
https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315562919

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Chapter 9

Soul, Dialogue and Creativity– In Dialogue with David Palmer

Peter

Dear Dave, I watch your work from across this great land mass and landscape of Australia with delight and interest; and I see kernels of wisdom that might inform this inductive thinking-writing project on soul, community and social change. You have spent many years journeying with, or accompanying, Aboriginal Australians, or at least several organisations that work with them, and this puts you on the cutting edge of social change work. You are engaging with people who are caught at times wanting ‘development’ and yet seem to also yearn for something other, sparked by living culture, a broader cultural archive than the Western, Modern, Development archive. Maybe I am naïve, maybe nostalgic, but I sense this is what is occurring. It certainly is among Aboriginal people of South America, parts of Africa and Asia. I have certainly seen it with my own two eyes in the Pacific nations of Vanuatu and PNG.

In the context of these complexities about development or something ‘other’, I would like to nudge our conversation towards the ideas or concepts of dialogue and creativity. It seems to me that the Western, Modern, Development archive is a relatively narrow one. Essentially it defines a vision of how people ought to be. I think that was Truman’s vision when he talked of the ‘great underdeveloped masses’ after World War Two. He of course imagined, believed should we say, that the USA could bring development, in their own image of course. And much of the world is still clamouring or scrambling up that Rostow-inspired stairway. It does not require much dialogue or creativity to do this; lots of effort of course – along with foreign capital, donor aid, expertise, interventions, technological transfer, increased consumption, the ejection of ‘old’ stuck culture, and so forth. But I imagine such effort could be juxtaposed with dialogue and creativity, theorised as an impulse towards survival, living, flourishing, connecting, and learning. So any thoughts my friend?

David

Can I start by saying ‘hullo old boy’? (By the way, ‘old boy’ is a term of respect). To use words given to me by some of my Noongar family: Yeye, nyung koort doork doorkany kwop geeniny noonar. Yeye nyung nyininy Nyungar boodjar. Noonook doorkany kwop geeniny noonar. Yeye nyung nyininy Nyungar boodjar. Noonook

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nyininy Turrbal Jaggera boodjar. Baal boordier nidjar boodjar, translated as:

Today my heart is happy and I feel good to be talking with you. I am presently sitting in Noonar country while you sit in Turrbal and Jagera country. They are still bosses of these places.

One way to respond to your opening remarks would be to go to my head and go to the language used in academia or many community work circles. I will probably do this a little later. However, this could take us away from our hearts, or what you are talking about as part of a soulful perspective. So instead I might start with a story or two. The first is about a senior man who has just passed away. I will not use his name out of respect for his family. Part of me wants to use his name because I was so fond of him. However, as my son reminded me last night, he is now part of the song for his country and so his name should not be directly spoken. Because his ‘spirit’ now sits on Country I will refer to him in the present.

There is a story about many old people of the Kimberley. This old man is just one of them.

This man is a senior Walmatjarri who was ‘grown up’ by his senior people on Country (traditional land for people from the northern sections of the Australia’s Great Sandy Desert). He has since moved to remote communities in the southern part of the Kimberley and now spends much time in Fitzroy Crossing, one of the six towns in the region. This desert country is infamous for being inhospitable to all but the most seasoned bush people. It is often raging in heat and humidity, extremely remote and uncompromising for newcomers.

Despite the physical challenges, the old man loves returning to Country. He is often the first one in the car when he goes on Yiriman trips. It is nothing for him to be sitting waiting in the front seat, instructing young people in the heat of the day or having a two-hour conversation at night when everyone else is exhausted. He is often the one up first thing, singing out for Country, rallying people, switching between different lines of thought and tactics and great at getting people to do things that demand discipline and hard work.

This is pretty amazing if you keep in mind that he is a fella who spends most of his time sitting quietly in a place where many people are doing it very, very tough. Often the whirlwind of town life is whistling back and forth with grog, fighting, enormous emotional pain and kids ‘humbugging’ with the law.

But when you see him out on Country he is clearly a boss. He asserts himself, his knowledge, his position and his language. He demands respect and ensures that other old people are respected.

But respect is not a one-way street for the old boy. He gives it out too, beautifully offering it to young people in so many ways. You can see it when he speaks to them, often in language and always in a tone that is soft and kind. He usually does this in Walmatjarri, showing others that when language gets used you simultaneously hold culture and law, take care of Country and look after the old people.
And he sings on Country. He sings to show respect to the old people who came before, passed away and now dwell in country. Every morning on trips people wake up to his voice in traditional song. Every night he is singing by the fire. When people visit important places he sings. He sings to look after and teach young people, making those present feel welcome and secure, warm and wrapped up in his arms. This is what this old man and that mob love to do. For them it is like going to the movies but better.

His message to young people is clear and consistent. He looks them in the eyes with silence for a few seconds, holds the space and their attention. He softly says in Kriol, ‘We are here because we care, we care about you, we have love for you. We know you, you come from a good family, I know all of your family, you have a name and we care for you, you are not just no-one walking on the street. You are someone, you are someone very important and you have a big life and a big role to play … don’t ever forget that’.

This old man is one of a number of important educators in the southern Kimberley, wielding something more powerful than a Cert 4 in Train the Trainer or a University degree in teaching. He has Country, he has stories and he has family. Now he is part of Country, part of the song for this country and, with his old people, looking after his family on country (see Palmer, 2012).

As you know, I have had the good fortune to join an Aboriginal organisation in the Kimberley. This group is called the Yiriman Project and I have been traveling along with them over the past few years as they attempt to respond out of love for young people. Yes, this is how many of the senior people express it. As one of my ‘cultural bosses’, Mr John Watson puts it when talking with young people, ‘we are here because we have love for you’. The idea of the Yiriman Project is both simple and quite complex. Drawing on ancient traditions, senior and middle aged people take young people on ‘back to country’ trips. Like their forefathers and mothers these elders draw upon culture, the arts, spending time on country and reinvigorating old knowledge. Speaking about his involvement with young men Mr Joe Brown (cited in People Culture Environment, 2014: 18) explains:

We tell these lads their skin group, that’s who they are and how they fit together in the community. Language is important. They’ve got to know this so they know their culture and who they are. If they lose language and connection to culture they become a nobody inside and that’s enough to put anyone over the edge.

One of the senior women who helped set up Yiriman is Annie Milgen (cited in People Culture Environment, 2014: 22). She explains how Yiriman does its work:

We take a lot of young people (12–14 year olds) out onto country. We teach them about country. They say they get a good feeling and they wear their country inside themselves. The country is their life. It is their culture place. It’s our place for learning. Taking our young people out onto country is a solution for many things.
It’s not working the whitefella way. We want to control this healing. We want our kids to learn their language and learn their culture. From the little ones up, we want our kids to stay in the community. Outsiders don’t understand that. Our people are stronger in themselves when they grow up in community. It gives them a better foundation to go out into the world.

When I first started to spend time with Yiriman I did not entirely understand the magnitude of what they were doing. As an old youth worker, I assumed that their work was similar to the outdoor education movement. I thought they were drawing up the idea of taking kids on camps, getting them active and helping them do something positive in a healthy environment. However, this is not an adequate description of what goes on.

Peter

David, your opening story and your reflections on the Yiriman Project highlights culture, or living culture, closely connected to country. So, reflecting some more, and coming back to your final sentence, what was going on in the Yiriman Project?

David

For those involved in Yiriman the connection between people and country is paramount and it’s the connection and flow between that really highlights what you seem to be thinking about in relation to soul. Largely this connection and flow reflects the fact that in traditional law and culture there exists an irrepressible link between people, family and country. Edwards (1988) explains that this is because in Aboriginal ontology and cosmology country is the place where present living family, ancestors and as yet unborn children dwell. This means that as a member of one’s family, country demands care. In turn, country offers care. To visit country, to travel through it, hunt on it, make fire on it and sing to it is much like visiting an older relative. In both acts one maintains relationships, obligations and ‘keeps alive’ one’s family. In this way, keeping country healthy (by visiting it, dancing on it and warming its soul by fire) also involves the act of keeping community healthy (Collard, 2007). Deborah Bird Rose puts this beautifully when she says:

In Aboriginal English, the word ‘country’ is both a common noun and a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, and grieve for country and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, and feels sorry or happy. Country is a living entity with a yesterday, a today and tomorrow, with consciousness, action, and a will toward life (Rose et al., 2002: 14).
Aboriginal cosmology is also animated by the part played by family and kin in a world that can be described as soulful, or of deep connection. This reflects the continued importance of ‘skin groups’, family affiliations, contact across the generations; between language groups, in teaching young people ‘respect’ and responsibility and in the protection of people in home and alien country.

Coming back to my story of the Yiriman Project and linking to this Indigenous cosmology are the obligations that come with age to nurture those who ‘come along after’ (Myers, 1991: 211). McCoy (2008: 22) describes this process as supporting what Kukatja (southern Kimberley Aboriginal group) call Kanyirninpa. Kanyirninpa and is expressed in a number of interconnected ways. It includes nurturance but it also involves older people taking responsibility and offering protection for those they hold. Kanyirninpa is also expressed in relationships that involve teaching and learning where older people help young people ‘grow up the right way’ (ibid.: 22). McCoy (2008: 28) also claims that this business of Kanyirninpa or ‘holding’ young people is an act of exercising respect towards others, creating conditions to reinforce social bonds and social obligations. The ‘old man’ in my first story exemplified this business of ‘holding’.

Another element in Aboriginal cosmology central to what you are describing as soulful is the importance of knowledge systems as expressed through narrative or stories. In the south-west regions of Australia this system of transmission of spiritual knowledge goes by the name of katatjin. In central and western parts of Australia the terms tjurkupa or altjira are used. This idea is more than simply knowledge or ideas. It represents the thread or vehicle through which the interconnections between country and family can be made. To paraphrase Stanner, katatjin (he used the term ‘the Dreaming’) is not simply accounts of the past, a history of what has been. Rather it is everywhen, ‘all the instants of being, whether completed or to come’ (2009: 23–24). At one and the same time katatjin holds the mysteries of life as well as the means of teaching the rules one needs to observe (see Myers, 1991; Folds, 2001; Glass, 2002).

‘Bringing out stories’ is important in a number of ways. It is a means through which young people can become an active part of the stories their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents featured in. It also allows young people’s stories to emerge. Combining story telling with tactile and active work both helps senior people recall their lives and give life to young people. In this way, being on country while you talk about country demands people exercise a range of sensory tools and ‘creative faculties’.

Peter

This idea of ‘bringing out stories’ seems to me to be important. When I think of soul, community and social change, the connecting themes of this book, story would appear to be central. In my years of reflecting on dialogue and community work (Westoby and Dowling, 2013) I have often noticed that one crucial element
is ‘staying with the story’, to enter someone’s story as fully as possible without
abstracting. And I see this element as about soul – about really seeing and sensing
fully. It is a challenge to those used to abstraction, keen to define, rather than describe
or directly perceive. This rings true when I hear you also write of Indigenous people
being on ‘country’ where country is not an abstract object to be exploited and so
forth, but a place that is alive to the reciprocal relationship you have talked about.

David

Some good points Peter and I would like to engage with them through telling
another story. This is a story that points to two important limitations of much of
our thinking about dialogue: i) that we share the same language when we talk; and,
ii) that dialogue only happens in the spoken and written language.

I remember some years ago going to see the stage production of a piece called
Ngapartji Ngapartji. It was being performed as part of the Perth Festival after having
played seasons in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and Alice Springs. The
work was produced and ‘held’ by the community and social change organisation
Big hART, the key creative piece shaped by a five year project carried out in Alice
Springs town camps, communities in the Anangu, Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
Lands in South Australia and other remote communities in Central Australia
from 2005 to 2010. The community development elements of the work included
creative workshops, community building projects, language maintenance, literacy
development, crime prevention, training and performance, arts and music work.
The Ngapartji Ngapartji stage theatre show tells the family story of actor and
co-founder of the project, Trevor Jamieson. It focuses on the life of Trevor’s
Tjamu or grandfather and his work helping refugee Pitjantjatjara, living in the
desert country between South Australia and Western Australia. This occurred as
a consequence of the decision of the Australian and British governments to carry
out nuclear testing at Maralinga and Emu Junction from the 1950s. The show
moves through the highs and lows of Anangu life, taking audiences through an
introduction to Pitjantjatjara language, introducing Australians to the magic and
talent of Anangu song, dance and performance and pressing home to people the
strength and resilience of Western Desert people. Members of the community
involved in the project literally shared the stage with Trevor, performing as the
choir, actors and cultural teachers of the audience (Palmer, 2011).

I went to see the production in Perth with colleagues, partly because we had
heard good reviews and partly because we had been invited to carry out research
work on another Big hART project. I was very keen to take up the opportunities
presented in the show for entering into a form of dialogue with the experience of
communities in Central Australia. So my colleagues and I agreed to see the show
and meet after for a coffee and a chat.

I was literally lost for words. The two hour show involved ‘bringing to light’
part of the ‘shadowy’ or covered up history of Anangu dispossession, political
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1. intrigue, military deception, secrets and lies. Throughout the performance we were
2. confronted by the story of the bombs that were dropped, casting as they did an
3. ominous gloom across the continent. During the performances audiences are softly
4. invited into Pitjantjatjara language. For example, from the early parts of the show
5. people are addressed in Pitjantjatjara, taught songs including ‘Head, Shoulders,
6. Knees and Toes’, stand up to join with the actions, helping to symbolise the project’s
7. aspirations for Piranpa (non-Anangu). Trevor was masterful at guiding us all
8. safely through tough and often uncomfortable places. His timing was impeccable,
9. managing to mix intensity and humour, light and shade and confronting people’s
10. sensibilities in the most disarming of ways. The subject matter of the show is the
11. history of Anangu dispossession. It is about the country and family of Pitjantjatjara
12. speakers being subject to atomic testing the magnitude of which had never been
13. known in human history. It contends with their experience of unbearably enormous
14. change over a single generation. It offered us people a remarkable, perhaps once in
15. a lifetime experience, revealing the tenacity of families who insist on holding their
16. language, song and, most importantly, children.

I was literally ‘struck dumb’ after the performance, unable to articulate the
17. depth of my emotional response. I participated in a standing ovation to signify
18. how I had been swept away to see, hear and be touched by the show. Like others
19. who I later interviewed, I was taken away for days afterward by the intensity and
20. sheer spiritual gravity. However, initially I did not have a vocabulary to describe
21. what had happened. I was entranced and under the spell of some kind of magic.
22. Given my state I was not as keen to immediately do ‘café analysis’. However as
23. we had agreed, after meeting the cast and crew, we headed off for coffee and a chat.
24. I found the conversation most unsatisfying. The café was busy and loud and
25. my colleagues seemed to be competing to provide the most clichéd responses (as
26. those of us from the middle classes often do). ‘This was a wonderful example
27. of community cultural development’, one said. Another claimed that we could
28. see, ‘community engagement played out on the stage’. The one that got me really
29. cross was that ‘this was an example of arts and community development best
30. practice, offering socio-economically disadvantaged Aborigines the opportunity to
31. capacity-build’. I excused myself and set off on a weekend of serious discomfort.
32. The author and political scientist Don Watson (2003) would have given us
33. absolute ‘stick’ for the nonsense being talked. Our university inspired ‘new public
34. language’ was thin, full of platitudes, devoid of verbs and, above all else, ugly.
35. Anyone listening would have been forgiven for thinking we were reporting on a
36. government policy document, business plan or football team performance. The
37. words and phrases being dropped in on this beautiful show did no justice to how
38. I was feeling.
39. Much to my personal disappointment I remained unable to talk about the
40. show for three more days. I was an intellectual with no vocabulary and unable to
41. position myself as a confident expert with ‘grown up’ and profound things to say.
42. This was even more unsettling when I considered that I had now been invited to
43. carry out a project evaluation of the work.
So I spent most of the next three days sitting quietly in my hammock under one of our beautiful trees in the front yard. I listened to a little music but mostly I meditated on the feelings and random thoughts that emerged. Sadly a treatise did not emerge. However, what kept occurring to me was how unsatisfying had been all the other reports that attempted to build an analysis.

About six months later I visited Alice Springs on my first ‘field visit’ to the project. I got to meet first hand many of the people involved in the work of the Ngapartji Ngapartji Project (the stage show shared the same name as the project). I spent a week catching up with people in town camps, watching footage from the rich and moving Ninti website, a language site that features young people as ‘tutors’ in Pitjantjatjara language, and joining a number of arts and music workshops. During one of my discussions with a senior Pitjantjatjara woman the analysis of my colleagues came to mind so I asked her, ‘what would you say to people that describe this work as good “community cultural development”, “capacity building”, “cross-cultural exchange” or “arts practice”? Her answer was precisely what I needed. She said, ‘no it’s Ngapartji Ngapartji, that’s him (it), he (it is) Ngapartji Ngapartji. You just gotta listen and understand Ngapartji Ngapartji’.

I had been trying to find a language for my experience of the performance. At the same time my colleagues had rushed to colonise the performance with abstracted conceptual descriptions. Indeed when I later suggested that we take up an opportunity to learn some Pitjantjatjara, colleagues were less than interested. We were all too keen on ‘capturing’ what we had seen and locking it into our ‘clever’ conceptual frameworks.

In the English language there appears to be no adequate translation for the Pitjantjatjara concept, ngapartji ngapartji. Many suggest that its closest equivalent in the Australian vernacular is something like, ‘I give … you give in return’. As with many attempts at direct translation, this fails to offer a nuanced or deep window into the western desert idea of ngapartji ngapartji with its emphasis on connections between people, kin, story and country.

Perhaps the English idea of the ‘gift’ takes us a little closer to the Pitjantjatjara concept of ‘ngapartji ngapartji’. In contrast to market exchange, a gift economy obligates people to one another, producing conditions that see people reciprocating their debt. In a classic gift economy the exchange moves in complex direction, ‘from one hand to another with no assurance of anything in return’ (Hyde, 2007: 11). In this way, the gift draws us into a mutual dependence upon those involved in the exchange, a formal give-and-take that forces us to acknowledge our participation in and dependence upon one other. It also forces us to respond to those around us with whom we become bound. In this way, the gift brings with it both a built-in check and creates the seeds of the practice of ‘kindness’.

However, I fear I am starting to do what I have been critical of, using an alien language to analyse a practice. The important point here is that in the very name and language of the show and the project (taken from a central Pitjantjatjara concept) we are given an invitation to enter into a deep dialogue by embarking on a process of learning some language.
Another important insight I gained from this experience is that words, both spoken and written, are often not enough for us to enter into dialogue. According to David Abram (1997) this is because there are massive limitations in simply relying on language, particularly written language, as a means of understanding, experiencing and relating. My colleagues and I had been taken into a world of magic, not in any romantic sense but the primordial sense of a world made up of multiple intelligences, art forms, sounds, sensory experiences, colours and perceptions. Trying to apply simple but familiar ideas to this experience, by mimicking half-formed concepts from elsewhere, caused us to instantly turn our back on the actual experience and hence possible insights. We had reduced this magical encounter to tired old academic discourse, pretending that we were involved in some kind of dialogue.

As Merleau-Ponty (cited in Abram, 1997: 52) reminds us, perception and understanding involves a reciprocal exchange between our bodies and the world around us. Coming to know, coming to understand, coming to see then, involves the body in dialogue with the entities around us. Abram explains how people’s relationships in the world are formed by ‘a sort of silent conversation that I carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness, and often, even, independent of my verbal awareness’ (1997: 52).

Too frequently as modernists we forget this, assuming that our words are the principal means through which we enter into dialogue. We assume that language comes before perception and that knowledge is formed by our minds and exercised upon our bodies. However, we learn language not so much mentally as bodily. Abram again,

We appropriate new words and phrases first through their expressive tonality and texture, through the way they feel in the mouth or roll off the tongue, and it is in this direct, felt significance – the taste of a word or phrase, the way it influences or modulates the body – that provides the fertile, polyvalent source for all the more refined and rarefied meanings which that term may come to have for us (1997: 75).

This partly explains what happened to me in the theatre when, subjected as I was to song, dance, story and lighting sensory experiences, I was ‘taken away’ from myself. In this way I went on a journey, traveling far away from my head, my cerebral self and my words.

Peter

David, your telling and reflecting on this story open up whole new ways of thinking about, experiencing, dare I say, theorising dialogue. A disruption of self, shifting you, or re-orienting you to ‘other’, seems to be crucial to what was occurring. What do you think enabled that process to occur, what opened you up?
Like the sociologist Richard Sennett (2012: 199) I now understand that from that evening on, my ‘conversation’ with the work and the community involved with Ngapartji Ngapartji was just as shaped by my body as by words. This occurred because I was drawn into the performance, literally feeling, moving and being moved, singing along and, to some extent, joining the rhythm and ‘dance’ that was the stage production. Just as importantly, I was drawn out of myself – maybe this ‘othering’ you talk of. In large measure this was because the show made use of what in the West we call the arts, performance, music and the creative experience. It offered the audience non-verbal encounters bound in the music, voice, film, dance and poetics. These ‘indirect’ communicative devices were, in some ways, more powerful than direct speech or didactic performance, lightly nudging the ‘strangers’ (audience) into the difficult terrain of intercultural understanding. In some measure this probably worked because Aboriginal performers were much more at ease and familiar with the forms of expression and ritual. For many Aboriginal groups there are long standing traditions that have made use of the body, the arts and music. Indeed for many senior Aboriginal people, country, community, dance and ‘singing’ are inseparable. The practice of singing is literally a way of life, a way of bringing country to life and in turn the way one comes to life in country (Muecke, 1997). As Catherine Ellis (1985) so clearly put it, for those Anangu old people with whom she worked, their view of the world, their insights, indeed their knowledge is held in their music. Ellis’s mentor Ted Strehlow made similar observations about Arrente. Outlining Strehlow’s poetics on song in Central Australia, Hill said, The whole life of the region was, in a sense, conducted according to song, the secrets of which were central to the laws of the culture … the whole region was animated by song that gave almost everything – fauna, flora, much of the topography – meanings. The terrain was a narrative, and song, like rain, united the sky with the earth, and day with the stars of the night … The songs were important among the deeds of the land. To sing the song was to transmit proprietary responsibilities to others. A song served to locate men and women in totemic terms, and this in turn mapped individuals with regard to birth place and place of conception. A man or woman, and the clan to which they belonged, owned the song as they owned the land … they belonged to the song and its country, as much as the singer’s voice belonged to his or her body (2002: 44). This happens in a number of important ways. Not only do Aboriginal understandings of country see people as being brought into being by country, but their ‘daily and yearly interactions with country are communicative events’ (Rose et al., 2002: 43). When travelling through country Aboriginal people with whom I travel often call or ‘sing out’ to country to announce themselves. Music literally becomes the...
way of addressing country (Dunbar-Hall and Gibson, 2004: 26). This also happens because singing about a place (or singing about country) involves ‘singing a place’. As Dunbar-Hall and Gibson put it, ‘By performing a song about a place, the events of the past, through which that place came into being, are re-created in the present’. (2004: 220) Through the performance of a song about a place the place comes again into existence, being reborn through the act of singing. In this way dialogue with country occurs through song.

Perhaps this first experience of ‘community’ with those involved in the Ngapartji Ngapartji project was also profound because music, dance and other forms of performance pushed me a little, forcing me to shut up and suspend my very different language repertoire and cultural framework; suspending my ideas while remaining present. The use of the arts demanded that I put on hold my ego, instead listening and turning outward. Attempting to explain a similar process to me Anangu long-time friend and advocate Bill Edwards recounted:

When we first started out work at Ernabella my missionary colleagues and I struggled with how we could enter into a relationship without proselytising. We were deeply interested in the religious experience, deeply enriched by our own traditions but very limited in our capacity to enter into dialogue. Fortunately we were also very keen on music, coming as we did out of many years of being in choirs, all deep lovers of singing gospel songs in four-part harmony. Much to our great joy we were invited to sit in on inma (ceremony that includes song, dance and performance). Although the traditions were very different, we were able to share our mutual love of music, finding in it the entry point into mutual respect, communion and eventually love. This is because of the power of music in shaping the human experience. I have often thought that if Descartes were a western desert man he would not have said ‘cogito ergo sum’ (‘I think therefore I am’), rather he would have said ‘canto ergo sum’ (‘I sing therefore I am’).

(Source: research notes Palmer, 2008)

Peter

Dave, this conversation has moved in many directions, from thinking about what you describe as a ‘world of magic … made up of multiple intelligences, art forms, sounds, sensory experiences, colours and perceptions’; to reflecting on the significance of story, country and culture in community work; to story about the genuine disruption of self, and opening to another way of being and experiencing that can emerge through powerful dialogue; and finally, to consideration of how that dialogue can in many ways be more powerful if embodied in creative artistic performative aspects of life.

For me these ideas, these experiences and stories you have recounted represent a soul orientation in community practice. They indicate a willingness to enter into the subterranean, subtle, sacred elements of life and foreground them in our
community work. You seemed able to open yourself to this other archive that you are in constant contact with – Aboriginal Australia – which disrupts the taken-for-granted world, and in turn invites you into another way of seeing and being. You were willing to engage with the depth of stories, performance, disruption that these encounters demand.

I also love how you then come to the end of your piece reflecting on the power and presence of music and song, and of course it is hard not to dismiss Bruce Chatwin’s famous meditation *Songlines* which also foregrounds the mythic story of how the world is created in song. Country and people in dialogue, through song – that resonates with something we most definitely could call Soul-Music.

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