain a particular vulnerability reaching beyond the realm of Beuys' 'shamanic' reconfigurations.

The inversion of the tree during the evenings of the performance signified common inversions connected to a country that has suffered the continuous effects of colonization. A Mayan becomes "mestizo" by moving away from his birthplace and adopting different mannerisms and clothing, often as a means of economic survival. A mestizo person becomes white through marriage or education. The artist's uncle, Byron Figueroa "entered the war (the guerilla movement in Guatemala) a Marxist, and left the war a Mayan."⁽¹³⁾

The Mayan world tree symbol embodies the axis believed to have been traversed by souls of those deceased, an axis also traveled by religious specialists during ritual. An imagined conduit between heaven and earth, the world tree is symbolized by a hole, pole, tree, or the Milky Way. The sun also runs along this conduit. The archetypical world tree reaches from the center of the earth and connects the upper world to the earth and the underworld. The conduit encompasses spiritual dualism, and may also be the source of "evil winds and sickness".⁽¹⁴⁾

One interpretation of Mayan literature based on the advanced methods of Mayan astrology cites the end of the world as occurring on Dec 22, 2012, and describes a world tree axis inversion, in that the sun will change its rotation (**the sun/son is crooked in the sky**) and the Earth (**my father**) will turn on its axis – (**is thrown over my shoulders**)⁽¹⁵⁾. Byron Figueroa interprets Mayan literature in a more practical sense, as the predication of a positive shift in global power relations and environmental degradation that will, in some sense, be marked by the year 2012. The Maya also predicted that we would be eating garbage at this time, Byron Figueroa agrees that this has already occurred in the proliferation of processed foods that we consume.⁽¹⁶⁾

I remembered that Ramirez-Figueroa had spoken to me of the childhood memory of viewing Vancouver Photoconceptualist Rodney Graham's work **Oak Tree–Red Bluff** at the Vancouver Art Gallery. At that time, he was nine or ten years old

4. winding

Thin white thread was wrapped around the branches of the tree many times. The spool clattered on the ground.

In Guatemala, we had visited a local healer who used thread similarly as a tool with which to do her work.

Using a pair of scissors, he cut at the threads so that they hung down loosely from the branches.

5. the world tree is upside down/right side up day turns into night/night turns into day

The tree was suspended from the ceiling with

and had lived in Canada for two years. Graham's work made an impression, which stayed with him over the years. Regarding this tree inversion image, Rodney Graham has stated, "You don't have to delve very deeply into modern physics to realise that the scientific view holds that the world is really not as it appears. Before the brain rights it, the eye sees a *tree upside down* in the same way it appears on the glass back of the large format field camera I use. I chose the tree as an emblematic image because it is often used in diagrams in popular scientific books and because it was used in Saussure's book on linguistics to show the *arbitrary relation between the so-called signifier and the signified.*" (17) [italics added]

Ramirez-Figueroa's inversion of the tree during the daytime seems to speak of the earthly plane, where man is capable of enacting both generosity and brutality. Feminist scholar Farida Shaheed has stated that, "A century ago, civilian deaths and displacements were a by-product of war, today they seem to be the object of war...[:] In World War I, 14% of the deaths were civilians, today it is estimated that over 90% are civilians, the majority being women and children. In terms of displacement, some 80% of refugees are women and children."⁽¹⁸⁾ Regarding the incident of male witnessing of events that largely affect women and children, Ramirez-Figueroa stated, "the emphasis has been to talk about the veteran, the guerilla — the official voice of war. Women and children are considered unconscious, hysterical — child memory is seen as half fantasy, half reality and an unreliable form of witnessing. The adult male voice is the authority. Patriarchal supposition is such that male veterans are assumed to have control over their trauma, and therefore can more accurately talk about and represent the experiences of war."⁽¹⁹⁾

Ramirez-Figueroa counters dominant interpretations of war by incorporating childhood materials and references within his work. In one example, he adopts a fetal/corpse position relative to an abject aesthetic. This strategy has also been used by Ramirez-Figueroa's contemporary, Regina Galindo in the work **No perdemos nada con nacer (We don't lose anything by being born)**, Galindo lay naked inside a clear plastic garbage bag, a corpse-like figure amongst the garbage of the Guatemala city dump. Galindo is a young artist now positioned in the post-war context of Guatemala, "a period

a rope, and became a hanging presence for the duration of the performance. During the day, the tree was hung upside down. At night, the tree was inverted.

6. fetal position/corpse

At first, the tree was on the ground, lying sideways, a position that Ramirez-Figueroa's own body would assume at several points during the performance.

"The word post-war appears...in the harshness of a grotesque reality...."

"In order to illustrate what post-war artists are, one critic identified them as the 'junk generation.' In general terms there is a phenomenon that occurs with this generation that goes beyond the play with clichés. In and of itself, it is an artistic awakening that is quite strange for the environment. On one hand it reflects the fragment of the complex web of realities that reinforce and project the cultural, psycho political, social and economic change that we are going through. On the

characterized by the aesthetic of forgetting ... [and simultaneously] that of anguish, and inquisition."⁽²⁰⁾

A related past performance **White Intravenous**, by Ramirez-Figueroa, was presented at the Church of Pointless Hysteria, an artist-run space in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. This area is often cited in the media as Canada's "poorest neighbourhood". Ramirez-Figueroa used garbage, medical, and natural materials such as plastic, surgical tape, flour, and intravenous bags filled with milk. The audience was provided with a glossary describing his reference to the materials. Syringes with pink blood denoted an aspect of North American youth culture, described as a 'synthetic happiness generation.' Surgical tape wound around the waist referenced an imagined medical technique of "keeping oneself together". Plastic signified remnants of objects found in the downtown eastside – wrappers, McDonald's straws, etc., and body bags for anonymous immigrant deaths. Plastic as littered throughout the Third World made reference to disposable countries, overlaid in economies of plastic created through the exportation of cheaply made toys, trinkets and household items sold "cost-effectively" within the North American market. ⁽²¹⁾

On the second day, struggling with self-consciousness/ consciousness of self, Ramirez-Figueroa stated "I felt like a fool. It was a test of my creativity and limitations."⁽²³⁾ The birds were loud and noticeable at dawn.

The position he assumed seemed like the birth position in the Frida Kahlo painting, **My Birth**. Later the tree was placed so that the trunk emerged out of the neck of his shirt.

"The mestizo child knows that the father exists by the nature of his/her own skin colour, yet the father is a silent symbol or icon of colonial influence. The transference of whiteness in this familial colonial landscape has seen paternal duty to its completion, substituting the normal paternal functions of direct presence and care with racial whitening – a political project of colonialism."⁽²⁴⁾ The detached white father may send a milk allowance monthly, the milk in the performance rots over time, and formal considerations become psychic and spiritual in nature, creating tensions that compress time/space continuums. "A sense

other hand they emerge with provocative proposals for a conventional environment more accustomed to traditional models than to being disturbed by art right in the middle of the street." [Cazali is referring here to the current practice of public intervention performance in Guatemala City]. ⁽²²⁾

7. the second day, cocooned then birthing

He urinated into a bowl of powdered milk. He made a cocoon for himself out of linen and rocked, comforting, close to the tree. He washed his clothes and dried them, later he said that they stank of milk. With his upper body shrouded by the linen, he supported his torso in a backwards bend, rocking back and forth on his heels.

8. two chairs in dialogue

A recurring use of two metal chairs facing each other possibly inferred a dialogue between the artist and an absent other/father. I read this image as a kind of gestalt configuration that implied dialogue/confrontation/identification with the absent other (often assumed to be a parental figure).

of shame pervades the performance and is connected to the conditions surrounding the mestizo child."⁽²⁵⁾

The t-shirt seemed transformed into a balaclava, totally covering his face like a member of the guerilla, or that of a political prisoner. He drew an image over this makeshift balaclava with a thick black magic marker. When he was finished, his drawing resembled the mask of a monkey. Later, he turned the t-shirt around and covered his head again. Tufts of hair protruded from the holes and seemed to denote the ears of an animal. With the shirt reversed, it also appeared as if he was looking out of the back of his head. "You've got eyes in the back of your head" is a popular term that comes to mind in relation to this action, a reference to the hypervigilant second sense of his surroundings that is possessed by the traumatized subject

In Mexico, the Zapatista National Liberation Army, composed of a few thousand indigenous Mayans, often wear balaclavas, as does Subcommandante Marcos. (Cleverly, indigenous women in Mexico have been known to sell balaclavas embroidered with the EZLN to tourists as a method of raising funds for themselves and the Zapatistas — a type of leftist craft/economy response to capitalist constructs of globalization).⁽²⁶⁾

Ramirez-Figueroa had spoken before of his Mayan grandfather – a carver who made masks for local indigenous ceremonies. His grandfather was also a folk dancer who performed a particular indigenous ceremony where men dressed as monkeys held whips and told riddles and jokes to a crowd of onlookers. If a viewer was addressed and neglected to offer money in recompense for his inability to respond to a joke or riddle, he was whipped by the monkey dancer. The artist's grandfather also performed as a pole flying tree dancer. This ritual encompassed the act of climbing a pole, which the pole dancer tied himself to and threw himself from, spinning with other dancers on ropes from a central pole signifying the world tree.

Earlier that morning, Ramirez-Figueroa had sewn together some linen into a kind of sack, which he stepped into. Lying in the sack, he went inside the tree and wrapped himself loosely around the branches. This action recalled the physicality of a monkey.

9. hooded sitting

He spread a line of powdered milk on the ground around the chairs to form a rectangular shape. Four clear plastic cups were filled with milk and placed on each side of the rectangle. He took off his clothes and pulled his t-shirt over his head. Sitting on one of the chairs with his legs bent and his feet resting on the other chair, he stretched his white cotton t-shirt over his head to cover it.

The absolute stillness of Ramirez-Figueroa's body in the drinking action reminded me of the painting **Sierra Madre (Mother Mountain)** by Jose Silva Nogales, a political prisoner in Mexico and a relative of Naufus' friends in Vancouver. The painting depicts a completely still, balaclava-clad guerilla fading into the foliage of the jungle behind him.

Embodied performative acts where Ramirez-Figueroa assumed the position of the tortured subject suggest a relationship to a kind of intimate violence, one of the most effective psychological tools used against political prisoners. Intermittent kindnesses amongst violent acts, such as the provision of food by the torturer, and the use of domestic props [such as milk with its maternal association] disorient the victim."⁽²⁷⁾ Surrender is said to involve the stage of "draining oneself of emotion and resistance as a means of survival"⁽²⁸⁾. The sleep deprivation that Ramirez-Figueroa undertakes is itself also used as an instrument of torture, and oppositionally, as a means of shamanic transcendence.

10. drinking

Leaving his arms in his sleeves, he folded the t-shirt into his mouth, and later ripped out a hole for the mouth while sitting motionless, barely breathing or moving.

Reaching down, he picked up a glass of milk and placed it in the ripped cotton mouth-hole. He drank the milk by holding the cup in his mouth, tilting his head backwards until it was emptied. He then dropped the cup between his legs where it clattered to the ground. The milk dripped off his lips, belly and groin, as if he were urinating milk. In the background, the tree continued to drip beet juice.

The balaclava/t-shirt became soaked and grey around the mouth opening.

At this point we have reached a half way mark for the performance. In my experience of "endurance witnessing" analysis and experience became blurred, and the artist also reported having gradually lost a sense of internal critique regarding his actions as a result of the exhaustion element of the performance. I am marking this moment in the performance as a viewer by lessening my analysis in this text, and by switching the columns of analysis and description, which I hope will also echo the inversion context that was important to the performance. The image becomes tantamount, as Ramirez-Figueroa approached his intent of making visual language particular, "populating it with his own intention, appropriating the word and adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention."⁽²⁹⁾

11. stuffing

Later that evening, viewers were asked to stuff the branches of the weed trees under the torso and sleeves of his shirt. It was Canada Day, and firecrackers erupted. A car alarm went off at dusk. After being stuffed with many branches, he walked backwards in time with the car alarm, down the concrete ramp, past the open garage door and into the street. The walk continued backwards; he did not look over his shoulder. It stopped when he reached the wall of the warehouse across the street. The car alarm also stopped. It was windy by the wall where he stood

— the grass and trees nearby were swaying in the wind. After standing quietly, he started to loosely jump on the spot to a timed count, with his head tilted slightly down. All the weed tree branches eventually fell out of his clothing as he jumped. Reaching behind his head, he pulled the last branch over his head in a sweeping motion, releasing it from the back of his sweater.

12. dragging

Outside at night, a long piece of muslin was dipped into a bucket filled with milk. Wearing the muslin as a long veil, he dragged the tip of the muslin along the ground by bending his head and walking backwards. His posture conveyed a collapsed, exhausted body. The milk left a trail along the ground that resembled a thick, wavy line. The walk continued around the corner and beyond the block of the studio. He redipped the tip of the muslin into the milk when it ran dry. Ramirez-Figueroa continued this action through this abandoned warehouse neighbourhood until he had used all of the milk mixture.

The action spoke to me of visual art training and its influence within the performance art tradition, as when an artist first takes drawing classes and is instructed to "feel the sensitivity of the line." I saw associations to the techniques of 1970s conceptual land art in reference to this action, and in particular the work of Richard Long, who conducted extended, performative walks in nature, leaving the mark of his trail upon the natural landscape.

13. Hacking/burning

Outside the studio, Istvan Kantor helped Ramirez-Figueroa create a circle of bricks in order to safely light a fire. Earlier, Ramirez-Figueroa had hacked at the tree with an axe, gradually breaking it into pieces. The fire burned momentarily, but eventually members of the local fire department arrived and told them to extinguish it. The firemen seemed to be aware that the fire was for a performance art event. Prematurely extinguishing the fire was unexpected — the wood was not burned to ashes as intended. Ramirez-Figueroa was left with pieces of wood and ash, as when a body is cremated and pieces of bone remain amongst the ashes.

14. scraping

He scraped the charcoal off the remaining charred branches into a bowl with a pocketknife. The wood was black underneath, and charcoal eventually covered his hands and the inside of his legs. He would come back to this action and continue it several times throughout the day until the wood was fully scraped. The larger pieces of charcoal were ground between two bricks to create a fine, powdered material.

15. biting/chomping

A beet was peeled into the shape of a heart. Winding white thread around the top notch of the heart, he proceeded to hang the carved heart from a long piece of thread hanging from the ceiling of the studio, until it dangled about a foot and a half from the floor. Lying on the ground, he positioned his head underneath it. Using a slow internal rhythm, he lifted his head to meet the level of the beet. He bit at a part of the beet with his mouth each time that he raised his head.

Eventually, beet juice resembling blood began to slowly drip out of the side of his mouth. The beet heart spun around in between bites, but generally did not shift from its dangling position. Ramirez-Figueroa continued this action until the beet was fully consumed, leaving some fibrous material hanging from the end of the string. A portion of the string that had come into contact with his mouth had been dyed red.

16. comparing

He imagined the charred branches to be similar to the bones in his legs. Lying on the ground, he placed similarly sized sticks on his thighs and shins. The scraped sticks were remarkably comparable to bone, and seemed to even have assumed the round hollow indentation marking where the femur inserts into the hip. This action described the connection between the family tree branches and the skeletal structure of the artist.

17. wrapping

He folded Kraft paper into pieces resembling an envelope and placed a piece of wood inside each package. Using black magic marker, he wrote the names of absent white fathers on the outside of the packages. Ramirez-Figueroa used forms of their names that were endearing, such as "Tate", the affectionate form of addressing a grandfather or older man. The packages were tied up with white thread and then distributed amongst the audience.

18. grinding/sweeping/ breathing/chewing

He dragged a broom over a pile of fine charcoal shavings. He swept the shavings into a line and then spread the shavings from this thick line into the shape of a rectangle. Repetitively, he dabbed the broom from side to side, trying to create a bed of finely powdered charcoals as the ground for the next action. He sifted dried milk between his

The carved beet heart created associations to el corazon sangrante (the bleeding heart), a hybrid symbol crossing a spectrum of influences (Catholic, Mayan and Spanish). I was reminded of the milagros of Antigua, small wax sculptures of body parts on red strings sold to the public by local healers. To initiate healing in a particular area of the body, one could choose to buy a corresponding carved wax milagro, place it at the tomb of St. Pedro of Betancourt, and pray for their problems to be solved within that particular body part.

Ramirez-Figueroa stated: "I associate the beets with the small organs or hearts of children. As children in Guatemala, the fear of being kidnapped was constantly present in our lives. It was said that when they abducted you, they would open you up and steal your organs and leave your empty carapace on the street. I heard from other children that your organs would then be sold to Americans and Europeans. These fears, as much as they seemed like urban legends, had very real manifestations in our lives. Two of my childhood neighbourhood friends went missing - later there was evidence that they had been present in an abandoned illegal orphanage."⁽³⁰⁾

This action had to do with a kind of genealogical exorcism. Ramirez-Figueroa cites the influence of Chilean artist Alejandro Jodorowsky. He created what came to be known as "happenings" in Paris. (The term "happening" was created by the later Fluxus movement.) Jodorowsky was interested in non-repeatable events and used smoke, fruit, gelatin, and living animals as materials in his happenings. He created the performative theories of "psychomagic" and "living poetry" which combined performative and ritualistic actions. Jodorowsky hosted an evening in Paris where visitors were encouraged to visit him and discuss their problems. In order to cure his guests of their discomfort, Jodorowsky would prescribe a performative action for them to complete. Jodorowsky also believed in returning to the family tree to heal traumatic wounds. He called the theory of this discomfort and the desire to re-establish

hands and eventually created a pile of white powdery material within the upper edge of the black charcoal bed. He sat down at the bottom edge of the rectangle with his legs outspread and marked charcoal on his thighs with his hands. After sitting still for a while, hands at his side, he lay down on his back, and lowered his underwear. Rolling over, he shifted to his belly, and lay in the charcoal bed with his forehead against the pile of white powdered milk. Ramirez-Figueroa later noted that the action seemed to just emerge from the act of breathing. He noticed that the white powder shifted slightly with his breath and revealed the concrete floor. By lifting his head, and breathing through his nose, he observed that he could clear away a spot on the floor. His breathing assumed a deeply rhythmic element as he continued to turn his head from side to side, his breath clearing away more and more of the white powder. As the artist inevitably inhaled the fine charcoal and milk powder substances, the materials slightly mixed together, compromising the "aesthetic purity" of black and white. His breathe also assumed a deeply hoarse quality, lending an asthmatic, repetitive resonance to the action. Having accomplished a circular "breathing space" on the floor, his breath eventually slowed until it stopped. Lifting himself up onto his hands and knees, he started to ingest the remaining charcoal. He chewed handfuls of at a time, which seemed to induce a sense of panic, anxiety and nausea in the viewers, and a viewer was compelled to leave the viewing area. Ramirez-Figueroa also conveyed an impression of strength and endurance in the completion of this action.

19. vomiting

He smoothed, scratched at, and cleared the space on the floor with the palm of his hand with the intent of removing any remaining charcoal or powder. Opening his mouth wide, a globular mix of charcoal, bits of white powder, and saliva slid from his mouth onto the floor in a pile. The mixture was an incredibly shiny, black substance that resembled a combination of tar and fecal matter. Ramirez-Figueroa remained in this same position momentarily and eventually covered the regurgitated mixture with the surrounding material of finely ground charcoal.

20. Peeling

Gathering up a pile of beets into his t-shirt, he

contact with the internal mystery of the individual as "efimeros panicos". He attempted to treat and evoke "efimeros panicos" in his guests through the prescribed performative actions. Jodorowsky's theories have not been translated to English, and are not presently accessible to English speakers. However, he has greatly influenced the development of performance art in Latin America.

Ramirez-Figueroa uses abject methods of smearing and ingestion as another means by which to arrive at a place beyond the fixity of

also moved a remaining pile of milk powder towards a mound of charcoal by pushing the material with his feet. He peeled the beets individually with a knife while continuously holding this pile of beets in the bottom of his t-shirt. The visual image resembled a kind of side satchel of small, bulbous organs. As he peeled the beets, he tucked the carvings down the neck of his t-shirt, and they accumulated to form the shape of a distended or pregnant belly beneath his t-shirt. His t-shirt became stained with various shades of grey and red, resulting from the mixing of remnant charcoal and beet juice. The bloating, and swelling of his exhausted body seemed to relate to earlier references of war and torture. He started swaying slightly while standing in this upright position, and at one point he almost fell backwards, which frightened several viewers. It seemed as if he might not have control of falling asleep while standing. Holding all the peels of the beets in his belly under his t-shirt, he used electrical tape to secure all of the materials within this simulated pregnant belly. Ramirez-Figueroa reached down for a bottle of water and held the water in his mouth while simultaneously tilting back his head. The water dribbled down the side of his mouth and dripped onto his t-shirt. With his arms at his side, he repeated this carefully timed action, while releasing the water slowly from his mouth. Over time, the water started to dye his neckline red, and as the milk powder, beet peels, and water further combined, milk dripped from the underside of his makeshift swollen belly. When he had finished the water, he released the electrical tape from the bottom of his t-shirt, and the beets fell out onto the floor at his feet.

meaning inherent in the act of forgetting in a post-war, post- colonial context.

The concluding sequence of Ramirez-Figueroa's performance featured the act of expulsion. Kristeva explains the staining, ingestion and expulsion of the familial (colonial) construct, as enacted through the body: "Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The same of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them ... nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel

it." (31)

Kristeva further positioned the abject in the context of forgetting the presence of refuse, and of the corpse "... it shows me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live... There I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. (The abject) disturbs identity, system and order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."⁽³²⁾ Ramirez-Figueroa's performance **The Sun is Crooked in the Sky; My Father is Thrown Over My Shoulders** is an investigation of reclaiming the other half of the image and the word, and reconstructing a visual language of representation that is previously situated half elsewhere, "at the borderline between oneself and the other." (33)

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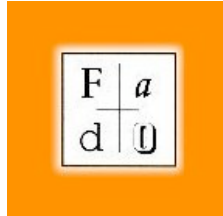
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