

# Chapter 10

## *Burning Daylight: Contemporary Indigenous Dance, Loss and Cultural Intuition*

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### 10.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the choreographic process developed to create the intercultural dance theatre production *Burning Daylight*, produced in Broome in the far North of Western Australia between 2004 and 2006. The large-scale outdoor, dance-video production, produced by Marrugeku, premiered in Broome in August 2006, was presented by Zürcher Theater Spektakel in Zurich, Switzerland in 2007 and toured nationally in Australia in 2009.

In reflecting on community research and rehearsal processes I will propose that, for new forms of intercultural-Indigenous storytelling to emerge, alternative approaches to ‘listening’ are required. The chapter presents a practice-based approach to new forms of intercultural-Indigenous storytelling that emerge from new and nuanced approaches to ‘listening,’ practiced by theatre makers and audiences alike. It outlines a collaborative intercultural process for performance making in a series of case studies presented from my perspective as director of the work. Drawing on an analysis of preparations and rehearsals, I outline a method for actively ‘listening to place’ and community in remote Indigenous Australia which is discussed as ‘Listening to Country.’<sup>1</sup> This aim

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**Warning** This chapter contains references to deceased people that may be sensitive to some Aboriginal people from communities in Western Arnhem Land and The Kimberley. Please consult with knowledgeable local people before sharing it with members of these communities.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Country’: (Ab English) an area of land formations and at times stories which a group or individual may have custodianship over. Indigenous leader Professor Mick Dodson explains that, “When we talk about traditional ‘Country’... we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians... we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, Country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains” [1].

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of the chapter is to present a model that identifies an ‘ethics of listening’ in intercultural-Indigenous art making and ‘culture making.’ As a multi-vocal attempt to document and archive artistic and cultural processes and outcomes the chapter includes descriptive accounts from the subjective view of the artists, directly reflecting on complex processes leading to and emerging from the rehearsal room.

## 10.2 Marrugeku

Marrugeku is an intercultural performance company working at the nexus of Indigenous and non-Indigenous experience, creating large-scale dance theatre productions in remote Indigenous communities. Each production tours to remote communities, urban Australian and international arts festivals. The work enables the Company to explore cultural difference and, by extension, parallel issues of intersubjectivity, which share some commonalities with the discourse of reconciliation. Marrugeku’s current base in Broome, Western Australia, is geographically and culturally located in close proximity to South East Asia.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence mapping Asian Indigenous experience in remote Australia has become central to our practice.

Marrugeku’s dance theatre is negotiated with Indigenous elders, community leaders and law men and women, created wholly within Indigenous communities, and practiced by a devising cast, three quarters of whom identify as Indigenous. The Company works in an Indigenous frame of cultural production that is also an intercultural frame, in a state of continuous negotiation. I have adopted the term ‘intercultural-Indigenous’ to describe the Company and its work, which Maxwell describes as follows:

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 with art, place, artistic and ethical commitment are brought together to produce community, a community of which Marrugeku is part. [4, p. 31]

## 10.3 *Burning Daylight* Production Outline

*Burning Daylight* takes its inspiration from journalist’s descriptions of the bar scene in Broome around the turn of the last century where it was described as an ‘Asian Wild West.’ The performance re-graphs this into the present, setting the

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<sup>2</sup>Marrugeku was based in Kunbarllanjja, Western Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, from 1995 till 2002; and has been based in Broome, in the north of Western Australia since 2003.



**Fig. 10.1** *Burning Daylight* Zürcher Theater Spektakel 2007. From left to right Antonia Djiagween, Sermsah Bin Saad, Yumi Umiumare, Katia Molino, Dalisa Pigram, Owen Maher (Photo: Christian Altorfer)

production in the streets outside a notorious pub on a Broome-style karaoke night. Inspired also by the ‘constructed’ or ‘painted world’ of the filmic and photographic style of Australian artist Tracey Moffatt as well as by her use of cultural subversion of genre, *Burning Daylight* takes place on a site which is part ‘Noodle Western’ set, and part contemporary remote town transit zone (Fig. 10.1).

A group of young people 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, stirring up the ghosts of the past and as the long night unravels he provokes the street gang into a surreal collision of past and present in the darkest hours.

*Burning Daylight*, which means ‘wasting time’ in local Aboriginal English,<sup>3</sup> uses popular culture forms of karaoke song and video, rap and rock as well as contemporary dance to explore the experience of young people in Broome.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Aboriginal English languages vary regionally. Broome Aboriginal English is informed by the town’s history of immigration and contains words in a variety of languages as well as Australian Pidgin.

## 10.4 Contemporary Dance in a Context of Loss and Forced Removal

The Broome Indigenous community's particular relationship to place is forged in part by the history of atrocities carried out by the Western Australian Government's so called 'Protector of Aborigines.' With the adoption of the WA Aborigines Act in 1905, the Chief Protector was made legal guardian of every Aboriginal and 'half-caste' child under 16, giving him and his staff far-reaching powers to remove children from their families. "I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. They soon forget their offspring" (quoting 'Travelling inspector' James Isdell [2, p. 11]).

In 1937, the first Commonwealth-State conference on 'native welfare' adopted 'assimilation' as national policy, on the grounds that, "The destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption" [2, p. 11]. The children who were removed from their families under the 1905 Act (and subsequent legislation) are known as 'The Stolen Generations.' The 'Bringing Them Home' Report on the findings of the National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families estimates that "not one Indigenous family has escaped the effects. Most families have been affected in one or more generations by the removal of one or more children. Nationally, the Inquiry concludes that between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970" [2, p. 4].

These genocidal policies resulted in loss of connection to parenting, family, the practices of song, dance and language and the transmission of Indigenous knowledge systems and direct ceremonial connection to country. The policies had far reaching consequences in Broome and the surrounding areas. Large numbers of forced removals in Broome and the Kimberley area resulted in the loss of many traditional songs, dances and stories and with these losses, connection to country took on very specific meanings. Further to this was the complex mixing of cultures under government control that came about with Broome's exemption from the White Australia policy due to the pearl shell industry. Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian and Filipino workers were allowed to enter Broome but as indentured workers their lives were strictly controlled by the Federal and State governments. The complex and painful history of these issues meant that the development of a dramaturgy and choreography for *Burning Daylight*, grew out of very particular relationships to country, steeped in loss, removal, deportation and the ghostly presence of multiple cultural traditions and stories. 'Listening to Country' and stories in Broome, has taken the form of 'listening' for multiple memories and multiple losses. This listening requires an understanding of an ephemeral 'memory of tradition' as a valid and important place to create from as an artist.

The creation of a contemporary intercultural dance practice in an Indigenous context of loss is the subject of this chapter. I propose the complex terrain of

contemporary Indigenous art generates its own meanings and own audiences as it develops. The following Case Studies draw on rehearsal notes from the very early research stages of *Burning Daylight*.

### **10.4.1 Case Study: Researching Burning Daylight**

In early 2004 in the wet *season* heat, Dalisa Pigram, co-Artistic Director of Marrugeku, and I were researching our proposed new production for the Company. We used the quiet of the wet season to visit elders, traditional owners of both sides of Rubibi (the Broome peninsular), cultural workers, young people and other local artists as we attempted to bring the community consultation to a point where it was possible to begin rehearsals.

The Rubibi Native title case before the State Court was at the forefront of everyone's minds, effecting modes of thinking about culture and ownership as well as access to story and country. Issues of major industrial land development, the traditional stories for the country that was being claimed and the dislocation of the Broome youth from their cultural practices were constantly brought up in conversations with the elders.

Despite the urgency we felt to gather the narrative content for the production, there was no going against 'Broome time.' The rhythm of our work had to stay in tune with the wet season heat, the rains, Native Title Court sessions and there was no time for 'business' when the tides were right for fishing. As stories, observations and cultural perspectives were put forward, we filtered the propositions through our perspectives as theatre makers. Our task was to decide which memories to summon forth, which ghosts to stir and which were best left to the elders, social workers or native title lawyers to deal with. From Marrugeku's perspective, there were multiple questions to process with both practical and conceptual implications: What could the position of local traditional myth narratives be in a contemporary work reflecting Broome now? How might we stimulate and develop a contemporary dance language that reflects Broome's multi-ethnic nature? What connection might this have with the Yawuru dance forms of the traditional owners of Rubibi? What position would memory take in the piece? How far could we push issues of land development in the light of the native title claim without losing the project to local and national politics? How could the piece bridge the gap between the concerns of the elders and the concerns of the young?

Patrick Dodson, senior Yawuru Law man and Traditional Owner, and Dalisa's 'Pop' had told us to make a cake and come around for a cup of tea on Sunday morning to discuss the project. We sat around for some time with Pat and family members while they relaxed after working on the block in the early morning cool. Slowly, all in good time, we got around to the project.

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Patrick has the habit of replying tangentially, or answering a question of mine with another question. I focus on the detail of his comments, even when I don't understand their relevance at the time, knowing from a decade of work in Arnhem Land, an answer to a question from a law man can reveal meaning to you over time, once you are ready to understand it.

After we outlined fledgling ideas for the new work, Patrick responded by telling us there are significant stories for Rubibi, the Broome peninsular, which are 'inside stories' which we can't know but which will underpin what we do with the project. They are Bugarrigarra, The Dreaming, creation stories. He also said there are stories which sit on the top of those, which are currently public and we can know. This idea that there are stories which underpin our work but which we cannot know as uninitiated, young or non-Indigenous community members is central to my developing ideas about appropriate dramaturgy for contemporary Indigenous performance. The role of a cultural consultant like Patrick connected to an experimental dance theatre process such as this is to know the stories on our behalf and to steer us in the right direction. Our task, in part, is to listen for what we are *not* being told.

We proposed the development of a new dance theatre language inspired by Broome's multi ethnic-indigenous histories. Patrick responded by talking about the current status of the native title case. He said the government are trying to tell the Yawuru they don't exist. In the court case this week the state government's lawyers had said that the Yawuru men were impotent which was why the Yawuru woman slept with the Malay, Japanese and Chinese. He talked at length about how the government can't handle the cultural complexity which has been navigated by the local community for generations. Patrick reiterated the stories I have heard from some of the elders about the so-called Protector of Aborigines making Asian-Indigenous marriages illegal through the cohabitation laws. Despite this, life carried on behind closed doors and there are now many 'mixed breed'<sup>4</sup> offspring in Broome. The government has informed them that they have lost their culture and their right to native title. Our mixing of traditional and contemporary dance and the intercultural dance forms we are researching has to sit within these issues. This is Patrick's answer to my question.

Patrick went on to discuss the '12-Mile' boundary fence, built 12 miles from the centre of Chinatown and how the local mob<sup>5</sup> were told they couldn't enter town without a permit stating they were working for a white man; a system which was practiced in much of Western Australia including Perth, until the late 50s. This forced the Yawuru to move their ceremonial dance grounds from the centre of Broome out beyond the 12-mile boundary.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Mixed breed': (Broome Aboriginal English) People of multi-ethnic descent.

<sup>5</sup> 'Mob': (Ab English) A group of people.

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Now the government is informing the Yawuru that they have no right to native title in Broome because they do not have continuous ceremonial connection with their land. Patrick scoffs at the Government offering money for land, saying the issue is not money at the moment, the issue is extinguishment of Yawuru culture. The very existence of Yawuru dance is therefore currently a volatile political issue in the community and by extension politicises our choreographic process.

The days were passing and Dalisa and I were still trying to find our way into the core concepts of the show. We drove round Broome, pulling into driveways, slowly ambling up to houses (always displaying an air of 'Broome-time'—no rush despite our urgency). We wandered around air-conditioned supermarkets waiting to bump into people, sat down with old girls<sup>6</sup> (often accompanied by their daughters) to introduce the idea of us working in town. We made and remade appointments trying to fit in with the busy schedules of law men and women. We made cakes, brought diabetic biscuits, ran errands, brought around fish or other bush tucker after fishing trips and handed out money for groceries.

Dalisa and I sifted through the breadth of the information, searching for interpretive pathways into the material whilst we waded through the suspicion brought about by the conditions of the native title case. In retrospect the key to actually managing to complete a production in this climate was that we allowed ourselves to take on board the complexities without needing to resolve them outside of our practice, knowing that we would process the material 'on the rehearsal floor' in the detail of improvisation, character, choreography and design. Art making has always been a site for paradoxes, for poetic and multifaceted expression that can contain both a personal and a political gaze. This lengthy research process took me five trips to Broome before we could contemplate beginning rehearsals in May 2004.

## 10.5 Negotiating the Contemporary in the Native Title Era

In the context of Australian land rights and native title legislation, questions regarding the representations of the past in relation to present conditions have acquired a wide-ranging social, political and economic significance. Broome's culturally complex, and at times painful history, and its current interrogation under the Native Title Act was clearly having a significant impact on our work. Static definitions of culture seemed to be eroding the community's confidence in the ways it had negotiated shared ground between separable cultures over the past century and the interwoven

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<sup>6</sup> 'Old girls': (Ab English) Senior Aboriginal women. Can refer to law women.

life-worlds of those of Yawuru and those of non-Yawuru and multi-ethnic decent. As we navigated these issues from our perspectives as artists, I was aware of a parallel interrogation of the challenges confronting anthropology. In anthropologist Benjamin Smith's view:

the ambiguous resonance of tradition in native title processes is generated through on going differences between European-Australian understandings of tradition based in fixity and stability and Aboriginal practice in which knowledge and law provide templates for the dynamic forms of Aboriginal existence... In the native title era it is vital that anthropology moves beyond reifying accounts of Aboriginal tradition and grasps and articulates more nuanced and complex understandings of Aboriginal cultural production... It is only by taking up this challenge that anthropology can be considered to be truly doing its job. [7, p. 231]

Our processing of notions of 'interculturalism' and the cultural production of contemporary art sat within these debates. The challenges facing anthropology, outlined by Smith above, echo challenges facing the role of the performing arts created in Indigenous contexts. How we process notions of the 'traditional' in our performance making is directly effected. Looking back on this period, I believe that the repercussions of the native title case meant that many of the elders were too busy, cautious or 'hurting' due to the proceedings, which left us in the streets of Broome at night, talking to ghosts. *Burning Daylight* became a dialogue between the young Broome locals now, confident in their cultural diversity, yet negotiating the presences and absences of access to their own Indigenous culture, and the intergenerational ghosts who haunt them as they wander the streets at night.

In a discussion of Walpiri kinship, Anthropologist Michael Jackson states,

the link between people and the Dreaming is entirely reciprocal since without the concerted effort of human beings in the here and now the Dreaming remains latent and moribund.... What then of someone for whom the intimate bond between biography and mythology has attenuated or slipped away? Someone who may have a mental map of his country but lacks any first hand knowledge of it. Someone unsure of his place of conception and birth, his past, his patrimony, and even his name? Someone who cannot follow the ancestral tracks without getting lost? What story might such a person tell to locate and define himself. [3, p. 133]

Within *Burning Daylight* one response to Jackson's question is Dalisa Pigram's solo. This is the site of Dalisa's 'reciprocity' with her country and it is also one of the forms the project found, along with other scenes to 'dance back' to the pain caused by the State Government's handling of the Rubibi Native title case. Dalisa has described her solo as 'crying for her country.' Her dance is an example of how I see loss as an expression of Indigenous belonging to country in contemporary contexts.

In his revealing discussion of the Pintupi artist, Linda Syddick's dot painting 'ET Returning Home,' art historian Fred Myers suggests that Syddick, as an artist, has identified with Spielberg's recurrent Jewish themes of exile and return. He adds that, "Linda's painting suggests that separation/ longing/ recognition are fundamentally encoded or activated in the transmission of relations to place.... Syddick's paintings extend and discern in painting practice a particular formation of identity, loss, and replacement that must have had long standing in Western Desert life" [5, pp. 21,22]. This 'particular formation,' I would argue, is prevalent in much contemporary Indigenous live performance as it navigates a process of reconnection within



the political history of Australia. A shared political history and navigation of loss and longing is one of the few defining elements which unites Indigenous artists in Australia. This is exemplified in the following Case Study.

### **10.5.1 Case Study: Rubibi**

Dalisa improvised physical scores for herself around the notion of ‘if Broome was a woman, how would she be, move, look and walk across country.’ She drew on improvisations based on one of her aunties, on her well-honed physical actions of throw-net fishing, the way she moves through the tidal area and looks at country when fishing. She added in ghostly fragments of Yawuru dance moves taught to her by her elders during the projects’ research and bursts of narration in Yawuru language about her connection to Rubibi—The Broome peninsular (Fig. 10.2).



**Fig. 10.2** Dalisa’s solo, Broome 2009 (Photo: Rod Hartvigsen)

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In the culmination of the scene, Dalisa wraps herself in the red and orange striped construction barrier fabric which has ringed the stage area since the beginning of the show, leaning forwards, taut with strength and resistance, she pulls it from its attachment poles, tumbling into the space. She holds the barrier fabric high above her head, releasing it to cascade down over her body as she performs a fusion of the hip hop popping and locking techniques inflected by her own dance style. With increasing momentum, her acrobatic moves propel her across the floor with the barrier fabric trailing in her wake. It flies behind her, swept up, or perhaps devoured, in a danced reclamation of her country. Her country, where the government forcibly moved the ceremonial dance ground out past the 12-mile fence line. This same government was now trying to prove cultural extinguishment due to the loss of continuous ceremonial land in the township of Broome in the Rubibi native title case.

Her self-devised choreography was deeply imbued with her own yearning for connection with the ceremonial dance practices of her own culture. In his article, 'Rhythm Sticks,' which comments on the ceremonial dance practices of the Top End of Australia, Australia's leading journalist on Indigenous art, Nicolas Rothwell states that, "the pure dance of ceremony at the heart of this sound-world is almost invisible: it is the refined, complex essence of the indigenous realm and it remains largely unknown, a gap in the nation's wider understanding of itself and its past." He goes on to cite researcher, Allan Marett, who estimates that 98 % of Indigenous Australia's song tradition and the associated dances have been lost, and he views what survives as desperately vulnerable, adding that, "For Marett and the recorders, the dance traditions are the libraries of the Indigenous realm, where knowledge is crystallised; they are the hospitals where wellbeing is maintained; they are the banks where its culture is stored. But there is another, almost paradoxical way of seeing dance: as a kind of life line into the future" [6].

The yearning in Dalisa's solo and her embodied anger at the impact of Australia's political history on the dance practices in her community, as well as her work of connecting to the memory and actuality of public dance practices available to her is another kind of 'life line into the future' in the form of her contemporary dance. Arts journalist, Rosemary Sorrensen's review of *Burning Daylight* in Broome describes Pigram's solo: "Like every one of the cast, she seems to move in entirely her own way, a body that is memory and future tense" [8]. It is this embodied reclamation of memory as a place, a foundation from which to create as an artist and its projection into the future which is the essence of *Burning Daylight* and the Company's danced search for new and appropriate performances languages.

In one of the final scenes of *Burning Daylight* it became necessary to create an 'Indigenous space' within the intercultural space of the production. The dancers' personal experiences of creating contemporary Indigenous dance in Australian contexts were contrasted and expanded on by choreographer, Serge Aimé

Coulibaly's insights of parallel choreographic issues in West Africa.<sup>7</sup> Serge Aimé's provocations alongside one of the devising performers, Trevor Jamieson's comments that his elders had asked him not to dance his traditional dances in contemporary performance anymore and Dalisa's constant subtle facilitation of the Indigenous choreographic issues within the Broome cultural, historical and political environment prompted the dancers to begin working from a place understood as one of 'memory of tradition.'

### 10.5.2 Case Study: *Memory of Tradition*

As they began to work actively with this notion, the dancers identified open public traditional dance moves which they had been taught and had been given permission to perform in public. Some of these were from their own cultural material whilst others were moves taught by cultural custodians of other tribal groups and given for use in rehearsal. Once these 'signature moves' had been identified, Serge Aimé facilitated a process whereby the dancers improvised with a particular move allowing it to become a 'memory' in their body. He asked them to let go of the visible form of the move and which parts of their body it engaged but to hold onto its essence and translate from this into new movement patterns in different planes, tempos and methods of articulation. In practice terms this choreographic process was akin to other improvisational tasks the performers had been given where the performer 'workshopped' a physical or theatrical idea in a spirit of play and experimentation, utilising their professional intuition and skill as devising performers. However, this was now taking place within a consciously negotiated cultural frame, sense of rhythm and purpose. The dancers built new phrases out of the material they had developed through the improvisations. After the days spent building material in this way, alongside ongoing Company discussion, Serge Aimé in association with Dalisa, went on to construct a draft version of the scene we titled *Memory of Tradition*. During a discussion whilst making the scene, Serge Aimé suggested that, "We are not traditional artists, but the traditional is always there—behind us—underneath us." It was from this place, from the embodied memories of the traditional signatures that they began to investigate new forms that forged a new choreographic idiom.

The results of this process were then shown to the law women of the Edger family, traditional owners of specific aspects of public Yawuru dance in Broome. The Company travelled out to Elsie Edgar's family's country on Roebuck Bay to perform the scene *Memory of Tradition* 'in country,' as is

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<sup>7</sup>See interviews with Serge Aimé Coulibaly, Trevor Jamieson and Dalisa Pigram on the *Burning Daylight* documentary for further discussion of these issues [9].

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their custom. This was done in order to have the experimental choreographic process the Company had developed in *Burning Daylight* approved.<sup>8</sup> The ‘old girls’ watched intently as the scene was run on the pindan<sup>9</sup> dirt and after discussion, approval was given to continue working in this way. This was followed by traditional owner Noreen Edgar, her daughter Colleen and some of the grandchildren teaching an open Yawuru dance to the whole Company for future use in ongoing choreographic processes.

In the structure of the performance *Burning Daylight*, this scene occurs towards the end of the production, notionally towards the dawn after a long night in the streets. Dalisa has just finished her solo and steps into the space she has ‘cleared.’ The scene becomes 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 as a celebration of Indigenous culture in the here and now (Fig. 10.3).



Fig. 10.3 The scene *Memory of Tradition*, Zurich, 2007 (Photo: Christian Altorfer)

<sup>8</sup> See documentation of this in the documentary on the making of *Burning Daylight* [9].

<sup>9</sup> The red dirt that makes up the country around Broome.

## 10.6 The Art of Listening

The development of the scene *Memory of Tradition* provides an example from the production process of how regimes of cultural value and notions of open public forms of Indigenous cultural practices can be negotiated and interpreted in dynamic, experimental and ethical methods of ‘culture making’ in dance-theatre. I would suggest, after Myers, that this is, “art-ethnography, sort of one and sort of the other. It is traditional and not really so” [5, p. 11].

Within Marrugeku, after years of negotiating processes of creating contemporary dance, song and music in direct yet experimental associations with so-called traditional forms, we take the position that our approach is based on ethics, not protocols. There is no fixed or stable method to the work with which to set entrenched protocols for any cultural context. Every specific negotiation must be treated as a unique expression of the factors and individuals and their histories which make up the lived experience of culture in each specific milieu. This is an ethics of listening to the past, present and future—an ethics of paying attention.

Journalist, Rosemary Sorensen discussed the complexity of this work in reporting on the Broome season of *Burning Daylight* and quoted Dalisa as saying, “It’s one thing to get permission to re-create something in an obvious way, but it takes a long time to create art in a way that’s inspired by culture” [8]. This “art (making) that is inspired by culture,” this step into finding a reciprocity with country in the form of contemporary dance and storytelling which ‘re-thinks’ tradition must grow out of an in-depth ‘mapping’ of a specific place and its history. It does not take place with a simple recognition of continuity between traditional and contemporary modes of cultural expression. It is precise work, ephemeral in its nature, elusive, yet painstakingly achieved through cultural negotiation, on the one hand, and through the ‘professional cultural intuition’ of artists manifested in their creative improvisational techniques, on the other. The work of contemporary Indigenous art brings into play a potent mix of biography, cultural intuition, and the navigation of a shared political history. It is frequently created in a context of loss, longing and separation and can function as both radical innovation and in dialogue with the way ‘traditions’ are transformed in intercultural lifeworlds.

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