

# Warning Signals: Indigenous Remembrance and Futurity in Post-Apology Australia: A Reflection from Broome

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**T**HE 2008 NATIONAL APOLOGY TO THE STOLEN GENERATIONS WAS MET WITH JUBILANT acclamation from across the country, generating a collective wave of optimism that Australia could be a better place than it had been, even if this was a 'largely symbolic' event. Nine years on, the Apology's promise to make Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians equal partners by 'closing the gap' in health and life-expectancy has spectacularly failed in all areas bar one,<sup>1</sup> while the nation stalls yet again on questions of formal recognition of the first Australians in its handling of the campaign for a referendum on constitutional

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<sup>1</sup> As detailed in the *National Indigenous Reform Agreement: Performance Assessment 2013-14* (2015), the Productivity Commission found that only one of the six 'Close the Gap' targets is being met, with child mortality rates decreasing. The improvement of access to preschool, reading and numeracy rates and life expectancy is stalling in each case. Indigenous Australians continue to die about ten years younger than non-Indigenous Australians, on average; a small decline in Indigenous child mortality between 2008 and 2014 is considered not statistically significant, casting doubt on whether progress has continued in the past eight years; and no progress has been made against the target to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018 since 2008 (Commonwealth of Australia, *Closing the Gap*). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders represent only about three percent of the general population but twenty-seven percent of all prisoners—a proportion that also has been increasing steadily (up from twenty percent in 2001) (Gosford). More Indigenous children are being removed from their families today than at any other time in Australian history—they are ten times more likely to be in care than their non-Indigenous peers. Although they represent only 5.5 percent of their age population, they make up thirty-five percent of children in out-of-home care (Behrendt).

change that would 'end the exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from the Australian Constitution and deal with racial discrimination in it' (Commonwealth of Australia, *Constitutional Recognition*).

What happened to the hope of a better future generated by the Apology as a national politico-media event? In conversation with Jordan Greenwald about the aftermath of the United States military's assassination of Osama Bin Laden, Lauren Berlant questions what it means to think of any collective political episode as 'largely symbolic'. She says that for a political episode 'to become symbolic doesn't mean to become "merely academic", but rather to become explicitly saturated by fantasy as though the situation is autopoetic, naturally exemplary and self-evidently powerful' (Berlant and Greenwald 73). The problem of symbolic events, she claims, is 'how often the political sphere and the mass media act as though they have the power to make performative utterances about collective affect through phrases that claim already to express a new collectively held normative sense of the event' (Berlant and Greenwald 73). In Australia, the normative sense of the Apology as event was reflected in media outlets across the nation as 'a new beginning'. 'Sorry' became saturated in the fantasy that the utterance of this single word could heal the after effects of more than 200 years of colonial violence and injustice and allow us as nation to 'move on' (Muldoon; Pearson; Short).

For many non-Indigenous Australians, the Apology's discourse of 'moving on' offered a welcomed shift away from matters of the nation's past. After all, as historian Tony Barta remarks:

The turning of all eyes to the future is in the great Australian tradition of averting them from the uncomfortable truths of a triumphant past... No one enjoying record levels of wealth and consumption wants to be reminded again, as they were during the years of those other inquiries into land rights and 'native title', of the relationship between the basis of their wealth and the dispossession of peoples who not so long ago owned the whole country. Much less do they want to be reminded of the fate of those peoples, of lives destroyed in the genocidal rush to take over the land. (201-11)

For Indigenous Australians, however, the Apology offered very little. No reparation. No Treaty. No national memorial. And no immediate shared future. Instead the Apology's structuring of historical time as a progressive narrative positioned Indigenous Australians in a temporal 'no man's land'. No longer consigned irrevocably to the frozen time of a pre-historical past but not yet arrived in the Apology's imagined future of an equal partnership between

Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, it relegated them to the dead-end time of historical absence, a social space of non-recognition.

Far from instigating a 'new beginning' then, the Apology, as a particular instantiation of nationhood, was a reassertion of settler conquest, performed as the state's power to determine collective memory of our past. Australia has a long history of pitting Indigenous Australians against the so called tide of history. Deborah Bird Rose's analysis of the place of Aboriginal life and death in Australian nationhood maps how Indigenous forms of unrecognisability—political, legal, social, and historical forms of *effacement*—derive from white fantasies such as Aboriginal people being 'washed away by the tide of history'. That is the terrible and terrorising normalised notion that they have become 'agents of their own disappearance' and the more recent imaginary of their embodiment as what Rose describes as the bodily transgression of 'total transparency'—'an absence' in their own past (Rose 158-61). As Rose explains, the madness of these colonialist discourses of Indigenous Australians' untimeliness has given rise to the enactment of a native title law that requires Indigenous peoples to perform continuity despite the law's own recognition of the historical discontinuity of colonialism as a catastrophic rupture to Indigenous life. In a similar vein, the Apology acknowledged responsibility for forms of historical unresolved grief and injury experienced by Indigenous Australians as a result of colonisation only to then off-load collective memory of this traumatic past back onto Indigenous individuals as *their* personal burden to carry. In Noel Pearson's words:

[T]oo many of (the Stolen Generation) will be condemned to harbour a sense of injustice for the rest of their lives. Far from moving on, these people—whose lives have been much consumed by this issue—will die with a sense of unresolved justice. (Pearson)

History of course shows that such historical unresolved grief does not disappear with the death of individuals but rather is carried by entire communities and is transmitted culturally to the next generation as their responsibility to resolve (Damousi). And in post-Apology Australia, the nation's refusal to properly relieve the Indigenous community of the historical burden of colonialism is reinforced by government policies of 'practical reconciliation' that Virginia Watson has argued make Indigenous people themselves responsible for the state of Indigenous social crisis and/or sees such crisis as deriving naturally from inherent features of Indigenous culture while covering over 'the crucial *active* and *material* role' played by government and non-government agencies by cutting funds and failing to properly consult with Indigenous Australians (334).

In the following sections of this paper I look at the practice of remembrance in Indigenous cultural production as a point of departure from the disappointments of the Apology and the crisis of youth suicide in Indigenous communities. These sections take the form of a first-hand account of a trip to Broome in 2013 where I experienced the work of the Marrugeku intercultural dance theatre company. My purpose is to read this cultural work with Walter Benjamin's concepts of history in order to show how Marrugeku brushes history against the grain by turning the historical discourse of Indigenous disappearance against itself. I suggest that Indigenous remembrance of the past in post-Apology Australia is not only an act of resistance to the Apology's injunction to 'move on' from our past. It is also a crucial means of ensuring Indigenous futurity.

### **States of Emergency**

In 2013 I travelled to Broome in north western Australia for the first time to participate in an academic seminar on experimental ethnographies. Broome is an incredibly beautiful and ancient place surrounded by water—a coastal pearling town of 14,000 people 'where the red desert of the Australian outback meets the sea', as the tourism brochures say. It's a fragile ecology of mudflats, tangles of mangroves and 22 kilometres of the blinding, silver-white sand of the world-famous Cable Beach where king tides rise and fall before your eyes like a tsunami in slow motion. It's a place of sanctuary for thousands of migratory birds that travel back and forth from Siberia each year to roost in the shorelines of Roebuck Bay and feast on the plentiful supply of fish. Locals refer to the relaxed, tropical vibe of this place as 'Broome Time'. Yet Broome is also a place where the tension of Australia's interlocking histories—colonialism, industrialisation, globalisation and the tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal occupation—hangs heavy in the air. Several days prior to the seminar, the multinational oil and gas company Woodside had announced its withdrawal from a controversial proposal to develop a gas processing plant in an area approximately 60kms north of Broome known as James Price Point—Walmadany, an area of sacred significance to its traditional owners the Goolarabooloo people. This withdrawal was a great triumph for Indigenous and other activists who had been supporting the Goolarabooloo fight against the proposal since 2008. But the Western Australian government's determination to industrialise this area has won support from many Indigenous and non-Indigenous locals, causing deep divisions within Broome's small community (Laurie).

On the afternoon of the first day of the seminar I noticed that some of the participants, those from Broome and those who had spent time here before this event, were wearing a small, plastic-covered photograph of a young Indigenous man safety-pinned to their clothing. I was told that the young man had violently taken his own life, that his funeral had been held earlier that morning, and that

the practice of displaying these Victorian-like miniatures had recently been integrated into Aboriginal 'sorry business' (see SNAICC for an Indigenous cultural explanation of 'sorry business'), although not without some controversy. The hand-made image reminded me of those worn by South American 'Mothers of the Disappeared'—an unofficial organisation of Argentine women who, for over three decades, marched together each week in front of the Casa Rosada governmental palace demanding to be reunited with their children who had been disappeared in Argentina's 'Dirty War' and whose photographs they carried in small wooden frames or pinned to the bodices of their dresses (Taylor). The difference between these two situations is that in Argentina in the late 1970s young people (and others) were being killed by the state's paramilitary death squads while for the past few decades in Australia young Indigenous people have been killing themselves. Or is it so very different?

In his essay on terror in South America, 'Terror as Usual: Walter Benjamin's Theory of History as State of Siege', Michael Taussig unpacks one of Benjamin's most famous theses on history: 'The tradition of the oppressed', wrote Benjamin on the eve of World War II, 'teaches us that "the state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule' (Benjamin cited in Taussig 12). As Taussig explains, the Republic of Colombia in the 1980s was a place where an official state of emergency was perceived both from within and outside of the nation as 'the rule' or 'the norm': 'now on, now off, now on again, for as long as most people can remember' (16). Yet Taussig questions strongly the 'ideal of Order' in the state's constant reference to an alternative 'state of public order', arguing that Colombia's state of disorder was intrinsic to both the state and the armed forces' modus operandi of terror (16). In this way the Colombian social situation maintained the form of social illusion that Benjamin theorised sustained German fascism—that is widespread social failure to recognise fascism as a constant state of emergency. Or as Taussig applies this concept—'the normalcy of the abnormal', 'terror as usual' in Colombia (16-7).

Taussig elaborates that this socio-political situation—wherever it may occur, including areas of poverty and disenfranchisement in urban and rural centres of the global West—raises the urgent question of how such an illusion can be sustained. He claims that 'the violent and unexpected ruptures on consciousness that such a situation carries' is the heart of what is politically crucial for an understanding of 'terror as usual' (17). Here he is referring to 'a state of doubleness of social being' (18)—an oscillation between somehow accepting emergency situations as normal and moments of recognition when we're shocked into seeing this socio-political charade for what it is. He argues that the back and forth movement between seeing and not seeing terror sustains the reality-effect of the normalcy of terror. In our era of the dominance of global media, the to-and-fro movement of the doubleness of social being Taussig

describes is hyper-accelerated by the lightning speed of news cycles in which stories of terror and crisis from around the world irrupt to shock us into a state of disorientation only to just as quickly disappear, returning us to a situation of emergency as usual until the next shocking story irrupts, and so on. Shock itself, thus, is not an intrinsic means to social action and change.

For the past two decades in Australia, the Kimberley region in the north west has been the epicentre of an emergency situation that even those of us non-Indigenous Australians who care about these matters have largely failed to recognise in a sustained way *as* a national emergency while, at the same time, the state's abuse of human rights in its ongoing 'emergency response' in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, known as the 'NT Intervention', is largely unremarked (Calma). In the Kimberley region a funeral for a young Indigenous person who has come to believe that death makes more sense than living is not something exceptional but rapidly becoming 'the rule'—'Indigenous crisis as usual', or, as it is termed in the peculiarly Australian racist vernacular, "'the Aboriginal problem" as usual'. The numbers of Aboriginal deaths in Australia by suicide are staggering. There were 996 reported deaths by suicide across Australia between 2001 and 2010 of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples, many of them from the Kimberley region (Australian Bureau of Statistics). This translates into one in every 24 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples (though mostly Aboriginal) dying by suicide, making Australia's Indigenous suicide rates higher than of any of those elsewhere, including the rates of all those 'elsewheres' our nation-state would proudly regard itself as superior to in every way, that is 'every African country, third-world countries included, and higher than every country on the planet, with the exception of Greenland' (Georgatos). While I was writing this essay a news story exploded about the shocking event of a 10-year-old Indigenous child from the Kimberley who took her own life (Mitchell). It made headlines in mainstream media across the nation for 24 hours, only to then disappear. Most news services reported her death as a tragic event (Mitchell) and part of a wider social problem. Yet none that I saw delved into the underlying causes of her death or mentioned the 2015 wide-reaching report on Indigenous youth suicide conducted by Indigenous elders from across Australia that provides important Indigenous perspectives on the causes of this crisis and what is required to stop these deaths (see People Culture Environment).

What I am suggesting is that the urgent question of how to end emergency situations such as Indigenous youth suicide is deeply related to the social view of Indigenous crisis as normal. The problem thus is one of how to *unthink* the normalisation of Indigenous crisis, and certainly without recourse to forms of sensationalism that produce temporary shock effect only for people to snap back into a 'crisis as usual' mentality and having, in the process, rendered Indigenous

people as tragic victims of a dying race, yet again. Here I am thinking about media *exposés* such as, for example, journalist John Pilger's documentaries *The Secret Country—The First Australians Fight Back* (1985) and more recently *Utopia* (2013). In Benjamin's philosophy of history, such unthinking requires guilt-ridden inheritors of past victories such as a colonial settler society like Australia to recognise the 'untruth' of their political and social situation as progress, so as to liberate the historical truth of exclusion and exploitation perpetrated in the name of civilisation/colonisation: 'There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism', writes Benjamin (256). The role of the historian in this process is to 'to brush history against the grain' (Benjamin 257) so as to expose social disadvantage not as something not seen before (à la Pilger's claim that he is 'uncovering' hidden facts) but rather as that which is widely known but perceived as normal. In this latter procedure the historian seeks instead to expose an official historical discourse such as the Apology's fiction of 'a new beginning' and become in continuity with 'the defeated'/the colonised.

In 'Terror as usual', Taussig provides an example of this critical historical practice. He argues that the Mothers of the Disappeared turned terror's tactic of silencing against itself by physically becoming 'the presence of the unsaid' (27) and thus reversing the state of doubleness of social being. These women made what had become familiar and seemingly normal—disappearance—strange and disturbingly abnormal—reappearance of the dead in and through the presence of the maternal body. For Taussig 'what is important is not so much the facts, since they are in their way well known, but the shift in social location in which those facts are placed, filling the public void with private memory' (27). He claims that what was most at stake, then, in the mothers' resistance to terror's tactic of silencing was not the possibility of erasure of memory—the forgetting of their loved ones. 'Far from it', writes Taussig. 'The point (of the terror of silencing) is to drive the memory deep within the fastness of the individual so as to create more fear and uncertainty in which dream and reality comingle' (27). Terror makes the individual bear the weight of public histories of violence and trauma as a private and unspoken grief and soul-destroying uncertainty; brushing history against the grain, as did the Mothers of the Disappeared, is a practice of remembrance that can reveal the ongoingness and collective nature of historical unresolved grief and hence casts off terror's destructive cloak of silence.

For Benjamin, the form of recognition enabled by brushing history against the grain is experienced as a different sensation of time: a jolting sensation of immediacy in which past and present collide, disrupting or indeed 'blasting open' the modern experience of homogeneous empty time—the tick-tock time of the clock in which each moment of time is imagined as equivalent and waiting to be

filled. In the experience of immediacy, moments in time are freed up from the linearity that drives modern life, allowing us to create connections between them through time in all directions, thus undermining powerful temporal notions such as fate and inevitability that sustain the ideology of progress.

### **Performing Now Time**

In the afternoon session of the second day of the Broome seminar Dalisa Pigram and Rachel Swain began their joint presentation on forms of experimentation in their work as co-artistic directors of Broome-based intercultural dance theatre company Marrugeku. They began by giving some background to their task-based method of devising dance that they call 'memory of tradition'. They explained how this method originated as a cultural response to local political urgencies. In 2003 the Rubibi Native Title Claim by the Yawuru people in Broome brought painful histories of Indigenous trauma and loss to the surface, a situation the Western Australian government then exploited by attempting unsuccessfully to turn these stories against the claimants by arguing that the tide of history invalidated the Yawuru claim to continuous cultural connection to the land (Swain, 'A Meeting of Nations' 2). Prior to 2004, Marrugeku was known for such spectacular modern interpretations of pre-invasion Aboriginal stories as their internationally acclaimed *Mimi* (1996). Since Rubibi, however, they have instigated works that directly engage with local and global Indigenous post-invasion histories, beginning with an international collaboration with West African choreographer Serge Aimé Coulibaly from the former French colony of Burkina Faso on *Burning Daylight* (2006). In her documentation of this collaborative work, Swain describes how each dancer devised a 'signature move' drawn from traditional movements entrusted to her by a traditional custodian ('Burning Daylight' 109). These movements were then improvised, becoming a 'memory' in the dancer's body that allowed her to forge 'a new choreographic idiom' in consultation with custodians (109). Marrugeku have continued to develop this method in new works, including *Gudirr, Gudirr* (2014) and more recently *Cut the Sky* (2016). Swain claims this experimental method of devising movements is 'an embodied expression of the negotiation of tradition and change, of what can be created out of a context of both "listening" and "loss" and a celebration of Indigenous culture in the here and now' (110).

What happened next at our seminar was an amazing actualisation of this work of negotiation when Pigram performed a scene from *Gudirr, Gudirr*—her first solo work based on her life, or, her 'story', as she says, and inspired by her Yawuru grandfather, renowned former chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and the Labor party's new senator for Western Australia, Patrick Dodson. In a subsequent interview, Pigram explains:



(My grandfather) spoke to me about this bird Gudirr-Gudirr or Guwayi (its proper Yawuru name), which is a small shore bird that calls out to warn you when the tide is about to turn. He said that he felt that I reminded him of this bird ... He related this bird to the work I do in my own community and school keeping language alive but also with how we, from Marrugeku, have been concentrating on finding sustainable new ways of storytelling that ensure our culture survives always through these modern times. (Pigram in de Garis)

The performance began with a piercing warning call, first in Yawuru then in English. 'The time when the word "suicide" does not exist in Aboriginal languages has gone', cried Pigram. I recall being totally rattled by the urgency of this powerful address. Forcing her audience to confront the fact of historical discontinuity, Pigram risks invoking long-standing colonising discourses of Indigenous cultural disappearance, specifically the colonial trope of the tide of history washing away Indigenous cultural continuity, as used against the Yawuru people in the Rubibi native title claim and elsewhere. Yet this performance is far from an act of resignation or defeat. She is not saying tradition is irretrievable. Just the opposite. As warning call, *Gudirr, Gudirr* call out the possibility of culture, 'disappearing through our fingers', as she says, while pointing to a different kind of future. (de Garis). Her performance turns the melancholic affects associated with the prevailing colonial discourse of Indigenous disappearance against itself by making the Indigenous experience of living with discontinuity visible and palpable as a harnessing of the cyclic nature of tidal power – a high-energy performance of temporal disjuncture; an arrest of time that reveals Australia's colonial past as *the origin* of the present crisis of Indigenous youth suicide and thus an unmasking of the fantasy of the Apology's claim that our colonial past is a 'closed chapter' (Rudd).

This is achieved in several ways. *Gudirr, Gudirr* is not a life story in the western form of linear biography but rather a non-linear constellation of memory and experience—a set of movements that make connections between the past and present, both public and private, in and through time. In the electrifying scene performed at the seminar, Pigram's mimetic performance of the shore bird's warning call allegorises an Indigenous experience of time in the here and now, that is, as Swain suggests, the now-time of the battle between loss and change. The intensity and rawness of the *gudirr-gudirr*'s physical struggle with time is performed as a tension between two planes of movement. A vector of vertical moves display the distant aerial perspective of the bird looking down on a scene of imminent disaster. This is Pigram as artist, perhaps, confronting the catastrophic effects of colonialism, including environmental wreckage of her ancestral lands. At the same time she performs the bird/her physical resistance to the turning tide in a horizontal register that makes her very much part of and

affected by this scene of disaster: bursts of violent paroxysm in a choreography of combatant-like low lunges of Malaysian Silat (a martial art appropriated from her Malay ancestry), acrobatics and traditional Aboriginal dance movements. We see her propelled forward only to then be dragged backwards, like a tide sucking out. She catches her balance and charges forward again, rolling this way and that. As a performance of the constant push-pull motion of tidal rhythms, Pigram refigures the past. Not now as that which can be washed away—time as something that can be emptied—but rather as that which coexists with the present and has density. Her performance also clearly displays how forms of discontinuity such as death and other traumatic breaks in time are felt by and carried in the body as wounds.

Here and elsewhere in the work Pigram expresses an Indigenous world view of the interconnectedness of human and non-human through her revitalisation of the omens and warning animals that populate the traditions of her mixed Malay-Aboriginal ancestry by drawing on the mimetic magic of replication in which one can draw on the of a thing by becoming that thing—becoming bird, becoming snake, becoming spirit and so on. In the full version of the work, this interplay between past and present, human and non-human is amplified across other scenarios from her life by incorporation of a wide range of materials: bursts of narration; projected text and historical documents; haunting black-and-white video portraits of elders by renowned Indigenous multi-media artist Vernon Ah Kee; ‘raw’ documentary footage of teenagers street fighting, also by Ah Kee; stunning macro images of animals, and a magnificent tangle of fish nets swinging from the ceiling, which Pigram, as one of Australia’s most talented aerialists, effortlessly manoeuvres in a series of oscillating gestures: entrapment and escape; stasis and flight.

As someone who reads the work of Walter Benjamin, I could not help but see an affinity between this scene and Benjamin’s famous reading of the twentieth-century artist Paul Klee’s ‘Angelus Novus’ as an Angel of History, that is, a winged creature who looks back at the past and sees not progress but the rubble of historical catastrophe while being swept violently into the future (Benjamin 257). Like the Angel of History and like all of us who have grieved a great loss, Pigram’s dance makes palpable the desire to make things whole again:

The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin 257)

The redemptive capacity in Klee's painting and Pigram's dance lies in exposing the truth that the past cannot be made whole again. Where Pigram's dance differs from Klee's painting is that while the latter makes this truth visible as an allegorical image of time in the European tradition of painting, Pigram's method of devising movements through 'memory of tradition' is a fully physical and lived embodiment of that truth—through dance she makes herself communicable as a body of history that carries (on) memory of her cultural past ensuring an Indigenous future. As the performance shows, for Indigenous Australians this future is not and indeed cannot be that which the Apology imagined, namely a national history that turns it back on the past as disavowal of its continuity in the present. Instead, *Gudirr, Gudirr* performs Indigenous futurity in Australia as a horizon of possibility—a set of movements that allow us to see the truly new ways of social being that are transforming our country, even if we are as a collective slow to recognise such change.

### **Hope**

In the late afternoon on my last day in Broome I travelled by mini-bus with several other out-of-towners from the seminar to Gantheaume Point. This is a place where tourists flock to see world-famous one-hundred-and-thirty-thousand-million-year-old fossils of dinosaur footprints. Broome's Tourist Information Centre warns that searching for traces from the past can be dangerous business:

Be warned that the terrain becomes rough, steep, unstable and slippery. You should only attempt to climb down to the intertidal area if you are fit and healthy and wearing sturdy, non-slip footwear. It is not recommended to search for the footprints after dark and take note of all warning signs.

But our group had not come to see the fossils. Instead we clambered over the sharp edges of the point's red ochre-coloured rock faces to find a perch where we could watch the setting sun. As with most days in Broome, or so I'm told, the sun's blazing red orb sank spectacularly into the distant horizon of the Indian ocean, lighting up the sky in a kaleidoscope of colour: red, yellow, orange and violet blue. The disappearing light soon cast a melancholic mood, reminding me of Michael Taussig's idea that 'in a beautiful sunset we see deepening shadows of despair, and maybe this is why they are beautiful. This is the beginning of twilight, the witching hour when light transforms itself and makes other worlds possible' ('When the Sun Goes Down' n.p.). Taussig's interest in the role of the sun in our cultural imaginations leads him to ponder ways of being in the world that allow for wonder, confusion, intuition and daydreaming. In other words, ways of re-enchanting the world, which he argues is both much-needed now and

inspired by the truly unthinkable possibilities of climate change. As with Pigram's allegorical performance of the turning tide in the scene from *Gudirr, Gudirr* the previous day, Taussig urges us to see that the germ of hope in a beautiful sunset's display of disappearance lies not in the dream of the eternal return of sameness but in the transformative power of difference opened up in the space of the setting sun's enfolding darkness. Despair can give rise to tragedy. But as a rupture to everyday rhythms it can also (re)connect us to the rich life of subterranean worlds of spirits of the dead that lie in wait for us beyond the glaring brightness of enlightenment and progress.

In Broome, Swain and Pigram are not alone in the cultural work of 'memory of tradition' of Australia's other cultural histories and alternative ways of being in the world. Indigenous cultural production as the continuation of Indigenous culture and as a living and continuously adapting culture is flourishing, from Wawili Pitjas' *Jandamara* (with ABC TV) and the popular culturally-based TV cooking show *Kriol Kitchen* to the beautiful songline animation *Lurujarri Dreaming* (Bernadette Trench-Thiedeman with Goolarabooloo community 2012), Goolarri Media's video-training workshops, Magabala Books' publication of works by more than 100 authors, the unique kriol sounds of the Pigram Brothers musical performance, and so on. In the western world the arts are often regarded as different to and separate from the world of politics. In Broome I was reminded that in Indigenous communities, cultural production is considered heavy-lifting and the means of ensuring trans-generational transfer of an Indigenous worldview, which, if we took the time to listen, is precisely what all the reports into Indigenous suicide prevention in Australia say must occur if we are committed to stopping this social emergency (Georgatos). As Marrugeku suggest through their work, such knowledge is crucial to an Indigenous understanding of culture and tradition. In this essay, I have tried to suggest that it is also a powerful critique of the discourse of progress and something we all need to learn if we hope to continue to live in this country, indeed if our fragile planet is to continue to sustain life and the different worlds we make for ourselves and our children. In Pigram's words of warning:

We need to be celebrating these [old] people and their knowledge, and learn from it ... If we don't look to our first peoples and their understanding of tree, of land, of natural systems and the way things work, it's all going to disappear very quickly. And I have a feeling we're going to really need that knowledge soon. (cited in Bruner)

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