

## SNAPSHOT 1: THE COMMUNAL SELF

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In *Anthropocosmic Theatre* [Part One], Núñez writes of a night-long ritual he attended in the mountains of Mexico:

The imposing austerity of the mountains, protected by a sky full of stars, and the murmur of human warmth giving itself over to the energies of the light, instilled in us a deep sense of brotherhood.... There we were in small groups, high up in the mountains, gathered in small groups around a fire.... Looking at the spectacle from outside, it seemed like a group which was too exposed, vulnerable, extremely fragile and delicate, and at the same time blessed with unique strength and beauty, like the orchid (p. 49 above).

When first I read this, it thrilled me, made immediate and tangible notions I had first encountered when reading about ritual performance - notions of 'communitas' and 'liminality'. The evocation of humans carving out a shared and structured space within the vastness of the geographical, the galactic and the spiritual, opened doorways of perception for me.

Some years later I attended a training session led by Nicolás. Running, endlessly, in circles, losing and finding myself in the spaces between my heated body and those around me, mediated by the drum. I found my edges by feeling them dissolve against the edges of others. Provoked into engagement with mythologies that, until then, had been entirely 'other' to me, I imagined myself (though it was more than that - it was a deeply lived imagining) simultaneously connected with and distanced from the ancient knowledge and cultures Nicolás brings to the studio. I encountered an imagined community across time with those who can only ever be entirely other to me.

One evening, some time later... I am sitting in a chair in Nicolás' living room. We are drinking tequila. He laughs and tells me that I am sitting

in the chair Maestro Grotowski sat in. I realise how strongly he occupies the community of our lineages - in his practice there is an interweaving of strands from Tibet, Europe, India, North American, the Contemporary, the Ancient, the Scientific, the Esoteric.

I once asked Nicolás to give me a definition of one of my own obsessions - ensemble. He said it was, to him, a dinner party that people attended having first removed their social masks. A social gathering that can contain nothing but truth and revelation.

I think of him - three times each week, running early morning training at the *Taller* in Mexico City, providing a place of refuge, meeting and transcendence for all who wish to attend: a practical and conscious construction and maintaining of living community.

In 2008, Nicolás attended a workshop I ran. He was skilled and powerful, as one would expect, but also impish and funny - neither denying the enormity of his energetic and intellectual presence, nor allowing it to separate him from the flow and connections of the room. He carved for himself a unique place in a shared community - of it and not of it, integral and other.

Across so many of my encounters - personal, cultural and intellectual - I find myself considering this notion of community; between peoples, within homogenous and heterogeneous gatherings, across time, across culture, through lineages. I consider the notion of the 'anthropocosmic' - the idea of the human in the centre of the universe. This does not evoke for me a sense of self-importance or of unfettered individualism. The individual here is an individual-within-collective, the communal self. S/he is the centre of an awareness that finds its detail by contact and contrast with the other. S/he is the single star, separated by vast distance from all others, which, in relationship, creates the infinity of the mountain night sky. It is the communal individual who has found her/his place in a biosphere, a galaxy, in the nexus of time and space that is now.

In Núñez, I find expression of a deep truth of performance and of life: that to know oneself - and to embrace the reality that the truth of ones experience

is found only through knowing ones experience - requires also a knowing of everything else. I find myself by taking my place in the community of everyone and everything I am not.

The clarity of dawn slowly uncovered the other reality, the everyday one. Shapes regained their volume and colour, and certainty tentatively built its path back to reason, to common sense. Nevertheless, in our stomachs, there was still a feeling that linked us to emptiness (p. 49 above).