

Encounters through, around, and within *Winter Circle X*

By P. Dante Cuauhtémoc

Encounter 1: Self

I am writing this to offer a perspective as to what happened December 16th, 2018 at the Polish Club in San Francisco, CA. I am writing as a graduate student critical dance studies ethnographer, still early in his experience with academe, and too, as a two-spirit butch queen storyweaver/storywalker with great experience in collecting and sharing stories of all of my relations. I am writing as a participant-ethnographer, as an artist-scholar, as a queer indigenous person, and as a healer. And, I am writing, to practice the tradition of my peoples telling our own stories.

On the facebook event page, it states clearly:

“Winter Circle X [is] An unsettling winter gather of talking, listening, healing, ritual, and performance with food and a punk band. A three-part event to support moving into winter considering indigenous/settler relations, healing from political harm, celebrating queer solidarity. All are welcome. Come for one part or stay all day. Everything free.”

And, in all honesty, I had not planned to attend on the sheer fact that, as a poor indigenous person, it is difficult work for me to heal, engage, speak about, or speak around issues and politics of settler colonialism and indigenous relationships... More, with Keith Hennessy/Circo Zero as the producers/hosts, which is a traditionally post-modern, politically radical, and experimental arts group—I was, again, at first untrusting of their ability to hold a space for indigenous voices. Our voices are too often exploited or silenced, and our traditional ways are too often seen as obsolete, or too conservative. I was unsure that an experimental time and space, with punk, would understand and have us, in the ways we need...

But, when I saw who was speaking in part one of the event, I felt at ease—I felt like I could go, and be in safe company. The speakers were Canyon Coyote Woman Sayers-Roods who is of the Mutsun-Ohlone peoples, Snowflake Towers who is of both the Yoeme and Mayan peoples, Mary Jean Robertson of the Cherokee peoples, and Sissy Slays, Indigecunt of the Paiute Nation. These peoples are known as leaders in my various communities with whom I walk, and I knew that if they were to start the opening prayers and talking, then the space would be charged towards a peaceful exchange. I know, that when indigenous people, and especially when our leaders are given the steering wheel of any function or happening, we tend to give it to the non-humans: the earth, the animals, the plants, and the elements. And, when we start that way, new relations, and new healings between peoples of shared traumatic experiences can and do take place.

Before the event occurred, I received an email, asking me if I was available to be a healer. I said yes, and then, I was a part of the day—a facilitator of the second part of the day: The Community Political Healing Clinic. For this event, I was no longer going to attend as a member of the community—but honored as a leader, and a healer.

With this in mind, I write as a giver, a guide—as a part of the event, but not of the whole event. I write with many relations...

Encounter 2: Family

It must be stated that I did not attend this event alone, and that I did not participate in this event alone. I was with my family. My mother, Amparo, who is in her own right a medicine woman, was with me, along with my cousin Brandon. There too, was my Tia/Aunt Rosa, and her husband, my Tio Mark. My Mescalero-Apache, my Mexica Chichimeca and Cano peoples, my mestizo peoples, and my european peoples of my blood and marriage were there. I had my family with me.

As an artist, as a scholar, from a working class family, I haven't always had the privilege to have my family with me at events of high art, or experimental art functions. At indigenous ceremony, or gatherings, such as pow-wow, sure; but not at an experimental gathering based in western ideas of art. Here at "Winter Circle X", my two worlds collided, my indigenous art practices and knowledge, and my experimental art practices and praxes--and, my family was present to be there, listen, participate in the healings, and be with me.

In a space about new discussions of how to heal from the trauma of settler colonialism, and create decolonial practices and talks, I am so happy to have had my family there. Personally, I have become accustomed to being alone in the struggle to decolonize western practices, while my family, decolonize through traditional practices at home and within our communities. And, to be together, in these new spaces, discussions, rituals, performances, and ceremony--was a dream come true I did not think I would see in my lifetime. And, for that, I am grateful, and humbled.

Encounter 3: Tribes & Houses

At *Winter Circle X*, it was not just my family of biological nature that was present--but also, my family of queer, tribal, and indigenous relations. And, they brought their families, and their relatives, relations too.

From Radical Faeries, to Houses of the Ballroom Scenes, and Indigenous Nations, collectives of all sorts of natures were present to gather and exchange, share ideas, time, cookies, soup, bread, and reflection with one another. Punk bands and dance companies, families and friends, rivals and healers, descendants of colonizers and the colonized--so many were present to be present, and be open to healing. Or, at least, many seemed to try to be present to be open to the healing that was offered.

It is usually unheard of, for so many people of so many different scenes to be present at a focused gathering to talk about the issues between them. It is a very rare thing for diversity to speak with itself and talk about why diversity exists in the first place, and perhaps where they are, and why they are there, and how they can be together in new and healthier ways. And with so much diversity, the indigenous people lead the first part of the day, from ceremony to discussion, between peoples of all walks of life.

Kanyon CoyoteWoman Sayers-Roods, Snowflake Towers, Mary Jean Robertson, and Sissy Slays spoke to all of us in the main room, in a large circle. Each of them were in a different spot in a circle of layer and levels of other circles. They were a panel, but more, a plenary embedded in a larger body, made of bodies of people of diverse experiences. And, they

spoke about what they knew, how they felt, and why they were present.

Kanyon spoke about her life as an artist and an Ohlone woman. She focused on land, and indigeneity--and how even indigenous people can be colonial. She reminded us of context, and how to be open and humble about not knowing our shared indigenous histories. With erasure and genocide so very present in the world, Snowflake spoke about the need for healing, and the recognition of people present that are indigenous. With the caravan of people crossing borders to our south, it can be easy to forget that brown peoples of the Americas are all indigenous. But too, more, indigenous people exist all over the world, and indigeneity, and relation to that word, to ancestors must be explored and complicated. And, it must have space for the femme, for the queer, for the quare, for the non-conforming, for the fluid, and for the trans. Sissy Slays, in her words, told us of her experience being an indigecunt, of being femme, butch, passing, and in resistance to conforming to the gender roles, traditions, presentation, and performance of her people. She spoke of the trauma that comes with resistance, and too, the liberation she felt when she found vogue and the House Ballroom Scene. Through dance, through this queer black and brown art form, she found a way to express her genders in ways that made sense to her, and also, as a way to understand her indigeneity in a way necessary to her. To all people, to all relations, to the genocide, trauma, and the history that must be told, remembered and moved forward, our elder Mary Jean kept us centered. Decolonization is not a metaphor, and neither is indigenous. From her, we were reminded of the people from whom we come. We were reminded where we sit, and with whom we sit. We were reminded of a future that is possible, but one that must reckon with the past, is ever we are to move forward.

I gathered, that this first part of the day was about sitting with each other, reflecting, and becoming a new family. To listen to the words we use, to not assume meaning, and to ask before we use--and to be okay, and to let go, if we are denied access or ability to that which we want, or want to do. That first panel, in many ways, was about the protocol of asking permission to the first indigenous peoples of the land, but too, to the people from whom we descend. It was an ask, a ritual of asking permission, before we act, so that we may walk into the future together, instead of alone, with the hubris that we can do as we please--which only continues to lead to the destruction and pains of colonialism. The talking, was the thinking, and understanding, as to why we need, healing... and then came the healing clinics.

Encounter 4: Healings

Part two of the day was set up with ten healing clinics in the main space of the Polish Club. And, while the healers set up (which included myself), the participants/guests/witnesses, were asked to move to the other room to rest, process the talk, and to eat soup, drink and quench thirst, and to enjoy the holiday treats. For the healers, this was a time of transition and focus--to prepare for the work to be done to help each other work through the trauma of colonialism. For the participants, this was a precious "unstructured time," for them to freely talk to one another, make new friends, and release the tension any sort of serious discussion often brings. This sort of event transition was smooth and lovely--giving ample time to the facilitators to find their place in the room, to conduct their healing clinics.

Soon it was time for the clinic. As Keith and Snowflake explained at the start of this

section of the program, there were nine healing stations, each with a facilitator, and the tenth station is the clinic itself, which includes the participants. Healing is not only given, worked, prescribed, implemented and discarded. Healing is in the interactions with others around us, and is in the space we tend to inhabit. 'The tenth healer' was the unifying aspect of the clinics, that carried over from the day's earlier panel--and, carried over onto the next parts of the day. It is a taking notice of what is there, that often goes unseen and uncredited. And here, in this way, all the relations were sought out to be acknowledged.

Because of the time and space limitations of the clinic, not every participant was able to visit every facilitator. I myself was only able to see some clinics across the room, but given the time limits and flow of the day, I really only participated in my healing workshop, and the workshop of "the tenth healer." I taught an "authentic movement" based healing clinic, and was able to facilitate many participants at once. The goal was to have a moment to listen, watch, respond, and share what our bodies like doing--or do, and don't do. And while my clinic was group oriented, other clinics, had to work on a one-to-one, one at a time mode--which allows for a focus on intention, with intimacy. And, the downfall to that sort of specificity, is that in a time allotted for 3-4 healing sessions, the healer is limited to only working with 3-4 people. And so, thank goodness for balance, and "the tenth healer"--at least everyone participated in at least one healing clinic--everyone had some good medicine that day.

Encounter 5: Giving'Thanks'Giving'Thanks

Most striking to me was the way in which Keith gave thanks after the clinics were completed. In a circle created by bodies standing and moving together, Keith moved to the center with a big jug of water. He asked us to say thank you, and to pray, and give away our appreciation for this time in any or all languages we chose. Using the indeterminacy process of hydro-chronography, Keith set a time to give thanks based on how long it took him to pour the jug of water into a bowl. In a circle, we gave thanks, unified by water, and it's associated action, the pour. Perhaps here, is another way to say "thank you" and "give thanks"--which is very important, as this world is changing rapidly, and there is a lot to be thankful for...

Encounter 6: Pogo into the Futures Present

Moving into the last part of the day, came a dance performance with a punk band. And though I was unable to stay for the full duration of the performance it was quite an energetic way to begin the end of this day. Bouncing up down, shaking limbs and heads, the dancers moved around the space. Sometimes, like in traditional punk pogo dance, they would hold each other, and bounce with and on each other. For the most part, it seemed as though pogo was a warm up for what would come. As the music grew, so did the locomotive movements of the dancers. Some witnesses decided to join in this dancing too, and there a sort of circular running to moshing ensued. Then the music changed, and the dancers moved slower, and started to dance with props.

The props consisted of blankets, ropes, strings, clothing, and signs with adjectives or messages. As the performance unfolded, the dancers, folded themselves with each other into the

blankets, and pulled at each other, placing the signs specifically, at certain times to create a message; such as a “failure” sign next to a dancer underneath a bunch of blankets, and slowly moving out of that space to another. The dance did not seem choreographed, but it did seemed scored in a sort of machine like function, with cues in the band, the dancers, and in the props. As I left the building I gave thanks for the day again, and removed my earplug to return to normative sonic cityscapes, instead of the deafening sounds of live punk in a small hall.

Looking at this day is an action of awe. The future is here. The time to work through colonial trauma, and build new relationships with one another is now. And this day truly kicked off the winter, and into the new year, with love, devotion, change, and refreshing kindness.

Omteotlzin

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