

BURNING DAYLIGHT

Place, history and community




MARRUGEKU



STALKER
THEATRE COMPANY

Marrugeku is produced by Stalker

BURNING DAYLIGHT

Place, history and community

Opposite Japtown, Broome,
Western Australia [transparency]:
part of scenes of the Northern
Territory and North Western Australia
by John Flynn 1880-1951. Courtesy
National Library of Australia



MARRUGEKU
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Broome-based Marrugeku is at the leading edge of Australian contemporary inter-cultural performance. The company creates large-scale cross-cultural works in-situ, in community, that blend contemporary indigenous dance with physical theatre, screen-based media and live music.

This process of making work 'in-situ' requires extensive consultation and conversation with the community before the 'art' making can begin. *Burning Daylight*, the company's third major work, was four years in the making, and included three creative developments, two community showings, and a heck of a lot of tea drinking with the elders in Broome. The final work is a manifestation of traditional and contemporary performance that was conceived through negotiation and collaboration with the traditional communities (Aboriginal, Malay, Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese) of Broome.

The work takes inspiration from journalistic descriptions of the bar scene in Broome around the turn of the last century where it is described as an 'Asian Wild West', and re-graphs this into the present, setting the production in the streets outside a notorious pub on a Broome-style Karaoke night. It tells the story of a group of young people who are kicked out of a bar around closing time. A series of contemporary dance scenes unfold expressing the friction, cultural collisions and local humour in the part of Broome known as 'The Bronx'. A lone cowboy comes to town, his presence echoing across the last century, stirring ghosts of the town's past and provoking the street gang into a surreal collision of past and present in the darkest hours of the night.

Burning Daylight: Place, history and community aims to give audiences a greater understanding about Marrugeku's process of making this work with community in Broome. It includes an interview with Senior Yawaru Law man and traditional owner, Pat Dodson, and essays by three Australian academics: Ian Maxwell, Jacqueline Lo and Kerrie Schaefer. It comes packaged with a DVD that contains full documentation of the 2009 production.

The first chapter is an 'in-conversation' interview between Patrick Dodson and Marrugeku Co-Artistic Director, Rachael Swain. In this transcript, Patrick speaks about the importance of engaging young people in dialogue about culture, life and responsibilities, and the necessity to find appropriate ways to tell stories that connect with young people and help them understand culture.

Ian Maxwell's *On Community* explores the notion of 'art' v 'community cultural development'. He writes about the many challenges of doing 'remote', community-based, intercultural arts work, and of making performance *in communities*.

In *Tangled histories, haunted streets*, Jacqueline Lo gives a history of interracial relationships between Asian and Indigenous people living in Australia, paralleling this with the narratives presented in the three karaoke films in the show.

The final essay by Kerrie Schaefer highlights the significance and impact that place, identity, belonging and co-existence has on the work that Marrugeku produces.

I hope you find this book and DVD a valuable resource that enriches your *Burning Daylight* experience and deepens your understanding of making performance in community.

Rosie Dennis
Publication Manager and Editor

In conversation
**Patrick
Dodson
and
Rachael
Swain**



Right
Patrick Dodson.
Image Rusty Stewart.

An edited transcript of an interview with Senior Yawuru Law man and traditional owner Patrick Dodson by Marrugeku Artistic Director Rachael Swain.

RACHAEL SWAIN: Can you outline how you became involved as a cultural consultant in Marrugeku's *Burning Daylight* and *Buru* process?

PATRICK DODSON: Primarily I got involved through Dalisa's (Pigram) request and her wanting to do the right thing by consulting the senior people and making sure sensitivities would be covered.

That immediately got me thinking about how this country came to be for the Yawuru people and there are some things about that history that are restricted, and there are some things that can be said that are about teaching young people. So I thought, I'll take responsibility for that and not leave that responsibility with her to decide what should and shouldn't be said, and how it should be told.

Fundamentally, I felt it important to make a contribution and give her support in the way she wanted to put this together in a creative manner, one as her grandfather, and also as a senior Yawuru person. Through my knowledge of culture and my interest in people and the inter-generational leadership that goes on, particularly the role that Dalisa plays not only in the schools but also in the community, I felt that I could support her concern for proper protocol to be adhered to. This is a good thing to be doing and this is a small thing I can contribute and provide.

RS Can you take us through the practical steps of how Dalisa went about consulting with you?

PD Well I think to get a common meeting time and place was part of the battle, but Dalisa was persistent about that. She sent me a couple of emails, she spoke to me prior to sending the emails to check that sending the emails wasn't going to create an obligation on my behalf. Then we organised a time to sit down and talk, for me to understand what she was contemplating, over a cup of tea in the backyard of her home. That gave me a sense of where she was coming from and then I started to inject into

that ways that I thought could be possible if they fitted with the artistic talents that she's got and that Marrugeku's got, because I don't have those talents.

Once she got a bit of a storyline together and consulted with the people in Marrugeku she came back to me to see how it was panning out. I was able to put some comment around that, not the totality of it, but certainly around some of it. She's a young lady, so I was thinking as I was speaking to her, so that she wasn't going to be exposed to any allegations or accusations about infringing any cultural protocols from a law side. This is important for her as well as for me. She understood that and she is certainly very sensitive to that.

I THINK THERE'S AN ENORMOUS CHALLENGE TO MARRY A LOT OF THE TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICES IN A CEREMONIAL SENSE AND ALSO THE PROTOCOLS AND RESPECT AND VALUE SYSTEMS THAT RELATE TO KINSHIP AND OBLIGATIONS

We talked mainly at home, which was relaxed. She was also nursing a young baby so that was a bit of a distraction for me, being a pop.

RS Can you give an overview of what you think the challenges are facing young people in Broome today?

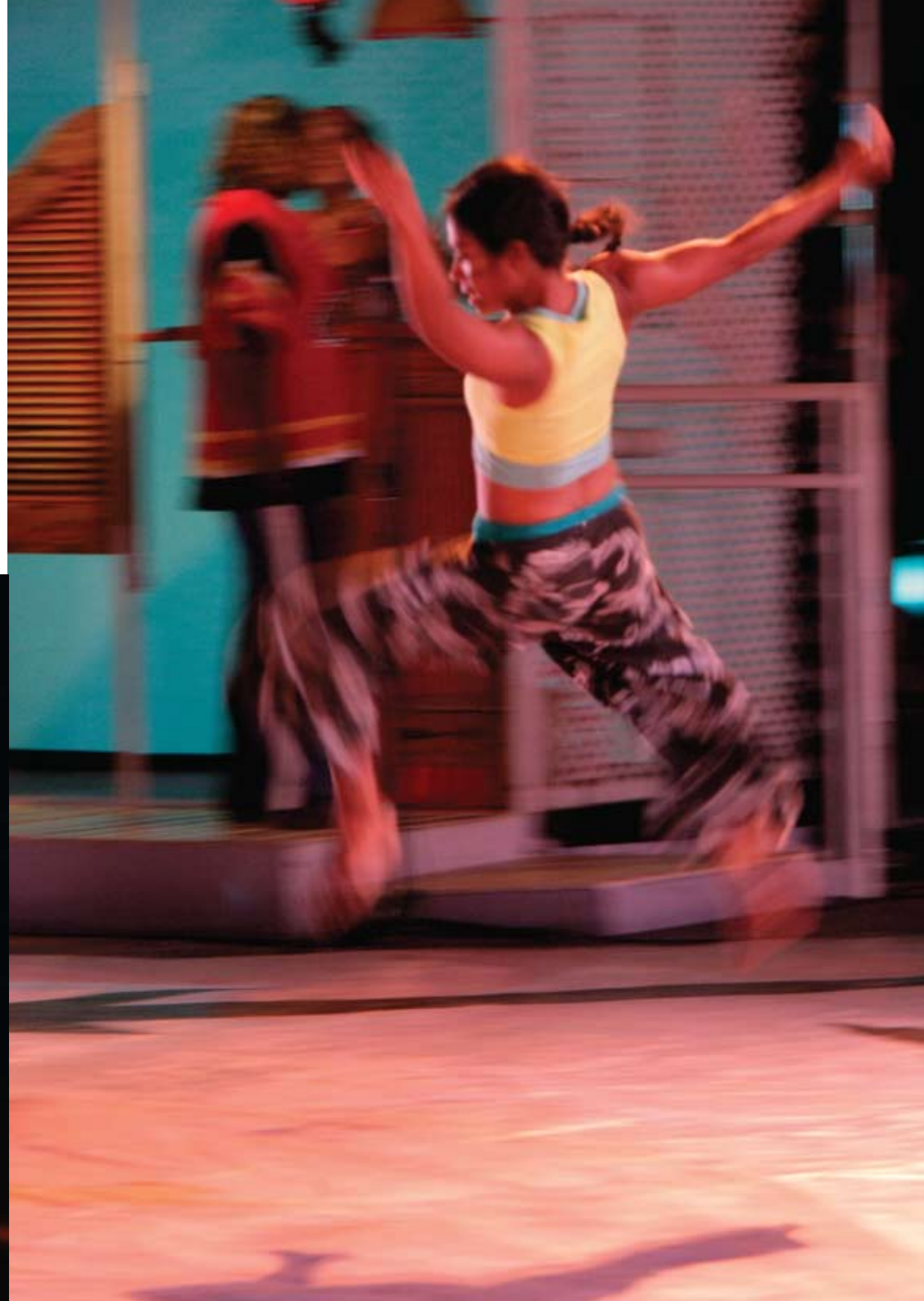
PD I think there's an enormous challenge to marry a lot of the traditional cultural practices in a ceremonial sense and also the protocols, respect and value systems that relate to kinship and obligations that arise from that. I think there are some real challenges about that as people become more immersed in a Western style of living. Broome is going to be an important focus point not only for the potential impacts on industrialisation, but also the tourism content of this place will increase irrespective of industrialisation. There will be a lot of young people to get skills and

qualifications in the Western world whether they're accountants, planners, engineers or developers – all sorts of things which provide the basis for a life which would be good for any individual.

Far right
Dalisa Pigram.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.

How does the identity of a young Yawuru person get moulded and cemented through understanding of the cultural ways and practices? I think the use of art in this form in terms of play and in terms of combining aspects of traditional story and protocols with the artistic form that goes and underpins the presentation of that is a very good way of, at least, opening up the possibilities.

Below
Dazastah.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.



The young people need to understand culture and be sensitive to it and to understand these obligations. There's not always the serious side of customary law and often people have a very narrow view about what customary law is. Customary law is about these sorts of things in fact, it's not just about one little aspect. So the work of Marrugeku gives a good avenue and a good foundation base to start talking about this. It's the sort of thing I would have seen our old people having done because it's in a public space. To get young people to do things in a play, that is not directly linked to the protocol and practices in a ceremonial setting, gives a good foundation for them to begin to understand culture.

Hopefully we'll have some independent economic base to focus on cultural sustainability – issues of language, dance, song, ceremony and knowledge of country, as well as the importance of the Westernised education system. If we can pull all that together in the way we are proposing, and that's the leadership of the Yawuru people, then I think the young Yawuru kids, subject to their desires, have got a very bright future.

RS How important do you think it is to find accessible forms to teach culture to the younger generations?

PD I think the particular beauty of this project, and projects where a young person like Dalisa is involved, is that it helps tremendously in how to improve the communication and participation of young people in understanding the process about culture, life and responsibilities. So often it's not just young people, I'm talking about young adults as well, find it very difficult to interface with the older people because they tend to think the older people have this bank of knowledge about culture.

There's some embarrassment because of what has happened. People's languages have been denied to them, people's opportunities to attend ceremonies have been denied to them, people have been subject to heinous policies like being taken away. So there's a social context there when you talk about cultural things. I think a lot of the young people think, "Oh that's for the old people," and "It's something that's special and unique

and I really can't get involved with that." They respect it, but they think it is rarefied and got very little to do with the day to day. I think when you have young people like Dalisa demonstrating not only through her work, but her practice of dealing with the old people, it helps others see that you can have serious communication, and you can get things done that respects both the young person's insights and abilities, and the older person can provide some advice and feel important in that process too.

I think there is a lot more focus that has to go on the intergenerational relationship so the storytelling component can find it's home in settings like this. You've seriously got to make the effort these days as there are many other distractions – technology, the IT stuff, the iPods, all these things have to be thought about in a different way when it comes to transmitting culture.

In the old times we'd sit around a fire and tell a story partly to put you to sleep as a young kid, but also the distractions weren't there – the videos, all these other things weren't available. So we've got to utilise the technology in a way that helps to get the storytelling across, and to do it in a relevant medium for young people so that they can clearly get a sense that it's not ancient history. This is really about stories that relate to modern situations with a serious ethical and moral message underpinning it.

Excerpt from an interview with senior Yawuru Law man Patrick Dodson, on Burning Daylight and the new youth work Buru, Broome, July 2009.



I THINK THE PARTICULAR BEAUTY OF THIS PROJECT IS THAT IT HELPS TREMENDOUSLY IN HOW TO IMPROVE THE COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THAT PROCESS ABOUT CULTURE AND LIFE AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

PATRICK LIONEL DODSON

Patrick Dodson was awarded the Sydney International Peace Prize in May 2008 for his courageous advocacy of the human rights of Indigenous people, for distinguished leadership of the reconciliation movement and for a lifetime of commitment to peace and justice, through dialogue and many other expressions of non-violence.

In 1974 Patrick was ordained as a Catholic Priest. After years working in remote Aboriginal communities, Patrick left the Priesthood to become director of the Central Land Council.

During the 1980s Patrick progressed to Chairman of the National Federation of Land Councils. In 1987 Patrick was appointed as a Royal Commissioner inquiring into Aboriginal deaths in custody.

In 1991 Patrick was appointed as inaugural Chairman of Australia's Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

Patrick is currently the Chairman of the Lingjari Foundation, Chairman of the Kimberley Development Commission, and Chair of the Kimberley Institute Limited.

Patrick lives in his Yawuru community on his traditional country near Broome.

Left
 Antonia Djiagween and
 Sermsah Bin Saad.
 Image Rod Hartvigsen.

On community

Ian Maxwell

Marrugeku's core ideal is the aspiration, succinctly summarised on the company's website, to develop "intercultural productions in situ in remote communities". This is no small ambition; while any number of companies make 'intercultural' work and others specialise in site-specific practice, Marrugeku's commitment to creating work drawing upon a diversity of forms, genres and skill sets in remote communities increases the complexity and risk of their work by several orders of magnitude. The logistics of setting up, coordinating artists' schedules, getting equipment where it needs to be — and getting it to work once it is there, far from the kinds of support and fall-back networks available to artists working in metropolitan centres — alone are daunting enough, and that's before you actually get to making the art.

In this short essay I want to take up the question of making art —specifically, in the case of Marrugeku, performance — *in communities*. To do so, I want to consider the idea of 'community' itself, in particular as the term has turned up over the past half century in relation to arts practice, and in the familiar term 'community theatre'. Although, as I will argue, Marrugeku is a company committed to developing its productions in communities rather than a 'community theatre company', the matter of what it is for the company to do this kind of work might be usefully unpacked by considering the ways in which theatre practitioners have approached the idea of 'community' in the past.

'Community' is a word that packs a significant rhetorical punch. In the mid 1970s the cultural historian Raymond Williams wrote that:

Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term (1983 76).



MARRUGEKU IS A COMPANY COMMITTED TO DEVELOPING ITS PRODUCTIONS IN COMMUNITIES RATHER THAN A 'COMMUNITY THEATRE COMPANY'

Above
Senior Yawaru Law Woman Cissy Djiagween performing the Welcome to Country with Tian Hall, Opening night, Broome 2006. Image Rod Hartvigsen.

Above right
Performance Still, Burning Daylight, Broome 2006. Image Rod Hartvigsen.

Below right
Receding Storm on Roebuck Bay. Image Murrnji Photography.



Williams was observing that ‘community’ tends to be invoked to suggest a certain earthy purity — a social organisation on the model of a village, perhaps, characterised by an ideal of consensus-based democracy — in which individuals are united by what the pioneering nineteenth century German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies called *Gemeinschaft*: a subordination of individual interest to the collective, brought together by a ‘unity of will’. Community, in this sense, as Williams suggested, is what we might call a ‘motherhood’ concept: no-one is going to argue against its fundamental goodness. This is the idea of community that is invoked by spokespeople on the evening news: the claim that “I speak for the XYZ community” is generally taken as a straightforward authorisation; an implicit permission to speak for a consensus position to which all those individuals are assumed to subscribe.

The idea of community as a concrete, defined *thing* in which inheres a set of shared values, beliefs and more lies close to the development of the community theatre movement, particularly in the United Kingdom, in the 1970s. The English scholar Baz Kershaw, one of the founding members of the theatre group Welfare State, has written at length about that movement, observing archly that the “socio-political aspiration” of community theatre in Britain in the 1970s was “a fairly common affliction”. The community theatre movement, he explains, was an explicitly ‘alternative’ movement, which sought in the idea of community the possibility of a political agency unsullied by the hand of the state, or of capitalism. By ‘returning’ to grassroots, drawing upon ‘folk’ forms, and expanding the context of performance practice, the movement both indulged the ‘motherhood’ ideal of community, and presumed the power to restore dysfunctional communities — those ruined, perhaps, by the brutalities of colonialism, capitalism, or simply by the elitism of metropolitan cultural centres — to their original states. Community theatre could do this by relieving those communities of the burden of false consciousness — the sense of inferiority inculcated by decades and centuries of oppression — and thereby restoring their lost purity by performing the truth of their condition, or healing

them through the righteous labour of (to be fair, best-intentioned) theatre-making.

The problem with the socio-political activist model of community theatre, however, beyond its tendency to radically over-estimate the potential of aesthetic practice to generate socio-economic outcomes, is that it was built upon a naïve idea about what community is: that a community is a straightforward, definable social fact. The artists drop in, from over *here*, identify the community, offer it the gift of art, or the capacity to discern the value of its own folk-ish ways, and then leave.

A more nuanced understanding of the idea of ‘community’ acknowledges that communities are usually complex, rather than simple, phenomena, characterised as much by struggles to claim the right to speak for the community, as being straightforward sites of consensus. For Kershaw, a community, at best, might be understood as sharing a symbolic language, without necessarily agreeing on the meaning of those symbols.

To be fair, the community theatre movement, insofar as it might be called a movement, moved through several models of engagement with its constituency. Where, for example, John McGrath’s *7:84* looked to revive folkloric forms to create work, performed by professional artists, which would then tour remote to towns and villages in order to alert citizens both to their own (political) situation, and to their own cultural heritage, Ann Jellicoe’s community play model in the 1980s involved members of a town or village performing themselves for each other, guided by a script provided by a professional playwright engaged for the task. In the 1990s, Kershaw’s own company, Welfare State, took a different tack, conceiving the role of artist as animateur, stirring a community into creating its own work for itself, rather than performing the community back to itself.

In Australia, perhaps the most high profile example of a company that itself traversed a range of approaches to making community-based theatre is that of Death Defying Theatre (DDT). Originally a troupe of improvisers working out of the Bondi Pavilion tailoring work for schools and workplaces, in 1985 DDT took up a residency in the mining town of



'COMMUNITY' EMERGES AS SOMETHING OF A BATTLEGROUND: A SITE OF COMPETING INTERESTS, PREJUDICE AND, NOT INFREQUENTLY, CONFLICT.



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Cast *Burning Daylight*, Broome 2006. Image Rod Hartvigsen.

Collinsville, Queensland creating, over a period of several weeks *Coaltown*, a piece in which the life of a tight-knit mining community was put into performance. This project was funded through the long-since defunct Art-in-Working-Life initiative of the Australia Council, a source of funding set up to enhance the arts experiences of working people. When that funding model was withdrawn — as government policy turned against such activist aspirations — DDT took a radical turn, relocating its offices in suburban Sydney, and embarking upon a long-term consultative engagement with local people to see what work a theatre company might best do in such a context.

I hesitate to use the idea of ‘community’ to describe the constituency with which DDT found itself working precisely because there was no one, singular community to be found in Auburn, inner western Sydney, where they set up their office. Rather, there was a complex, often fractious, unsettled — and unsettling — mixture of competing interests and claims to identity. To simply celebrate a rainbow diversity from a position of tolerant cosmo-multiculturalism — the kind of position advocates of a simplistic multiculturalism might encourage in such a context — was not an option. Instead, DDT, soon renamed Urban Theatre Projects (UTP), set about a series of ambitious works which attempted to grasp, reveal and animate the complexity of late twentieth century urban life, bringing established artists into extended, site-specific relationships with a diverse range of often competing interests. In such a milieu, conventional ideas about the integrity (and fundamental benevolence) of ‘community’ were impossible to sustain. Instead, ‘community’ emerges as something of a battleground: a site of competing interests, prejudice and, not infrequently, conflict. (While some might argue this is an effect of post-industrial late-capitalist urbanisation, it is perhaps more likely that Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft* ideal of community as unified totality never really existed at all.) Above all, UTP came to understand itself less as something external to whatever it was that was going on in this fractured, contradictory and difficult ‘community’, as, in fact, one of the ‘players’ in the ongoing contests and struggles.

Indeed, this is the kind of position that Kershaw moves towards. Developing the argument made by Raymond Williams, Kershaw uses the term community to refer instead to that which links and mediates, on one hand, the everyday experiences of individuals with, on the other hand, historical changes on a global scale. On this account, community is not a stable essence, but rather a dynamic interface between our face-to-face experiences and wider, more abstract structures. As might be expected, on such an account, community is anything but a stable phenomenon. Rather, it is the scene in which the often contradictory forces of the world at large are brought into the practices of the everyday.

In Australia, too, the movement from a straight-forward idea about community and the ways in which artists might be involved with people living in complex social worlds is reflected in the history of the Australia Council. Celina McEwen, in her 2008 doctoral thesis *Investing in Play: Expectations, Dependencies and Power in Australian Practices of Community Cultural Development*, traces four distinct phases of the Council’s funding of community-oriented arts. First, the Community Arts and Development Fund (later Program) was set up by the Whitlam Government in 1973; attempts by the subsequent Fraser Government to cut funding to such projects were prevented in part, argues McEwen, by Malcolm Fraser’s own small-l liberal views about the ‘civilising’ power of the arts: the erstwhile Program was promoted to the level of a Board of the Council, with all the marks of legitimacy and responsibility which attend to such a status. Among the effects of this were included a marked increase in opportunities for viable career paths for community-oriented artists which led, too, to an increasing impact of what McEwen describes as ‘progressive’ or even ‘radical’ artists, aesthetics and values in the field.

The years of the Hawke (and later Keating) Government saw a significant rolling back of this agenda. The rise of state-endorsed market economics demanded that the Community Arts Board (CAB) be able to demonstrate its cost-effectiveness and national economic benefits. The articulation of a rigorous rationale resulted in the CAB being reconstituted as the



Above
Scott Grayland.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.



Below
Sermseh
Bin Saad and
Dalisa Pigram.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.

Far right
Red Ripples,
Cape Leveque.
Image
Murrnaji
Photography.



Community Cultural Development Board, thereby linking community-based practice to a broader agenda, cloaked in the rhetoric of ‘culture’ as a driver of economic benefit, generating employment and economic growth: a far cry from the alternative agendas of the earlier community theatre movement.

The fourth phase identified by McEwen is that period of neglect and systematic cut-backs under the Howard Government — the graphs McEwen produces documenting the deterioration of funding for the CCD sector are starkly revealing. Where it survived at all, the idea of community tended to melt away, replaced by the discourses of regionalism, audience (that is, market) and economic development. By 2004, the CCD field had been so undermined and destabilised that the Australia Council announced a dramatic restructure, dissolving the Community Cultural Development Board and replacing it with the ‘Community Partnerships Committee’. On their website, the CPC sets out their mission:

Partnerships between the arts and non-arts sectors will advance positive outcomes for building culturally vibrant communities and provide working opportunities for artists.

The shift from a progressive, politicised agenda is complete: community-based art is, on this model, about the creation of vibrancy in the places in which people live, and, explicitly, the provision of opportunities for artists. At the same time, however, such a position works hard to step back from pure economic instrumentalism: there seems to be a suggestion that, in the face of the endemic depopulation of drought-stricken, undernourished regional centres, a degree of vibrancy does not merely add to economic value, but might make the difference between there being anything there or not. Further, such

Partnerships take time to develop and maintain, require a shared exchange of ideas, and can include a range of contributions from the partners such as financial commitment, in kind support, networks and other non-financial resources.

As I suggested above, however, it would be wrong to place Marrugeku in the lineage of community theatre per se. However, the general question of the relationship between theatre practice and what is, as I have suggested, the deceptively complex concept of community helps us to understand Marrugeku’s work, and the company’s rationale for undertaking that work in the way in which they do.

Marrugeku does not make a claim for the value of its work *exclusively* in socio-political terms, or what Rachael Swain calls “CCD outcomes for a community”. Of course, real, tangible benefits flow to the places and people where and with whom they work because of the profound commitment of the company to work in particular ways. There is no claim, however, that the work is intended to effect radical change. They are, in Kershaw’s words, free of the “affliction of social-political aspiration”. Times have moved on, and Marrugeku’s aspirations are artistic, inflected by a deep care and commitment to the places in which the work is made, and the people with whom it is made. Swain explains it to me like this:

The company first and foremost makes the art that it feels is needed in Australia at this moment in time, and it happens that the best artists to make that work are mostly from the community we are working in with the additions of a few specifically skilled outsiders. However, parallel to our artistic goals, we have long-term concerns that have grown out of our practice and the shows themselves over time. We find ourselves close to strong currents of issues, feelings and histories, which sit hand-in-hand with our art making.

Marrugeku has made a decision that an ethically appropriate way to access and to make art with those resources requires that the company place itself in those “remote communities” for extended periods, to negotiate and observe protocols, and to steep themselves in the sensibilities in which those resources have developed. The company, in a real sense, becomes part of the place in which it is working, and this allows the work to speak to, with and for the concerns of that place. Rather than community being a fixed idea to be placed into a relationship



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Trevor Jamieson.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.

with art, place, artistic practice and ethical commitment are brought together to produce community, a community of which Marrugeku is a part.

In Marrugeku's formula, quoted at the beginning of this essay, there is the echo of Kershaw's thinking about community: community might be seen as something of a middle term, sitting between the everyday, physical reality of 'place' on the one hand, and the abstraction of 'culture' on the other. Put another way, community might be understood itself as the performance of the interaction between the abstractions of the 'global' and the realities of the everyday, enacted across the ground of place; 'culture' is that matrix of ideas, perhaps, that emerges from this performance.

And indeed, this is the kind of community into which a show like *Burning Daylight* offers a glimpse: a poly-cultural mixing pot in which people are making a world for themselves as they are buffeted by forces which have all sorts of abstract names — 'the global economy', 'colonisation', 'post-colonisation', 'post-industrialism' and so on — but which have material effects rendered at the level of the everyday: How will I work? How will I get by? What am I worth? What kinds of relations do I have with my fellow humans?

The addition of the adjective 'remote' to 'communities' has an added resonance in the contemporary Australian context. Those of us living on the coastal fringe generally encounter the term 'remote community' either in the romanticised, touristy abstractions of 'the Red Centre'. This is particularly the case over the past two years, in which the Howard (and subsequently the Rudd) government mobilised the Northern Territory 'intervention'. The media has been flooded with images of 'remote communities' as sites of rampant petrol sniffing, alcoholism, and sexual abuse — the legacy of contact and subsequent exercises in colonial engineering. One of Marrugeku's legacies, in the context of such a

saturation of the mediascape, may well be to offer a counter-narrative: remote communities not (just) as places of social disintegration, but of vivacity and creativity.

In fact, the question of 'remoteness' is at the heart of Marrugeku's project. For whom are these communities in which productions are created remote? Presumably for Marrugeku's international audience: for the urban European festival audience Broome is about as remote a community as it might be possible to imagine. In a production such as *Burning Daylight*, 'in situ community' brushes up against — is brought into relationship with — a different kind of community: the community of festival-goers that is the market for such a work such as *Burning Daylight*. In this encounter, the local finds its test in the most globalised of contexts. We might even speculate that in the process, the idea of community itself finds a new cadence and set of values.

But Marrugeku is about making productions. The work — the company's aspiration — is artistic, rather than oriented towards any order of cultural engineering. The company recognises imaginative, technical and energetic resources that stimulate and engage them as artists, and make the effort to locate themselves into places where they may be able to engage those resources in a spirit of creative collaboration. The problem the company sets itself is how to make their work with integrity — observing protocol, respecting place.

Above all — and this is the thread that connects the work to that of a company such as Urban Theatre Projects — the company invests itself in *being there*, becoming part of the scene, the lifeworld of a particular place, allowing time to play its part: the engagement and involvement in place, with the unstable, unfolding, contested ground of community, and with those strange, hard-to-grasp abstractions that we call culture, is, perhaps most significantly, an engagement *in and through time*. And as might be expected, the way is not always smooth or without controversy; that, perhaps, is the point, and what makes the art so good.

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IAN MAXWELL is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts School of Drama, where he majored in Directing. Subsequent to that training, he embarked upon academic work at the University of Sydney, where he completed his PhD – an ethnography of Hip Hop culture in the suburbs of Sydney in the 1990s – in 1997.

He has published extensively on a range of topics, including his 2003 book, “Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes”: Hip Hop Down Under Comin’ Upper (Wesleyan), chapters in several collections and a number of journals.

Ian is deputy chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney. He is also President of the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies and a Vice-President of Performance Studies international.

In 2008 he was awarded the Marlis Thiersch Prize for research excellence in an English-language article published anywhere in the world in the broad field of theatre and performance studies for his essay on Victor Turner.

Tangled histories, haunted streets

Asian-Indigenous relations in Broome

Jacqueline Lo

Multicultural Australia did not begin, as generally held, in the 1970s with the official demise of the White Australia policy. Northern Australia was a multicultural place where Asians and Aboriginal communities traded, coexisted and procreated prior to the British presence on the continent (Ganter 2006). Yet, within the larger context of settler Australian history, there is still the perception that Asians and Aboriginals do not have much in common. The Australian story is largely constructed in terms of black/white race relations. According to Regina Ganter, the non-British histories of Australia have “never been unknown, but they have also never been privileged into the master narrative of domestic histories.” The histories have been conveniently forgotten because they do not extend British history, and are thus, “not remembered very hard”. (28)

The separate but parallel management of Asians and Aboriginals solidified in the first half of the twentieth century: the former were controlled by immigration laws (most notably the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*) that kept them outside the borders of the nation, while the latter were confined to reserves and fringe settlements. The White Australia Policy and its breath of legislative instruments not only prevented non-Europeans from entering the country but also prevented Asians who were already in the country from associating with Aboriginals. Like many other states, the Western Australian government introduced its own *Aborigines Act* in 1905 to prevent sexual contact and business dealings between Asians and Aboriginals. Under the legislation, the category of Aborigine included so-called “full-bloods” and “half-castes”, as well as their children.

Peta Stephenson asserts that the Western Australian government saw its “Aboriginal problem” largely in terms of the thriving pear-shelling industry that centered around Broome. In the late 1890s the white population of 700 was dwarfed by more than 2500 indentured Asians who arrived each year to work. The ethnic composition of lugger crews usually consisted of Japanese employed as divers, tenders (whose task was to hold the diver’s air hose line and work line) and engineers, and Malays and “Kupangers” (from West Timor) as crewmen. Casual Aboriginal labour



THE MOST COMPELLING REASON FOR WHITE OPPOSITION TO ABORIGINAL- ASIAN LIAISONS WAS THE THREAT OF AN INCREASE IN THE "COLOURED" POPULATION.

also supplemented Asian crews. (Stephenson 72-3) Although northern coastal communities such as Darwin, Broome and Thursday Island were exempt from the *Immigration Restriction Act* due to the pearling industry's reliance on Asian labour, the state governments were concerned about the economic and social implications of Asian and Aboriginal communities living in such close proximity so strong measures were taken to minimise contact between the groups. Stephenson believed that the legislation, introduced ostensibly to protect Aborigines from Asians, worked to protect white commercial interests by restricting Asian economic enterprises. The authorities were particularly concerned about indigenous women mixing with Asian men. Many reasons were given to justify anti-miscegenation laws including concern about the availability of the women as domestic labourers, increases in diseases, and alcohol and opium consumption. The most compelling reason for white opposition to Aboriginal-Asian liaisons was the threat of an increase in the "coloured" population. (Stephenson 75)

Above
Broome Pearling
Luggers.
Image courtesy of
Murrarji Photography.

Far left
Sermsah Bin Saad,
Scott Grayland and
Dalisa Pigram.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.

Asian men and Aboriginal women took great risks in forming these relationships. The police were authorised to charge and deport Asian men found to be in a sexual relationship with indigenous women. The women caught in such relationships were sent to state homes, missions and reserves, and separated from their children. Permission had to be sought from the Chief Protector of Aborigines (the most well-known being A.O. Neville) for any non-Aboriginal man to marry an Indigenous woman. The complexity of the permission process deterred many couples from formalising their unions. According to Stephenson, the Asian men and Aboriginal women “were forced to continue their relationships in clandestine ways and their children remained illegitimate. Indigenous-Asian relationships were shrouded in secrecy, with many fathers reluctant to acknowledge their mixed-race children for fear of reprisal. The threat of fines, imprisonment and deportation also kept many men from publicising their relationships with their Aboriginal partners”. (75-6)

Burning Daylight bears witness to this history of interracial intimacies, and the secrecy, denial and punishment wrought by official policy. Marrugeku was previously based in Arnhem Land where, according to its company director, Rachael Swain, cultural practices remain strong despite significant social problems. Broome, by contrast is marked by the “legacy of the assimilation policy of the Western Australian Government which was one of the most brutal and far reaching. And even though Broome was exempt from the White Australia Policy it still had a major effect. Cohabitation was illegal, so there were a lot of deportations, a lot of ‘lost’ relatives and family breakdowns. The forced removals had a big impact on the way communities and families passed on stories, dance, song and relationship to country. We were interested to work with what the legacy of this means for young people in Broome now.” (Swain cited in Gallasch 12) The production uses the trope of ghostly haunting to explore the legacy of this history. While ghosts and haunting are used to great theatrical effect in the production to enable multiple stories to be told, there is also an ethical and political dimension to the concept of haunting that gives the show added complexity and edge. Avery Gordon in her book *Ghostly Matters*

argues that haunting is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis but rather a social phenomenon that provokes us to redress past or present injustices.

[Haunting] always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present. But haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing something-to-be-done [...] haunting [is] precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, the moment ... when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done. (xvi, emphasis added)

The arrival of a mysterious cowboy to the ‘Bronx’ late one night awakens the ghosts of the past. The core narrative of the show comprises three interracial love stories that end tragically in death, deportation, and the destruction of family life. The stories, featuring historic Broome figures such as the Aboriginal stockman, the Japanese geisha, the Aboriginal waitress and the Indonesian pearl diver, are first presented as technicolour Noodle Western videos projected on two screens that accompany the live karaoke performances on stage.

The first karaoke video, sung in Japanese by Yumi Umiumare, depicts the story of a geisha who is presumably in an unhappy relationship with a mean-looking Indigenous stockman/cowboy. She falls in love with another Aboriginal cowboy and they decide to run away together one night. The “mean” cowboy finds out about this plan and a typical Noodle Western shoot-out takes place between the men on the night. To the horror of the geisha, the mean cowboy kills the lover cowboy, and the final scene of the video depicts her performing rituals at his grave while being watched by a little mixed-race Indigenous cowboy who might be her child. The video not only foregrounds the prevalence of Asian (in this case Japanese) and Aboriginal intimacies but more importantly, demonstrates the complexity of interracial relationships that go beyond simplistic accusations of racialised



Previous pages

Trevor Jamieson
and Yumi
Umiumare.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.

“goodies” and “baddies”. In this case, the baddie is the indigenous cowboy who kills his fellow Aboriginal against the backdrop of assimilationist politics.

The second video similarly complicates the black-white-Asian racial formula by foregrounding Asian-Aboriginal rivalry. Sung by Sermsah Bin Saad, the video dramatises another love triangle: the baddie is the Chinese bar-owner who, spurned by the white man who loves an Aboriginal woman, reports the pair to the authorities. The Aboriginal woman and her children are forced onto a truck by the police and taken to the Beagle Bay Mission while the white man watches helplessly. In these final scenes, the little cowboy from the first video reappears on the second screen watching the removal of the children and separation of the family. The video also uses newspaper headlines to foreground the anti-miscegenation policies that form the background to the story. The heading “Native Woman Entraps White Man: Woman Removed For Her Own Good ” contrasts sharply with the drama enacted, and provides further ironic comment on how official history is constructed, and the truths that are silenced and marginalised in its wake.

The final karaoke video, sung by Dalisa Pigram and Trevor Jamieson, depicts the mixed-race family of a Malay pearl-diver, his indigenous wife and their young son. The family has a simple but tidy home decorated with both native and Malay ornaments. The pearl-diver departs for another season at sea and soon after, his wife receives a notice of his deportation for breaking the law. The police arrest the man before he has a chance to say goodbye to his family and all that remains on the jetty, in keeping with the melodramatic style of the genre, is his red headscarf. This time, the newspaper headlines “Crossing The Colour Line: Malay Diver Deported For Marriage To Native” points to the use of the print media as a means of controlling society through such cautionary tales of interracial liaisons. The final scene of the video shows the young son walking out of his home carrying his father’s batik bag and wearing his headscarf, perhaps to carry on the tradition of diving for a living.

The three videos proffer a multifaceted view of Asian-Indigenous-white relationships against the backdrop of the anti-miscegenation policies of the time. *Burning Daylight* is careful not to simplify the tangled histories of the various communities nor does it lay blame solely with one or other of the racial groups. The show does however draw attention to the consequences of this history of silence and violence. The young mixed-race cowboy/diver’s son who witnesses the three relationships in the videos functions as a dramatic device to connect the past as depicted on the screen with the present events on stage. His history is the inheritance of the young people in the ‘Bronx’ today; in generational terms, the young cowboy probably belongs to the cohort of the teenagers’ parents. As the night unfolds, and the videos are screened, the ghosts of interracial entanglements step out of their assigned place and time, and intrude on the contemporary world of the young people. Their appearances exacerbate the sense of displacement in the young people. The show’s final song, performed by Dazastah, captures the sense of cultural confusion of today’s youth:

*Poor balla me, mix breed me,
I am a Brother and stranger on the streets,
I’m a stray mongrel sensing the scent,
of black flowers wen I walk in the darkness,*

*I’m your little Mongrel, a seeds seed of the blossoms,
Blown with the winds of time, weathered by the seasons of problems,
knocked unconscious by stolen cultures, I dream of my history,
Robbed by Lawful Vultures, My past is such a mystery,*

CHORUS

*How come ME
The past come to haunt my soul,
How come me,
The past come to call my soul,
How come me,*

*The past come to taunt my soul,
wanna take me home and won't let me go,*

*I hear her crying wen I sleep,
Geisha girl weeps, wen the wind breathes,
you fought my Neville and his devil crimes,
to be with your cowboy man one last time,*

CHORUS

*Geisha Girl, you long for his ghostly shadow,
Though it's clear I'm in the dark,
you have no way of letting your secret stray,
except black flowers blossom on the grave,*

CHORUS

*Your souls tango around in my head,
I fight this devil till the day of my death,
though your secrets are locked on your grave,
those black flowers that blossom have something to say,*

The song alludes to the silence surrounding the history of Asian-Aboriginal relationships but it also asserts that although the geisha's "secrets are locked on [her] grave, those black flowers that blossom have something to say". The black flowers can be interpreted as the descendants of the doomed lovers, who have been "knocked unconscious by stolen cultures", and whose history has been denied or repressed by the authorities ("Lawful Vultures"). In the course of the show, however, the young people arrive at a better understanding of their history and are thus able to give voice to what had previously been condemned by mainstream society and hidden by their own communities. Although the past continues to "tango around [their] heads", knowledge of this history also provides them with the determination to "fight this devil till the day of [their] death". This final number comes after a sequence of dances, beginning with Dalisa Pigram's poignant solo number, that shows the slow transformation of the teenagers from a collection of angry people whose bodies literally contort

Far right
Sermisah
Bin Saad.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.



with restless visceral energy to becoming individuals with a sense of their own history, culture and place in the world. The variety of traditional and contemporary dance vocabularies drawn from Indigenous, Asian and western forms deployed in the final dance sequences dramatise this process of reclaiming Broome's cross-cultural heritage.

TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY DANCE
VOCABULARIES DRAWN FROM INDIGENOUS,
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THE FINAL DANCE SEQUENCES DRAMATISE
THIS PROCESS OF RECLAIMING BROOME'S
CROSS-CULTURAL HERITAGE.

At this point it is useful to reflect on Gordon's assertion that hauntings are characterised by producing a sense of "something-to-be-done". Hauntings are not just about displacement – "when people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away" – which certainly happens in the production, but more significantly, hauntings animate us to amend past injustices and give voice to those who were previously denied the right of representation. *Burning Daylight* does not attempt to exorcise the ghosts of the past and to rid them from the history book even as we begin, in the wake of Prime Minister Rudd's apology, to write a new chapter in the story of Australia. Rather, the show invites us to dance with the ghosts and to give them the appropriate recognition that they deserve through the creative use of theatre and dance. This process of reckoning with the past is communicated in the final scene of the performance when the mean cowboy returns to lay flowers on the grave of his murdered rival. His action can be interpreted as an act of atonement for past injustices but this does not mean that the impact of past actions is erased or neutralised. The legacy of past actions, including race-related policies live on in the psyche of the present generation: "The past come to haunt my soul/.../The past come to call my soul/.../The past come to taunt my soul, wanna take me home and won't let me go."

Burning Daylight does not conclude, in Noodle Western fashion, with a happily-ever-after scenario where the good guy gets the girl and wins the fight. The final dance features the two pairs of ghost lovers (the geisha and the mean cowboy, and the native woman and her white partner) complimented by a third pairing representing the present generation (Owen Maher and Antonia Djiagween). The dance, which accompanies Dazastah's song cited above, is marked by unresolved tension as well as passion and desire. Both the song and the dance suggest that there is no easy resolution to dealing with the past: the ghosts do not disappear even when the past is acknowledged in all its complexity and contradictions. Reading *Burning Daylight* through the framework of "hauntology" draws attention to reconciliation as a process that requires sustained political action rather than arrival at an end point.

Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, towards a counter-memory, for the future. (Gordon 22)

Burning Daylight offers a creative and theatrical way to engage in a dialogue about the impact of the past on the present. It does not condescend to simplistic ways of resolving our colonial heritage within the context of our increasingly global and multicultural present. Instead, the production asks us to think deeply and act ethically about how we may each, in our own way, take responsibility for past actions as citizens of this nation, in order to create a more equitable future for all Australians.

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damage to property or injury to
Persons using this Jetty.*



Above
Streeters Jetty.
Image
Rosie Dennis.

Below
Grading
and sorting
mother-of-pearl
shell at Broome.
Image
Frank Hurley,
1885-1962.
Courtesy
National Library
of Australia.

Far right
Yumi Umiumare.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.



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Place, identity, belonging and performance

Marrugeku's Burning Daylight

Kerrie Schaefer

Marrugeku, an intercultural performance company co-directed by Rachael Swain (also co-artistic director of Stalker Theatre Company) with Dalisa Pigram, is renowned for the production of spectacular site-based performances in creative collaboration with Indigenous artists and communities in remote Australia. Marrugeku's *Mimi* (1994-1996) and *Crying Baby* (1998-2001) – the date range indicates the period of creative development to world premiere – were created over a number of years in and with the Kunbarlanjinja community in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. As Swain has noted, in working with remote Aboriginal communities, Marrugeku does not simply translate or interpret traditional myths and stories into contemporary performance form. Rather, the company is involved in a “deep processing of the shock and conflict of our difference and our stumbling steps towards understanding each other and, as such, understanding life together in Australia” (Swain in Gilbert and Lo 2007: 79). Marrugeku's process of grappling in situ with conflicting senses of place, identity, belonging and co-existence, impacts on the performances produced, the mode of reception they demand and perhaps, even, our individually and collectively determined senses of who and where we are.

Marrugeku's *Burning Daylight* explores a very particular place or locale: Broome, Western Australia, the company's home base since 2004 and a “diverse and complex” place “with an extraordinary history of cultural relations between the local Aboriginal and immigrant Japanese, Chinese and Malay communities” (Marrugeku 2008: 2). There isn't one story to be told here, as Dalisa Pigram and Rachael Swain note in a documentary on the making of *Burning Daylight*. The story to be told must be as multifaceted as the place itself, and its people. Arguably, all places closely considered are rich, complex, multi-layered, rough-edged (Casey 1997), and *en procès*. Indeed, for cultural geographer Doreen Massey what is special about place is “not some romance of a pre-given collective identity or the eternity of the hills” (2005:140) (or any other ‘natural’ feature you may wish to substitute in place of English ‘hills’). Rather, what is special about place is its “throwntogetherness” and “the unavoidable challenge

of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and geography of thens and theres) (Massey 2005: 140). In other words, place is an event in the sense of a “constellation of processes rather than a thing” (Massey 2005: 141). Place as an event is “open and internally multiple. Not capturable as a slice through time in the sense of an essential section. Not intrinsically coherent” (Massey 2005: 141). The very ‘event-ness’ of place, according to Massey, “necessitates intervention” in so far as it “requires that we confront the challenge of the negotiation of multiplicity” (2005: 141), and what is at issue are “the terms of engagement of those trajectories (both ‘social’ and ‘natural’), those stories-so-far, within (and not only within) that conjuncturality” (2005: 142). For how we engage with place will determine what we make of both it and ourselves, since “who we are very much reflects where we are” (Casey 1993: 226).

Given ‘the event of place’, might performance be well placed to respond to the challenge of the negotiation of multiplicity entailed therein? Paul Carter and Stephen Muecke have argued, separately, that we can’t apply our intellectual heritage to this task. Knowledge-garnering in the tradition of the European enlightenment involves employing the technologies of scientific rationalism which have always assumed the linearisation of time and space (Carter 1996: 9 and Muecke 2004: 8-12). It is my contention, based on analysis of Marrugkeu’s *Burning Daylight*, that some kinds of performance – site-specific, community-based, for instance – engage modes of knowing which are attuned to the ‘event of place’ and therefore, able to offer a response to the perennial question “if everything is moving, where is here?” (Massey: 138).

There are many ways to ‘know’ a place such as Broome, ranging from the painstakingly detailed knowledge of the complex interactions of wind, water, sand and rock, through to the historical knowledge that can be garnered of a place, and which is sometimes exploited as heritage, particularly as commodity for the tourist trade. Places so encrusted with meaning(s) are much more than mere ‘venues’ for site-specific performances. They are already, in Mike Pearson’s term, “aggregations of

narratives”, and performances in/on/of them can only be negotiations with or explorations of them. Not all the narratives thrown up can be handled at once though; such is the richness or thickness of place when attentively examined. There are at least three main narratives that are engaged in *Burning Daylight*. The first is historical. This is the story of Broome as an ‘Asian Wild West’, partly reconstructed via journalistic accounts of the local bar scene around the turn of the last century when Broome was a thriving industrial town. The second narrative is the local story, built unashamedly on the local knowledge of the performers (for some of whom Broome is ‘home’). It overlays the historical narrative but adds to this story by telling about the impact of immigration (White Australia) policy and cohabitation laws on local people through to the present day. Finally, there is the tourism narrative, an externally produced, commercialised image of the place as an all-year round, remote, unspoilt desert/beach resort, in which history and local cultures are commodities for consumption by transient outsiders.

Before I take a closer look at the narrative strands engaged in the performance of *Burning Daylight* I want to note the set as it creates or makes the space for their particular interaction. Typical of Joey Ruigrok van der Werven’s designs, the non-naturalistic set features skeletal installations which are multi-functioning, signifying a type of built place but also able to be used practically. Laid out around the rim of a semi-circular space from left to right is, first, a karaoke bar (hung with red lanterns and calligraphy screens). The back wall of the bar doubles as a cinema screen showing Noodle Westerns films representing Broome’s ‘Asian Wild West’ past. To the right of the bar is a road or transit way lined by a row of streetlights and boab trees. The road/transit way separates the bar from a large billboard hoarding which projects tourist images of Broome, and also doubles as a film screen. Underneath the hoarding is a covered stand for a live band. A little further along to the right is a park bench under a streetlight. The audience is seated in an adjoining semi-circle completing the circular performance space. In the middle of the circular space is a large dance floor.



Above
High Tide Antics.
Image
Murrnji
Photography.

Right
Katia Molino,
Owen Maher and
Dalisa Pigram,
Zürcher Theater
Spektakel 2007.
Image
Christian Altorfer®.

The images advertising Broome to the tourism industry dominate the performance space. There are four images displayed in sequence. The first projects the picture of a palm-tree fringed beach taken as a large orange sun sinks into the ocean. Curved across the top left hand corner of the image are the words: "Discover the pearl of the north". The second billboard projects probably the best-known image of Broome for non-locals like myself. A camel train stretches across Cable Beach at sun set (in Broome the sun is, apparently, always setting). The text across the top of the image says: "Discover our hidden treasures". The third billboard image shows a man and woman meeting in the middle of a resort-style swimming pool. The rather non-descript image urges us to "Discover paradise". The last billboard shows a group of Aboriginal kids delightedly jumping in a creek bed with the words "Discover a different Australia". Each image exhorts the onlooker to "discover" Broome in some way or another, in the process turning tourists/visitors into explorers of old, setting out on voyages of discovery. Massey critiques of this type of thinking ("an un-thought cosmology" (2005: 4)) about space and place:

Implicitly it equates space with the land and sea, with the earth which stretches out around us. It also makes space seem like a surface; continuous and given. ...So easily this way of imagining space can lead us



to conceive of other places, peoples, cultures simply as phenomena 'on' this surface. It is not an innocent manoeuvre, for by this means they are deprived of histories. Immobilised they await ... (for our, or global capital's) arrival. They lie there, on space, in place, without their own trajectories (2005: 4).

The performance calls into question this habit of thinking of space and place as a superficial surface. The action that plays out on the ground directly in front of and below the billboards (though they are never referred to – verbally or non-verbally – by the performers) expands or opens up the imagination of the single, monologic narrative and allows space for a multiplicity of messy trajectories – both local and global, past and present. In this way the performance company takes back its hometown base, and though it doesn't shun external or global representations of Broome, it demonstrates how local knowledge might actively play a part in re-imagining that world from the ground up, rather than accepting a single, fixed, globalised depiction.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY AS MEMORY AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE UNDERPINS THE COMMUNITY-BASED ETHOS OF THE PERFORMANCE MAKING PROCESS AND IS EVIDENT IN THE PERFORMANCE OF *BURNING DAYLIGHT*.

The local and historical narratives are closely inter-related. Historiographer Keith Jenkins suggests that rather than ask what history is we should ask who it is for (Jenkins 1991: 18) since:

History is basically a contested discourse, an embattled terrain wherein people(s), classes and groups autobiographically construct interpretations of the past literally to please themselves. There is no definitive history outside these pressures, any (temporary) consensus only being reached when dominant voices can silence others either by overt power or covert incorporation" (1991: 19).

These minoritarian histories force a re-examination of performance and other embodied practices (storytelling, dance, spoken language, song, bodily inscription, and so on) as systems of "learning, storing and transmitting knowledge" (Taylor 2003: 16). This expanded understanding of what constitutes knowledge places more importance on history as continuity into the present and as 'memory', rather than as a body of recorded 'facts' about the distant past. An understanding of history as memory and local knowledge underpins the community-based ethos of the performance making process and is evident in the performance of *Burning Daylight*.

The bar scene around which most of the action in *Burning Daylight* occurs is based on journalistic accounts of Broome at the turn of the last century. However, this documentary/archival account of an 'Asian Wild West' does not dominate, though it does inform, the setting and nature of the action. Most of the action occurs in or around a pub hung with red lanterns and calligraphy screens for karaoke night (crab racing and wet T-shirt competitions are entertainments for other nights of the week). It is crammed with bodies dancing, stumbling, drinking and singing. Two young men take over the karaoke machine. As they warble away a fight breaks out at the other end of the bar. The bar lady breaks up the fight and expels the pugilists from the bar, out onto the street. Other bodies follow. A couple of bodies head over to the bandstand, and pick up an electric guitar and African twin drums that are already there (with a turntable and acoustic guitar) and begin to play. A group of four or five performers begin to dance a vernacular choreography made up of traditional Aboriginal, contemporary European, African dance and Asian martial arts forms. The free-flowing dance serves as an introduction to the dynamic and hybrid world of contemporary Broome. The party continues, partly in the bar and partly outside it in the street, in mostly humorous, good spirits though there is also fractious edge to the frivolities.

Into the mix is driven a large Toyota Land Cruiser with a massive roof bar. It is parked at the end of the road/transit way beside the bar. An Aboriginal



stockman steps out of the vehicle and walks into the performance space. He unbinds a large whip from the belt around his waist, places it on the ground and then dances solo in the middle of the street space. The other performers recede into the shadowy background, as if they are watching a ghost – and quite possibly they are. This is the first of a series of scenes from the past interwoven, from here on in, with the present action. The stockman/cowboy is joined on the floor by a couple of initially curious dancers who make an approach and draw the man into a dance. He cracks his whip in a display of masculinity matched by a young rapper who comes on and lays down the law of the street, telling the cowboy to “get back”. The next time we see the cowboy is in a short film, projected on both the billboard and pub screen as a performer sings karaoke in

Far left
 Scott Grayland,
 Dalisa Pigram
 and Dazastah.
 Image
 Rod Hartvigsen.

Below
 Unidentified
 Aboriginal adults
 and children
 outside bar,
 Broome, ca. 1900.
 Courtesy National
 Library of Australia.



accompaniment. The cowboy plays the love interest of a geisha. However, their plans for an illicit meeting are uncovered by another jealous cowboy who intercepts the two lovers, challenges the man to a duel and kills him. The short film story is transmuted into live action as three geishas laying blossoms at the foot of a grave perform a sword dance in search of the killer. When they find him, a hilarious (and extremely skilful) scene of mock/cartoon violence occurs as the performers, separated by several feet, attack each other with lethal sword and martial arts movements while acrobatically recording the results of these (gestured) strikes on their own bodies. The two following films that spill out of the long night spent on the streets of Broome are slightly more serious than the melodramatic introduction to the genre bending Noodle Western film form. Both films, accompanied by sung Karaoke, deal with the racist immigration and cohabitation laws that applied from the mid-19th well into the 20th century, and that led to the forced deportation of non-White Australian residents and prohibited interracial relationships, respectively. The live performers double as the main characters in the films creating a fluid sense of movement between past and present action and, also, the sense that this version of history is rooted in the living memory and local knowledge of the performers in the company and community members consulted as part of the community-based performance making process.

About 25 years ago, community arts advocate and theorist Owen Kelly drew a distinction between experiential ‘knowledge’ and ‘information’, pointing out that the former allows people to form a *cumulative, and comprehensible, view of how their world operates [...] which is a necessary condition of democratic participation* (Kelly 1984: 84). ‘Information’, on the other hand, prepackaged and presented as individuated items of ‘news’, decentres us by suggesting that everything important happens elsewhere. It is:

A window to a world for which there is no door, We ignore what is going on around us, and stand with our noses pressed up against the window trying to peer into this other world to find out what is really going on. (Kelly 1984: 79).

Adhering to the principles of Australian Community Cultural Development (CCD) policy/practice and protocols for producing Indigenous performing arts, Marrugeku’s work values this distinction between knowledge and information and uses performance as a tool to make space for integrated and democratised knowledge making, hence the particular versions of history (a people’s history) presented in the performance. As with any good CCD process, as explained by David Watt, “the process of making performance thus becomes, explicitly, an implement in the making of community and in the generation and negotiation of knowledge which will serve that community’s ends” (2009: 206).

Some of these ‘ends’ are visible and others less so, particularly to a non-local audience member and performance analyst such as myself. At one – and perhaps the most basic – level, this multi-layered performance is clearly (in part) telling a story about the legacy of racist government policies on groups of people in a place that was richly multi-cultural before Multiculturalism became official government policy (with the slow unravelling of the White Australia Policy) in the 1970s. But how is this story told and who is it for? This is an important question, for as Maryrose Casey has recently written, “There are issues in relation to the framing of Indigenous theatre that need to be addressed to ensure that the telling is efficacious for the communities who own the stories rather than, in effect, just another form of exploitation (2009: 137). Marrugeku’s *Burning Daylight* eschews the re-presentation of individual or personal testimonies of oppression, preferring instead to work communally generating stories through generic and popular mainstream performance forms, which are both non-specific and accessible. In this way, the company avoids the limiting theatrical dynamic of locating audiences as witnesses attending to testimony of past oppressions ‘in good faith’ (Casey 2009: 133). In the final scene of the performance, a young male performer recites a rap/ ballad over several verses (with chorus), drawing the various performance narratives together around the central theme of identity and belonging.

As the young man sings, the ghosts of the past – the cowboy and geisha, Aboriginal woman and white man, Asian pearler and Aboriginal woman – are conjured into the present. These spectral figures haunt the performance space serving to remind the spectator of the multiple layers of history and geography that constitute processes of individual and collective identity formation in Broome. These processes of identity formation are portrayed as ongoing and dynamic as the use of popular mainstream forms (particularly musical/lyrical ones such as rap) attests to. In *Burning Daylight* the legacy of racist policies lives on in the lives of a cross-section of young people in Broome who are, at the same time, shown actively negotiating complex local identities through multiple, global influences – as are many young people in cities around the world.

On another level, there is a complicated working through of embodied and emplaced knowledge by the company dancers, led by Dalisa Pigram for whom Broome is home and who worked as a performer, co-choreographer and cultural liaison on *Burning Daylight*. To create the original dance scenes in the performance – and there is some stunning solo and ensemble work – the performers travelled to communities and consulted (dancing as well as talking) with a range of cultural elders (Aboriginal, Malaysian, Japanese, etc.) then transmuted these consultations on the rehearsal room floor into dance scenes which augment the more literal storytelling aspects of performance. In the *Burning Daylight* documentary Pigram and Trevor Jamieson discuss the subtleties of drawing on their own knowledge of traditional Aboriginal dance without breaching community protocols, and of the challenges involved in turning the (comparatively) small and contained movements of Aboriginal dance into the large and fluid ones suggested by Serge Amié Coulibaly, co-choreographer in African (Burkina Faso) and contemporary European (Belgian) dance. The negotiation of embodied knowledge that occurs on the rehearsal floor happens at an intensely personal level and is also a collective process that materially enacts composite identities as

Right
Trevor Jamieson
& Yumi Umiumare,
Zürcher Theater
Spektakel 2007.
Image
Christian Altorfer©.

THESE SPECTRAL FIGURES HAUNT THE PERFORMANCE SPACE SERVING TO REMIND THE SPECTATOR OF THE MULTIPLE LAYERS OF HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY THAT CONSTITUTE PROCESSES OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY FORMATION IN BROOME.

well as startlingly new vernacular choreographies. For me, this is the most exciting aspect of Marrugeku's work: the bringing into being of new modes of identity, belonging and co-existence via performance about 'the event of place'.



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Marrugeku

MARRUGEKU is at the leading edge of Australian contemporary intercultural performance. Founded in 1994, the company is currently under the artistic direction of Rachael Swain and Dalisa Pigram. Drawing from the lives of people and communities living in remote North West Australia, Marrugeku Theatre Company share the memories and traditions of Indigenous culture through contemporary dance-theatre. Place and identity, migration and misplacement, and the constant shifting world of cultural identities and globalised fantasies constantly inform the direction of their productions.

Their ambitious large-scale outdoor works are created through long-term collaborations with a multicultural cast of professional and community-based artists. The company utilises flexible contemporary dance languages, relevant traditional and contemporary music, physical theatre, circus, installation and video art. Each visually spectacular production is designed to tour regional and remote communities as well as major Australian and international arts festivals.

Marrugeku's previous works have followed their world premiere seasons in WA (*Mimi* 1996, *Crying Baby* 2001, Perth Festival commissions) with significant touring lives. They've been presented by festivals as well as community events in carefully chosen cultural and environmental sites in Broome, Perth, Kunbarlanjana, Maningrida, Elcho Island, Yirrkala, Brisbane, Uluru, Sydney, Canberra, The Philippines, The Netherlands, New Caledonia, Belgium, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland and Brazil.

www.marrugeku.com.au

MARRUGEKU STEERING COMMITTEE

Dalisa Pigram, Rachael Swain (Co-Artistic Directors),
Lorrae Coffin, Matthew Fargher, Debra Pigram

MARRUGEKU

Far left
Dalisa Pigram and
Trevor Jamieson.
Image Rod Hartvigsen.

Following page
Yumi Umiumare,
Dalisa Pigram, and
Trevor Jamieson.
Image Rod Hartvigsen



Burning Daylight

Place, history
and community

Conceived by

Director
Choreographer
Assistant Choreographer
& Cultural Liaison
Set Designer
Director & Cinematographer
(Karaoke Videos)
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Musical Director & Composer
Karaoke Songs by
Dramaturgy
Additional Dramaturgy

Co-Devisors & Performers

Performer (2009)
Co-Composers & Live Musicians

Original Co-Devisors

Production Manager
Company Manager
Lighting Operator
Sound Operator
Producer 2009 Tour
Original Producer

Rachael Swain
Dalisa Pigram
Rachael Swain
Serge Aimé Coulibaly

Dalisa Pigram
Joey Ruigrok van der Werven

Warwick Thornton
Stephen Curtis
Geoff Cobham
Matthew Fargher
Amanda Brown
Josephine Wilson
David Pledger
John Baylis

Trevor Jamieson
Dalisa Pigram
Owen Maher
Sermah Bin Saad
Antonia Djiagween
Yumi Umiumare

Kathy Cogill
Lorrae Coffin
Dazastah
Justin Gray

Katia Molino
Scott Grayland

Mark Haslam
Clytie Smith
Marko Respondeck
Reuben Hopkins
Harley Stumm for Performing Lines
Margurite Pepper Productions

Burning Daylight

Place, history and community

Publication Manager & Editor	Rosie Dennis
Essays	Jacqueline Lo Ian Maxwell Kerrie Schaefer
Design	Alphabet Studio
Images	Rod Hartvigsen Christian Altorfer

DVD Credits

Karaoke Films

Karaoke short film DVD

Stir Fry

Black Pearl

Troubled Waters

Writers	Josephine Wilson Rachael Swain
Director and Cinematographer	Warwick Thornton
Editor	Greg Ferris
Composer	Amanda Brown
Costume designer	Stephen Curtis
Producer	Rachael Swain
Singers	Asako Isawa Mark Williams Ursula Yovich
	Richard Boxhall Amanda Brown Sophie Glasson John Howells Pete Smith Jonathan Zwartz

Interviews

Film Editor & DVD Production	Greg Ferris
Camera for Interviews	Brandon Batten
Cinematography for rehearsal and live performance sequences	Warwick Thornton
Publication Manager & Editor	Rosie Dennis
Interviewers	Rachael Swain Rosie Dennis

Message Sticks Documentary

Production Company	Artemis International Pty Ltd
Producer	Brian Beaton
Director	Warwick Thornton
Writers	Rachael Swain Warwick Thornton

Special thanks to: Penny Bolton (ABC), Julia Overton (Screen Australia), Liz Ward (Screen West), Christine Nitz (Marcom) and Brian Beaton (Artemis Films) for allowing Marrugeku to include the *Burning Daylight* Message Sticks documentary on this DVD.



The publications project *Burning Daylight: Place, history and community* was assisted by the Western Australian Government through the Department of Culture and the Arts.



Final Development & Tour Partners, 2009

The final development and tour of *Burning Daylight* are produced by Performing Lines for Mobile States.

The development and WA seasons are supported by the Western Australian government through the Department of Culture and the Arts. The tour is supported by Mobile States, a national touring initiative of the Australia Council, the Australian government's arts funding and advisory body, and by the national performing arts touring program, Playing Australia.

Mobile States is a consortium of contemporary performance presenters: Adelaide Festival Centre, Arts House, Brisbane Powerhouse, Performance Space, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts and Salamanca Arts Centre, along with tour producer Performing Lines.

MOBILESTATES
TOURING CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE, AUSTRALIA



Far left
Sermsah Bin
Saad and Yumi
Umiumare.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.

Original Development Partners, 2004-06

Burning Daylight was originally produced by Marguerite Pepper Productions.

The project was assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council's New Australian Stories Initiative and its Dance, Theatre, Music, New Media and CCD Boards, and DCITA through Festivals Australia; the Western Australian Government through the Department of Culture and the Arts, and the Kimberley Development Scheme; the NSW Government through Arts NSW, The Sidney Myer Fund, Advanced Land Resources, the Kimberley Stolen Generation Commission, Country Arts WA, Healthway, Australian Film Commission, Screen West and Stalker Theatre Company.



Inside back cover

Relaxing in March before the start of the 1973 pearling season, young Japanese divers on lugger moored in Broome.

Image
Michael Jensen.

Back cover

Katia Molina and Dalisa Pigram.
Image
Rod Hartvigsen.



Marrugeku is at the leading edge of Australian contemporary inter-cultural performance. The company creates large-scale cross-cultural works that blend contemporary indigenous dance with physical theatre, screen-based media and live music.

Burning Daylight: Place, history and community aims to give audiences a greater understanding about Marrugeku's process of making work with community. It includes an interview with Senior Yawuru Law man and traditional owner Patrick Dodson and essays by Ian Maxwell, Jacqueline Lo and Kerrie Schaefer.

The book comes packaged with a DVD that contains full documentation of the 2009 production.



**MARRUGEKU**