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Western Sydney University

Jake Goetz

Placing a poetics of anti-propaganda: Collage as a spatial mode in the poetry of Laurie Duggan

Abstract:

This article conducts a spatial reading of Laurie Duggan's place-based approach to poetic collage in Australia, focusing on poems which span four decades of the poet's career. The article centres on how Duggan's use of both a textual and experiential collage practice, and its resultant effects of juxtaposition and recontextualisation, can provide a way of reading the poet's place-based poetics as 'anti-propaganda' (Cran, 2004, p. 151). I argue that Duggan challenges mainstream conceptions of Australia's colonial narrative and its anthropocentric regime of land mismanagement. This analysis provides a new way of understanding Duggan as not only a poet but also an 'experimental geographer' who foments 'insurgent countertopographic and counterhegemonic alternatives' for understanding place in the settler state of Australia (Boykoff, 2013, p. 252). The article also considers Duggan's work through an ecocritical and decolonial lens, concluding by reading his work in light of Anglo-Australian artist, Jonathon Kimberley, and plangermairreenner elder puralia meenamatta's transcultural 'painting-writing' project, *meenamatta lena narla puellakanny*, which Peter Minter describes as a rejection of 'settler-colonial landscape representation' in favour of 'a more reciprocal and meaningful discussion with Country' (2021, p. 208).

Biographical note:

Jake Goetz's poetry and writing have appeared in various journals, including *Overland*, *Island*, *Southerly*, *Rabbit*, *Plumwood Mountain*, and *Cordite*. He has published one book of poetry, *meditations with passing water* (Rabbit Poets Series), a long-form poem written alongside the Maiwar (Brisbane River), which was shortlisted for the QLD Premier's Literary Award in 2019. He is currently undertaking a DCA at the Writing & Society Research Centre (WSU), continuing his interest in Australian long-form ecopoetry.

Keywords: Poetry and place, literary collage, spatial theory, ecopoetics, decolonial poetics

Introduction

This article uses the writing of spatial theorists to analyse Laurie Duggan's decades-long interest in writing poetry of place through two very different forms of literary collage: the first being textual, and the second being experiential. It will suggest, by way of theorists such as Cameron Lowe, Rosa Cran and Bartholomew Brinkman, that the technique of collage, and its resultant effects of juxtaposition and recontextualisation, can provide a new way of reading Duggan's place-based poetry as a spatial mode of 'anti-propaganda' (Cran, 2004, p. 151), and the poet himself as an 'experimental geographer', who foments 'insurgent countertopographic and counterhegemonic alternatives' for understanding place in the settler state of Australia (Boykoff, 2013, p. 252). To aid my argument, the article also considers Duggan's collage practice through an ecocritical and decolonial lens, concluding by reading Duggan's work in light of Anglo-Australian artist Jonathon Kimberley and plangermairreenner elder puralia meenamatta's transcultural 'painting-writing' project, *meenamatta lena narla puellakanny*, which Peter Minter describes as a rejection of 'settler-colonial landscape representation' in favour of 'a more reciprocal and meaningful discussion with Country' (2021, p. 208). I should also note that this article does not seek to label Duggan as an overtly 'decolonial' or 'eco' poet, but rather seeks to stimulate discussion around the contribution that a geographically specific approach to literary collage can make to these fields, and to ensuring concepts of place in settler states such as Australia do not become depoliticised. Given the focus of my article, I will not address Duggan's poems published during his time living in the UK, but will centre on three collections written while he was living in Australia – the epic documentary poem about Gippsland, Victoria, *The Ash Range* (1987), the poet's ongoing poem series, *Blue Hills* (begun in 1980), and the title poem of his most recent collection, *Homer Street* (2020). This article will be split into two parts: the first will deal with the textual collaging of historical documents in *The Ash Range*; the second will consider poems from the two later collections as examples of a more conceptual approach (as Cameron Lowe (2014) suggests, an 'experiential' collage approach) – one which seems to stem from the poet's interest in imagism, and which is enabled by scalar shifts between micro and macro thoughts and observations.

Before beginning my analysis, I believe it is important to first define the concept of 'space' and how I will be using the term in my discussion. To do this, I look to Jeff Malpas's 2012 essay, 'Putting Space in Place', which conducts an ontological inquiry into the nature of space, concentrating on how, why and when the concept of 'space' came into being, and how theorists have drawn distinctions between time, space and place throughout history. Malpas devises his own terms for understanding time, space, and place, ascertaining time as an 'Emergence', space as an 'Openness', and place as a 'Boundedness' (2012, p. 236). Time and space 'depend on a boundedness that allows an opening and an emergence', and yet, 'place cannot be considered boundedness alone', for it is 'part of the very character of openness and emergence as always occurring within and in relation to certain bounds' (p. 236). Malpas concludes that the unity of

these terms is ‘best understood through the idea of place’, which is ‘always bounded, yet it is also always open and dynamic’ (pp. 236-237).

This framework, and his standpoint, is an alternative approach to other contemporary theories of space, which Malpas suggests dissolve the specificity, or boundedness, of place through the ‘abolition of relationality’ which ‘matches the proliferation of spatiality’ (2012, p. 238). Through such an ‘abolition of relationality’ (which is to say, an erasure of borders which allows one thing to relate to another through time and across space) one loses the very ground, the very place, out of which the theory of space grew. This article discusses the interrelation of time, space and place (as it relates to Duggan’s poetry) through Malpas’s conceptualisation. This approach provides, I believe, a somewhat ‘concrete’ foundation from which to discuss how literary collage can spatialise a specific geographical area by, for example, unsettling the apparently sequential narrative of history by re-presenting ‘simultaneous relations and meanings that are tied together by a spatial rather than a temporal logic’ (Soja, 1989, p. 1). This is not to say, though, that there aren’t many other significant ways to understand time, space and place, nor other literary techniques or poetic texts that could be just as appropriate for conducting a spatial reading of site-specific poetry. But the overall aim of this article is to stimulate discussion around the contribution that a place-based approach to poetic collage can make to contemporary discourse around the politics of place in contemporary Australia.

Unsettling Gippsland through textual collage

Situated in the anglopoetic tradition of geographically specific documentary epics, such as Muriel Rukeyser’s *The Book of the Dead* (1938), William Carlos Williams’ *Paterson* (1946) and Charles Olson’s *The Maximus Poems* (1960), Laurie Duggan’s *The Ash Range* (1987) is an epic elegy to Duggan’s place of birth in Gippsland, Victoria. Through the collaging of historical texts and photographs/paintings (from newspaper articles, journals, gallery collections and diaries) together with Duggan’s own observations and imaginings of Gippsland, Duggan unsettles the mainstream colonial narrative that has come to occupy an area that spans the traditional lands of the Gunaikurnai, Bidjell, Monero (Ngarigo) and Kulin nations. Using as little as ‘ten per cent original material, and ninety per cent edited text from other sources’ (Smith, 2016, para. 10), the work can be read as an assemblage – a textual collage of a region that is written almost exclusively by people who lived in, or travelled through, that same region. This allows, as Duggan suggests, ‘the ‘explorer’ to speak for, or rather, against himself’ (Duggan, as cited in Smith, 2016, para. 20). Initially, it was this very quote which stirred my desire to explore how, through the practice of collage, the poet was able to consider Gippsland from a spatial perspective, and how this, in turn, enabled him to look past the way ‘Gippslanders’ at the time, as Don Watson notes in the introduction to the book, pronounced themselves as a ‘triumph of civilization over barbarism’ (1987, pp. 10-11).

First, it is important to note that, by working purely with texts written by colonial and settler Australians, Duggan inadvertently excludes the voices of First Nations people, leaving *The Ash Range* at risk of only further perpetuating the colonial perspectives it seeks to subvert – perhaps discounting the text’s subversive, or decolonial, potential. This, too, leads to a much larger question of whether or not settler poets alone can create an ethical engagement with the history, geography, ecology, and more, of a place in which Indigenous sovereignty was never ceded, and in which their presence can quite easily be thought of as untenable. Or, to quote Waanyi author Alexis Wright, how does a settler Australian writer ‘crawl down the hole to see what we have all inherited’, or make a work from ‘memory, preventing the past from coming to an end’ so as to allow ‘the wound’ of colonisation to ‘be kept open and the much desired and prescribed forgetting be reversed ...’ (2002, pp. 18-9)? While the scope of this essay does not allow for a comprehensive attempt to address these questions, an answer might be hinted at through centring on Duggan’s ability to use colonial voices in order to expose the contradictions, failures and bloodshed that lie at the foundation of Australia’s colonial history. An excerpt dated ‘17/9/1853’ in the third section of *The Ash Range* (‘Owning the Land’), illustrates just one example of a (rather humorous) failure during the early years of Gippsland’s colonisation:

So little did the present
Government know of the locality, that at a
recent land sale, they had sold the site of their
own Court House, without knowing it. (Duggan, 1987, p. 78)

As a whole, *The Ash Range* adheres to a chronological elapse of time across its twelve sections, though each section deals with the passing of time through different themes, creating for Gippsland a series of mini epochs. For example, the second section, ‘Maps’, details the early observations, encounters and naming of the land by European colonists, while the fourth section, ‘Gold Mountains’, details the dramatic effect the Gold Rush had on the region’s ecology, both through mining and also via a population boom, which saw a further diversification of the colonial inhabitants of the area. By the eleventh section, ‘January 1939’, with the land mined, dissected, ‘colonised’ and considered a part of a federated Australia, Duggan details the effects of the bush fires of January 1939 which ravaged the area. Through such great temporal and thematic leaps, we could see Duggan as undertaking a kind of creative history-writing through this work; this is suggested on the back cover blurb of the book, where Duggan is described as a ‘chronicler’ and ‘geographer’ (I will return to this idea later).

In his ‘Introduction’ to Duggan’s book, Don Watson suggests that Gippsland is ‘an idea as well as a place’ (1987, p. 7). This notion – that a region is more than simply ‘a place’, but ‘an idea’ with a distinct history, collective imagination, and geography – correlates nicely with Malpas’s aforementioned distinctions of place as a ‘boundedness’ (geography), space as an ‘openness’

(collective imagination) and time as an ‘emergence’ (history) (2012, p. 236). It also leads me to consider that the region of Gippsland, though bound to the rigid nature of the colonial cartographer’s lines (importantly, not drawn out until the second section of the book) has been challenged through Duggan’s ability to re-present the history, or time, of the area. Such a temporal rendering, in turn, challenges the ‘idea’, or what I think of as the ‘imaginative space’ of Gippsland. Watson also goes on to stipulate that this idea of Gippsland is one of ‘normality’, which in no flattering way reflects the ignorance of the people of Gippsland (and of Australia) regarding the history of the region (and of the country as a whole). This he associates with settler Australians having ‘locked away the imagination’ which had made their ‘triumph of civilization over barbarism’ possible (Watson, 1987, pp. 10-11); in this way, ‘they also locked away their memories of course – who would have believed them anyway?’, and went on to substitute them with ‘a patina of Victorian heroics’, which Watson quips ‘was very normal’ (1987, pp. 10-11).

Duggan’s ability to challenge this ‘normality’, or what can be understood as the mainstream colonial narrative of the area, can be seen in the first section of the poem, ‘Stars’, which locates, and contrasts, the local Indigenous creation story of Bunjil to western conceptions of constellations:

west of the cross, Centaurus; further west
 Ara, the Altar, Scorpio and red Antares,
 Pavo, Indus, Capricorn, Grus, Toucan,
 and Bunjil?
 — who made the earth and
 the people down here;
 the Classics inverted overhead —
 Bunjil
 grew tired
 and told the musk-crow who
 kept the winds:
 ‘let some out from your bags.’
 And Crow
 gave out a blast that ripped trees skywards.
 But Bunjil wanted more.
 So the knots were all untied,
 and a gale blew Bunjil and his people off the planet:
 flecks of light in a dark sky... (Duggan, 1987, p. 20)

The evocation of this Indigenous creation story, which originated amongst the Kulin nations of Victoria, is then juxtaposed to Duggan’s own observation of Gippsland, followed by descriptions of the earth’s geological formation:

...looking down on sphagnum bogs
trampled by cattle
to swampy flats
 thus, Nunniyong
and the surfaces of the Bogongs,
grey over green, on a yellow field,
slope gently southwards in conformity with the general
inclination, initiated when the Mesozoic paleoplain
was deformed. (Duggan, 1987, p. 20)

Such a conceptual collage approach – which I borrow from Rona Cran’s discussion of New York poet Frank O’Hara’s poem ‘Naptha’ – allows one to question ‘the validity of the place’ they occupy within a context, both ‘physically, creatively and temporally’, by veering sharply between different images of time and place (Cran, 2004, p. 144). This is perhaps most apparent in Duggan’s use of ellipsis to draw attention to what we can think of as the cultural divide between the people of the Kulin nation and their long-standing connection with their Country – as expressed through the creation story of Bunjil, who ‘created much of south-eastern Australia’, including its features, animals and people (Museums Victoria, 2021, para. 4) – and, as Duggan observes, how such a connection has been altered, or ‘trampled by cattle’, through colonisation.

Cultural divides such as this are highlighted throughout *The Ash Range*, whether it be between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population, Duggan and Gippsland, the human and non-human, and on a textual level between Duggan’s ‘own’ writing and newspaper articles, diaries, photographs and paintings. Although the very nature of such divides suggests an initial inability for reconciliation between these things, it also allows for an ‘enlacement or contamination’, where words and ideas are cross-pollinated with others to, in Duggan’s case, subvert how settler Australia understands its colonial history (what Watson earlier alluded to as a ‘patina of Victorian heroics’) (Cran, 2004, pp. 140-1). Another example of Duggan’s historically interrogative, and subversively spatial approach can be seen in the following excerpt from the eighth section, ‘White Palings’, which details the actions of European settlers after hearing that a white woman was believed to be held in ‘captivity by the aborigines [*sic*] in Gippsland’ (1987, p. 181):

And the handkerchiefs
 nailed to the trees
in English and Gaelic:
 WHITE WOMAN! —
There are fourteen armed men,
 partly white and partly black
in search of you. Be cautious;

*and rush to them
when you see them near you.*

*Be particularly on the look out every dawn
the white settlement is toward the setting sun.*

For this,
for the spearing of cattle
and other slights, McMillan, *his normally kind nature*
stirred to wrath,
with a group of armed volunteers
decided to 'teach the blacks a lesson' (Duggan, 1987, p. 182)

Conveying this call to arms through his own writing, newspaper excerpts, and what can we assume to be a quote from one of the colonisers, Duggan then presents the reader with a paraphrased newspaper article:

In the *Standard*, Oct. 9th
a letter from Mr W.H. Thomas
details investigation of
a quantity of human bones
of both sexes and all ages
buried in the sand near
Warrigal Creek.
It was disclosed
that all the skulls were fractured,
a piece broken away at the base
as though caused by a blow from a tomahawk;
a tribal fight discounted by resemblance
of the fractures. (Duggan, 1987, p. 183)

Through the juxtaposition of different source materials (e.g. the story of the kidnapping to the finding of Indigenous bones), the reader is able to piece together the reality of the situation, just as a voice in the poem ironically suggests: 'The story appears to have originated / amongst the natives themselves' (Duggan, 1987, p. 181). Such a recontextualisation also suggests a subtle deferment of Duggan's 'authorial authority', as it encourages the participation of the reader not only to passively read each individual piece of found text included by Duggan, but also, as exemplified here, to follow the process by which he collated them to gain a new insight into one of the many horrific massacres that define the foundation of colonial Australia. As Boykoff (2013) suggests, when collage is used in this way, it has the potential to make a reader reconsider the history of the

place the poem represents – thereby ‘shifting the locus of power to the audience’ and ‘transforming bystanders into meaning-makers’ (p. 224). This highlighting and exploiting of ‘thematic or formal connections and differences’ also results in what Brinkman (2011) describes as a ‘heteroglossic site’ which retains the writer’s ‘individual distinctions, yet adopts new meanings through juxtaposition and recontextualization’ (p. 50). That is, Duggan does not just write of place from his present-day perspective, but crosses time via historical sources to provide a more spatial rendering of that place. As spatial theorist Edward W. Soja (1989) notes, through such a practice of re-collecting and creatively juxtaposing, ‘experimenting with assertions and insertions of the spatial against the prevailing grain of time’ (p. 1), the sequential nature of both language and life, which is ‘bound by that most spatial of earthly constraints, the impossibility of two objects (or words) occupying the same precise place (as on a page)’, one is able to break out ‘from the temporal prisonhouse of language ... to make room for the insights of an interpretive human geography, a spatial hermeneutic’ (pp. 1-2).

Drawing correlations between Soja’s idea of a spatial hermeneutic and Duggan’s use of collage elucidates the multifarious ways in which history can be understood, represented and reshaped in a poem, thereby positioning Duggan as an ‘active participant’ in writing, or rather, collaging history (Brinkman, 2011, p. 44). This also results in the deconstructing and recomposing of what can be understood as ‘the rigidly historical narrative’ (Soja, 1989, p. 1) embedded in the mainstream colonial narrative of Gippsland, Victoria. To again borrow from Cran’s discussion of O’Hara, Duggan’s use of the collage mode can be understood as an attempt to provide an alternative portrait of the ‘time and place in which he finds himself living’ and to create ‘a kind of anti-propaganda’ (Cran, 2004, p. 151). This idea can be further aligned with Duggan’s aforementioned aim in *The Ash Range*, which was to allow the colonisers ‘to speak for, or rather, against’ themselves (Duggan, as cited in Smith, 2016, para. 20). But it is also important to ask here, is it appropriate to think of collage as a type of ‘anti-propaganda’, given the colonial context in which it was implemented? Or can we similarly read the collage approach in *The Ash Range* as a type of metaphor, or symbol, for nation building (especially given the technique has its origins in early 20th century modernist art movements of the Northern Hemisphere, and through such dictums as Ezra Pound’s ‘Make it new’)? I have no immediate answer for these questions, but a quote from contemporary US poet Rachel Blau DuPlessis highlights the radically political nature and continuing relevance of poetic collage. As DuPlessis writes (and here, too, we can think of Duggan), the mode allows one to move past ‘the avant-garde question about what the ‘new’ is in favor of the much more desperate question ‘what is the news’ and how to understand what is going on in every crisis-laden aspect of life: political, economic, ecological...’ (DuPlessis, as cited in Mossin, 2020, para. 11).

Despite the wave of English colonisation driven under the guise of capitalism, nation building and its pursuit of environmental exploitation through land grabs and mining, as well as the still insistent

idea of ‘normality’ embedded in Gippsland’s colonial narrative, Duggan (1987) ends *The Ash Range* with a return to the image of Bunjil:

In the evening
Omeo darts champs
fill the lounge, and Randy Bill
pulls a harmonica from the bar shelf;

plays the bossa nova
to the shearers, house-painters,
local politicians; twenty cars
in a No Standing Zone.

There is a message at the bottom of every glass.
Dust blows off the road outside,
and the stars, Crux, Bunjil, look down
on a telephone booth in the middle of the bush. (p. 262)

Returning to this image of stars, of Bunjil, of the beginning of the poem itself, conjures up ideas of the cyclical, further undermining the linearity of history and the rigid nature of the cartographer’s lines to find a point of connection in a more spatial consideration of place – one which acknowledges the continued presence of Indigenous people in Australia. Such a consideration also aligns with the cyclical belief system through which some Indigenous Australians view life, as expressed in Yankunytjatjara/Kokatha poet Ali Cobby Eckermann’s poem ‘Circles and Squares’:

I have learnt many things from my Family Elders
I have grown to realise that my Life travels in Circles
My Aboriginal Culture has taught me that
Universal Life is Circular (2009, p. 8)

Scalar shifts: The ecopoetics of experiential collage

Through the textual collaging of historical documents, the epic, polyvocal nature of *The Ash Range* exemplifies just one way of understanding Duggan’s collage practice. Another way, which the second half of this paper explores, draws on what Cameron Lowe has described as Duggan’s ‘process-based aesthetic’, or ‘experiential collage’ approach to writing place (Lowe, 2014, pp. 2, 4). Lowe defines this approach as an ‘alternative mapping process’ which is ‘very much dependent on the subjective, bodily experience and practices of everyday life’ (p. 7). To interrogate this mode

of collage, I will first briefly look at two short poems from another extensive, though vastly different, place-centred poetic project of Duggan's, the ongoing poem series, *Blue Hills*, followed by the title poem of the poet's most recent collection, *Homer Street*.

Named 'partly as a joke', *Blue Hills* takes its name from Gwen Meredith's Australian radio serial about rural Australian life, which was broadcast between 1949 and 1976 (Duggan, 2012, p. 5). The first poem in the series was written in late 1980; over the next 26 years, until Duggan's move to the UK in 2006, a total of 75 poems were written and subsequently published as *The Collected Blue Hills* in 2012. It wasn't until Duggan's return to Australia at the end of 2018 that the project continued, with the publication of new poems ('Blue Hills 76-110') in *Homer Street* (2020). Intermittently written over four decades in both urban and rural locales, predominantly located in Australia's south-east, Duggan has noted that one of the unifying attributes of the series is that 'it all happens in Australia' (2012, p. 5). But as Tim Wright suggests, another attribute can be seen in the poems stemming from the 'Imagist/Objectivist tradition', which Wright describes (by quoting Pound) as being guided by the ideal of 'the direct treatment of the thing' (Wright, 2017, p. 252). To demonstrate this approach, here is one of the shorter poems ('Blue Hills 54') from the *Blue Hills* series, written while the poet lived in Brisbane:

lit clouds

electrical storm

over Moreton Bay

later, the moon

yellow on

Bulimba reach (Duggan, 2012, p. 69)

Exemplifying the subordination of 'moral reflections' and 'abstractions' to the concrete details of the 'thing', in this case a storm and later, moonlight on the waters of the Maiwar (Brisbane River), the poem can also be seen as existing in the greater tradition of Japanese haiku, which was a precursor to the imagist movement (Academy of American Poets, 2017, para. 4). I am here less interested, however, in considering Duggan as an imagist poet (an aspect Wright explores in much more detail in his essay 'Across Time: Laurie Duggan's *Blue Hills*'), and more interested in exploring how his imagist poems can be further read as 'experiential collage' (Lowe, 2014, p. 7). To do this, I turn to an excerpt from the second poem in the series, 'Blue Hills 2', which reads:

Junction of the Brogo and Bega rivers,
one dry, one running under sand;
smoke haze as thick as Sydney smog

– dried bamboo would explode
if a match were lit

A crazed accountant sits at a desk in the park
On the desk

Erica 4 Brian
I WANT TO SUCK COCKS

Log trucks cross the Bega flood bridge;
all the poets have moved to Sydney (Duggan, 2012, p. 9)

By shifting between his own imagist-inspired observations ('Junction of the Brogo and Bega rivers, / one dry, one running under sand'), his own thoughts ('dried bamboo would explode / if a match were lit') and what we can assume to be a found text ('Erica 4 Brian / I WANT TO SUCK COCKS'), the poem 'creates a representation of space that is constantly shifting and provisional, dependent upon whatever material Duggan elects to incorporate' (Lowe, 2014, p. 7). It also speaks, to return to Cran, to the way a more conceptual collage approach to place can veer 'physically, creatively and temporally' (2004, p. 144) – from the immediacy of the moment in which the poet is watching log trucks cross 'the Bega flood bridge' near the border of Victoria and New South Wales, to the way the 'smoke haze' of bushfires carries the poem into air pollution above Sydney. But what effect does such shifting have on how we perceive ideas of time, space and place in contemporary Australia? To answer this question, I want to now draw on the writing of both spatial and eco-critical theorists to analyse how Duggan's poem, 'Homer Street', despite not incorporating any historical or found texts, can still be read as an example of experiential collage – one which uses scalar shifts to evoke a sense of place through a 'spatial rather than a temporal logic' (Soja, 1989, p. 1).

The titular poem in Duggan's most recent collection, *Homer Street* (2020), is a twelve-part poem in dialogue with the city of Sydney, and predominantly, with Earlwood and its surrounds, an area where the poet lived at the time of writing, and which is located near the drowned valley estuary referred to as the Cooks River (south-west of Sydney's CBD). The locale is evoked through the short couplets of the first section of the poem:

Turner would like it here
(the skies)

the city, northeast
as a ridge

separates creek
from river

a lone palm, almost
the tallest thing (Duggan, 2020, p. 67)

A predominant feature of this work, as the above excerpt shows, is Duggan's interest in centring on aspects of the non-human in the city – for example, its ecology (creeks, rivers, palms), geography (the city to the northeast), topography (the ridge separating the creek and river) and climate (the skies). This opting for the non-human in writing a place often perceived as a centre of the human world is what leads me to situate Duggan's poetic practice as working within the tradition of ecopoetics, a field which has been little applied to Duggan's work. However, given he lists writers such as the famed 'ecopoet' Gary Snyder as an influence, it seems foolish not to (Brown, 2013, n.p.). As Phillip Hall notes in a discussion of Duggan's poetry in his essay, 'Natural selection: ecological postcolonialism as bearing on place', 'Duggan's more recent pastoral poetry ... has included urban and suburban sites', and interrogates how the building of Australian cities have 'often come at considerable expense to the natural environment' (2016, p. 5).

To further flesh out how Duggan's poetry operates as a type of spatial ecopoetic, I would like to concentrate on how scalar shifts between Duggan's own micro and macro thoughts and observations allow the poet to both juxtapose, and recontextualise, the relation between the human and the non-human in urban centres. My approach here draws on the work of Fincher and Iveson (2015), who note that Australia's large urban centres 'which suck in food, water, and energy from elsewhere' tend to 'mystify the connections between urbanized consumption of resources and the environments which support them' (p. 23). Such 'mystifications', I argue, have also more recently been fractured by events such as the bushfires of our recent Black Summer in 2019-2020, which saw the toxic smoke of fires burn from the safety of our phone screens and into the streets and homes of some of our major cities. Our current environmental catastrophe, made worse by humanity's burning of fossil fuels, has been pushing our climate away from the relative stability of the Holocene, forcing the majority of city-dwelling populations in Australia (and around the world) to rethink the apparent disconnection between urban centres and the natural world (Hughes et al., 2020). In breaking with such mystifications, the ninth section of 'Homer Street' begins by focusing on 'a street of Californian bungalows' and their texture and colour of 'red ochre and liver brick, / cream gables, timbered,' before zooming out to:

a black Norfolk Pine

Canterbury race track under lights

the fireflies

(airliners)

approach Sydney

as they do

morning and evening

hints of elsewhere

if we needed proof (Duggan, 2020, p. 70)

The effect here, to riff off the use of ‘zoom’ to describe the collaging of micro and macro descriptions, provides Duggan’s writing with a cinematic quality – one of the key stylistic features of his more imagist-oriented writing. It also allows us to read the poem as an assemblage of images, as lines four to six exemplify in their jumping from ‘a black Norfolk Pine’ to ‘Canterbury race track under lights’ and ‘the fireflies’. The subsequent, and subtle, description of fireflies as airliners speaks more specifically to the poet’s ‘eco’ ethos here: with another line, ‘hints of elsewhere’, ironically contrasting the incessant movement of humans flying around the earth to a small bioluminescent insect that has an average life expectancy of just two months. This image of planes flying to and from, say, Abu Dhabi, Singapore, Beijing or Santiago, is a common sight for those living in, and around, Sydney’s Inner West, and also finds other interesting contrasts across the poem. As the fifth section notes:

the sky’s romantic

but the architecture beneath is cubist;

the sensibility is surreal

at twilight the bats

fly to Five Dock (Duggan, 2020, p. 68)

Through the image of another large-scale movement of non-human animals (bats), the poem suggests that these creatures are flying to an urban location, ‘Five Dock’. Such subtle juxtapositions between the scale of human and non-human life speaks to one of the key facets of ecopoetics, as understood through the definition of 2020 Pulitzer Prize-winning ecopoet Forrest Gander, who describes it as a poetry that ‘investigates – both thematically and formally – the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception’ (2011, p. 216). The poem’s seventh section sheds even more light on how we can view the scalar shifts of Duggan’s work as the collaging of human and non-human worlds into a type of spatial ecopoetic:

clouds bank
at Rydelmere
all the way to Wiseman's Ferry
later
shafts of light
hit the CBD

sharp outlines of buildings,
the distant hills. (Duggan, 2020, p. 69)

Here, by paying close attention to the weather, the poem heightens our awareness of the greater non-human systems that govern how we experience, and locate ourselves in, everyday urban environments such as Sydney. The excerpt also displays a refusal on the poet's part to allow 'the CBD' and the 'sharp outlines of buildings' to overshadow 'the distant hills' – allowing us to think of the metropolis of Sydney, of something too often perceived as an apparently non-natural environment, as forever operating in, and confined to, a specific bioregion defined by a unique climate, topography, ecology and geology. As Gary Snyder writes in his seminal work, *The Practice of The Wild*, 'wildness is not limited to the 2 percent formal wilderness areas. Shifting scales, it is everywhere' (1990, p. 15). To draw further correlations between Snyder and Duggan's work, a short excerpt from Snyder's poem, 'Night Song of the Los Angeles Basin', demonstrates further how an ecopoetics embedded in a tradition of imagism has the potential for unsettling anthropocentric perceptions of social relationships by shifting between scales:

Owl
calls,
pollen dust blows
Swirl of light strokes writhing
knot-tying light paths,

calligraphy of cars.

Los Angeles basin and hill slopes
Checkered with streetways. Floral loops
Of the freeway express and exchange. (Snyder, 1996, n.p.)

Like Snyder, Duggan's shifting between micro and macro thoughts and observations, and through that, between human and non-human worlds, results in texts that re-contextualise how we perceive our immediate urban environments. It also leads me to view Duggan (and Snyder), to borrow a term from spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre, as 'rhythmanalysts' who seek to interrogate the relation

between the ‘micro and macro’ through ‘knowledge and their relationship with the known’ (2004, p. 91). In the context of this study, I think of ‘the known’ as one’s everyday experience of ‘place’, of the ‘thing’, and the collaging of different scales as a spatial attempt at determining one’s ‘location ... in the space-time of’ this place/thing (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 90). This, too, results in a poetry that goes beyond ‘theorizing and academicizing to create participatory events that demonstrate ... critique through an experiential process’ (Boykoff, 2013, p. 250). It also aligns with, to borrow from Boykoff’s discussion of the work of documentary poet Mark Nowak, a way of perceiving spatial poems hinged on scalar shifts as a ‘political-poetic antidote for alienation, replacing the solitary with the solidary’ (2013, p. 249). In other words, such spatial scalar shifts provide a new way of thinking about how poetry can help humans find meaningful connections with the non-human world, and move us past the view of cities as purely human sites. The sixth section of the poem provides yet another example of how studying the rhythms of everyday life can provide a point of departure for re-situating the human as a part of a greater non-human system:

after a day of rain
 the landscape returns:
 Burwood, under construction,
 Chatswood, is science fiction
 orbited perhaps by tiny capsules (Duggan, 2020, p. 69)

In this excerpt, we see Duggan ironically remark that Chatswood, a suburb of Sydney, ‘is science fiction / orbited perhaps by tiny capsules’. These lines could be read as an allusion to Sydney as a kind of sprawling alien outpost in the context of the continued occupation of Indigenous land (in the case of this poem, predominantly Gadigal, Wangal and Gameygal lands). It also calls out colonial Australia’s inability to reckon with the march of ‘progress’ across the Australian continent, and to move toward viewing its own occupation as a form of ‘anti-progress’. Thus ‘Homer Street’, through collaging thoughts and observations across different scales, gestures toward a dissolving of our conception of the dichotomy between the ‘pre-colonial’ and ‘post-colonial’, ‘human’ and ‘non-human’, or ‘urban’ and ‘rural’, and seeks, as did *The Ash Range*, ‘to make room for the insights of an interpretive human geography, a spatial hermeneutic’ (Soja, 1989, pp. 1-2).

Such a reading further aligns with my belief that a spatial consideration of place allows a poem to look past purely Western, colonial-centric concepts of time and place, an idea which draws on the work of decolonial theorist Deborah Bird Rose, who in her book, *Reports from a Wild Country*, elucidates how a sense of the cyclical is intrinsically embedded within the beliefs of the Indigenous groups living in the Yarralin community of the Northern Territory. Their lives, she argues, follow a temporal orientation that allows them to ‘face the source’ and live through ‘the image ... of generations of people returning into Dreaming’ – an idea which she sharply contrasts to the past-future orientation of westerners, who position the past behind them and live through ‘the image ...

of generations marching into the future' (Rose, 2004, p. 152). Such belief systems are also reflected in Ali Cobby Eckermann's poetry, shared in the previous section of this article. Through this discussion, though, I do not mean to suggest that Indigenous belief systems can be read through the lens of spatial theory, but rather, want to show how Duggan's textual, and experiential collage approach to writing can speak to how the spatial consideration of place can produce a poetry empathetic to the concerns of decolonisation (more specifically exemplified in my discussion of *The Ash Range*) and environmentalism (as shown in my discussion of *Blue Hills* and *Homer Street*). Further, as I mentioned earlier, we can view Duggan's poetry as a type of 'anti-propaganda' which veers 'physically, creatively and temporally' across time and through space to re-imagine how we perceive ideas of place (Cran, 2004, p. 144). As Boykoff relates, place is 'a complex tapestry of perpetually emergent story, a congregation of 'throwntogetherness' rather than a coherent, pure, fixed patch of land' (2013, p. 228), an idea which I believe correlates to Malpas's suggestion that it is only through taking place as one's focal point that time and space can be properly contextualised, and conceptualised, into something beyond just an abstract idea (2012, p. 237).

Conclusion

In concluding, I suggest that, through my spatial reading of Duggan's use of collage, we are able to view the poet as an 'experimental geographer' (Boykoff, 2013, p. 226), the task for whom, states Alex Villar, is to expose 'the absurd rules that organise living spaces while at the same time proposing deviating paths as a contribution toward a rearrangement' (as cited in Boykoff, 2013, p. 226). Interpreting this view in the context of Australia, I think of Duggan's works, then, as creating an experimental geography that foment 'insurgent countertopographic and counterhegemonic alternatives that fortify and advance' the greater aims of unsettling the idea of 'Australia' (Boykoff, 2013, p. 252). Further, I believe that this has been achieved through the creation of poems that are 'experiences in themselves, and not just accounts of or commentaries on experience' (Thompson, as cited in Boykoff, 2013, p. 252), a view which also returns us to Lowe's definition of experiential collage as an 'alternative mapping process' which is 'very much dependent on the subjective, bodily experience and practices of everyday life' (2014, p. 7).

This idea of Duggan as an experimental geographer further aligns with Tim Wright's description of Duggan's *Blue Hills* as a whole, which he describes 'as an attempt to decommission mythic ways of conceiving of nation and, in a broader sense, as a response to J. M. Arthur's assertion that 'Australia' ought to be considered a verb rather than a noun' (Wright, 2017, p. 261). This notion is further teased out in the final lines from one of Duggan's (1996) long poems, 'The Front', which remarks on a statue of Captain Cook overlooking Port Phillip Bay south of Melbourne:

Captain Cook stares out
at a stretch of water he never saw;
the imagination erects one locality, government
erects another. (p. 132)

The above excerpt also speaks to Gary Snyder's (1990) conception of how humans relate to places:

We live in a backwards time. We can regain some small sense of that old membership by discovering the original lineaments of our land and steering – at least in the home territory and in the mind – by those rather than the borders of arbitrary nations, states, and counties. (p. 40)

This notion of unsettling ideas of 'nation' (as exemplified by Duggan and Snyder above) finds parallels with Jonathan Kimberley's idea of the 'unlandscape', which was conceptualised through a 'transcultural ecopoetic' project entitled *meenamatta lena narla puellakanny* (Meenamatta Water Country Discussion) (Minter, 2021, p. 191). Through this project, Kimberley, an eighth-generation Anglo-Australian, and puralia meenamatta (Jim Everett), an Indigenous poet from the plangermairreenner clan of the Ben Lomond people, fused words and images to create 'painting-writings' that respond to meenamatta Country (northeast Tasmania). Through their collaboration, as Peter Minter argues in his recent chapter, 'Transcultural ecopoetics and decoloniality in meenamatta lena narla puellakanny', Meenamatta and Kimberley turn away from traditions of 'settler-colonial landscape representation' in favour of 'a more reciprocal and meaningful discussion with Country' (2021, p. 208). This is exemplified, for instance, in the pair using water as the main theme throughout their project: the reason for this being, as meenamatta explains, that water has the ability to 'connect everything' beyond colonial/post-colonial structures (Vivian, 2009, p. 72). Though there isn't space to comprehensively engage with the project in this essay (I recommend reading Minter's article instead), an excerpt from just one of the project's poems, 'In the time of living origin', displays meenamatta's consideration of water as a point of connection across time and space:

time is endless for water
as with it time cannot be
spaced before time began
locating itself in timeless
forever gone yet here in future
touching in spirits of old
lest it becomes the feeling
in churches that have claims
of ownership for man as god
to please a self interest power

breaking water until living things
 can no longer survive the new
 order of possessing water's spirit (meenamatta & Kimberley, 2006)

Such an approach to writing and painting place, Helen Vivian suggests, displays a breaking with 'colonial and post-colonial constructs of landscape' to create works that seek for 'expansiveness rather than definition' (2009, p. 72). Indeed, it is in the 'expansiveness' of Kimberley and meenamatta's unlandscape approach, with its consideration of water as a type of spatial means to transcend the western strictures of time and place – that I draw parallels with Duggan's attempt to not merely collage place, but to use collage as a spatial mode that can re-imagine place by being sympathetic to decolonial and ecopoetic concerns. Such a spatial approach to place, I believe, can have the potential to reinvigorate the ways in which creative mediums, such as poetry, can be attentive to, and reconceptualise our interrelation with, the environment.

As a white male in a settler state, writing, of course, of another white male, I am wary of ascertaining a decolonial aim to Duggan's collage practice. As poet and academic Evelyn Araluen suggests, there exists a risk of 'foreclosing decolonisation to an academic elite by coding it purely within poetics and academic practice' (2017, para. 24). Therefore, I acknowledge that this essay may not actually 'benefit those outside the sandstone walls of a colonial institution, mortared with [the blood of Indigenous Australians]' (Araluen, 2017, para. 24). To finish on a personal note, though, Duggan's work, particularly that of *The Ash Range*, was one of the first books of poetry I read that truly made me (as a white Australian, 'educated' in the public school system) reflect on, and want to engage with, the reprehensible nature of this nation's colonial history, and the detrimental effects this history has had on Australia's Indigenous population, as well as with its ecology. In this sense, for me, it speaks to the ability for poetry to ensure concepts of place – of Country – do not become depoliticised.

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