

Anthropologist of Space: The Poetics of Representation in Laurie Duggan's *Crab & Winkle*

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This paper explores the representation of contemporary space in the work of Australian poet Laurie Duggan. Focusing upon Duggan's *Crab & Winkle* (2009)—a work 'situated' in the United Kingdom—the paper contends that such a text presents an example of 'spatial mapping,' one in which the representation of place and space is both a thematic preoccupation and a determining feature of the poem's structural concerns. In *Crab & Winkle*, a book-length record of Duggan's first year living in East Kent, the reader is offered a diaristic mapping of an environment largely unfamiliar to the poem's (autobiographical) narrator. In this expatriate work, Australia—as physical and social space—becomes a ghostly presence, an imagined space that is nevertheless a vital component of the cognitive map the text constructs through a collage of everyday materiality and the mental spaces of memory and imagination. Situating Duggan's work within a tradition of process-based aesthetics, the paper argues that *Crab & Winkle* constructs experiential, yet necessarily provisional maps of contemporary space that roam from the local to the global.

Maps, as Ian Davidson suggests in *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (2007), 'assume no perspective and are drawn to a consistent scale rather than being seen from a single viewpoint: they implicitly claim to be neutral,' yet like other forms of representation, 'they do have an "angle," however explicit or implicit that may be' (60). The map's projection of mathematical objectivity produces a representation of space that, for a theorist such as Michel de Certeau, subordinates the bodily experience of everyday life. Indeed, for de Certeau, contemporary mapping practices have removed the human action that made map-making possible in the first place: 'if one takes the 'map' in its current geographical form, we can see that in the course of the period marked by the birth of modern scientific discourse . . . the map has slowly disengaged itself from the itineraries that were the condition of its possibility.' The map as a representation of itineraries carries with it a narrative of movement through space; it is, effectively, an experiential document that charts the very operations that enabled its production. In such documents, de Certeau argues:

the proliferation of the 'narrative' figures that have long been [the map's] stock-in-trade (ships, animals, and characters of all kinds) still had the function of indicating the operations—travelling, military, architectural, political or commercial—that make possible the fabrication of a geographical plan. . . . Thus the sailing ship painted on the sea indicates the maritime expedition that made it possible to represent the coastlines . . . But the map gradually wins out over these figures; it colonises space; it eliminates little by little the pictorial figurations of the practices that produce it. (121)

In such a colonising process the social and historical dimensions of the map—the traces of human agency as it were—are effectively eliminated. For de Certeau, the map becomes 'a totalising stage' that consigns 'into its prehistory or into its posterity, as if into the wings, the

operations of which it is the result . . . It remains alone on the stage' (121). The result of this erasure of operations and itineraries from maps effectively means that 'the tour describers have disappeared' (121).

The representation of space produced by such erasures leads to a Cartesian abstraction of space, a model that conceives space as objectively mappable; or, as Russell Smith puts it:

The modern Western notion of space is dominated by a Cartesian model exemplified by the map, a model that erases the social aspects of space (space is abstract and mathematically representable; social relationships appear only in the form of boundaries), the bodily and experiential dimensions of travel (distances are measured in kilometres rather than travelling time), and the history of its own production (blanks are filled in; previous versions are erased without trace). (352–53)

If de Certeau's conception of the totality of the map may be read as a critique of Cartesian space, it should also be treated with some caution. It is not that difficult to find contemporary maps, particularly local maps, that retain the figurations of the 'itinerary.' One obvious example, familiar to most Australian road-users, is the Melway street directory. First produced in 1966 after taking five years to compile, the title 'Melway' is expressive of the purpose of these directories; they are not simply geometric representations of Melbourne and its surrounds, but are intended as guides for users to find their way through the spaces of the city. According to the Melway website, one of the people responsible for compiling these documents took the 'maps and drove many thousands of miles in a secondhand old Morris Minor field checking every road and detail' (n. pag.). Whether the story is factual or somewhat apocryphal, it is in keeping with the intention of these maps; that is, they are not simply faithful to the cartography of the places and spaces they represent, but also provide an experiential guide for ways to navigate these spaces. Thus, although they present a two-dimensional perspective, this is supplemented by the pictorial figurations of experiential spatial practice that de Certeau argues have been lost from contemporary mapping processes. The maps of central Melbourne, for instance, involve not only a detailed cartographic representation of the city's street-grid, but also provide pictorial reference points for tram routes, the location of taxi stands, and indicative markers (arrows) for streets that are only traversable by traffic in one direction. Additionally, human figures indicate not only dedicated walking tracks, footbridges over the Yarra River, but also arcade spaces and other means of moving on foot through the city, so that the map becomes very much a guide to planning an itinerary. And further heightening this sense that the map is a record of experiential practices are the numerous figurations for restaurants, hotels, theatres, toilets, churches and public telephones; these are very much maps of shared social spaces. In de Certeau's terms, these spatial representations are an attempt to incorporate the practices of everyday life into an otherwise god's-eye-view of a city space.

I argue in this paper that Duggan's text does offer an alternative mapping process, one that is very much dependent on the subjective, bodily experience and practices of everyday life, and which—to draw on de Certeau's phrasing—re-engages with the itinerary as the means for the map's production. Additionally, I'd like to suggest that the text invites a consideration of de Certeau's distinction between *place* and *space*, where *place* implies stability and a fixed position. By contrast, de Certeau argues that 'space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that

orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities . . . *space is a practiced place*' (117). The mapping process in *Crab & Winkle* is one of spatial practice, a record of the operations that transform place into space; or, as Duggan remarks in a slightly different context in his book *Ghost Nation* (2001), it is a mapping process that seeks to 'navigate the incomprehensible,' to produce a narrative from the confusion of spaces we inhabit and construct (Duggan, *Ghost*, xxii).

In the short Prologue to *Crab & Winkle*, the speaker seems to descend from the clouds—which one may well be doing as one arrives in England—and the frame of the view tightens until we are in the space of a small bedroom:

Through cumulus, the hump of Thanet, then Pegwell Bay.

The University of Kent, Canterbury downhill like a 19th century painting,
Cathedral dominant. A low-rise city in the valley of the Stour.

A half-timbered hall: Beverley Farmhouse.

A bed that barely fits its room. (Duggan, *Crab*, 7)

I do not think it is going too far to suggest that in this short passage Duggan is not simply registering his arrival in Kent, but is foregrounding that spatial representation is at the heart of *Crab & Winkle*; that, in fact, we are not engaged in the panoptic view from above, but are instead entering a text that will navigate the lived spaces of this unfamiliar environment. The view, if you like, from the ground.

Situating his work in foreign localities is not entirely new to Duggan, although past poems set in non-Australian settings—such as 'West' from *Mangroves* (2003), or 'British Columbia Field Notes' from *The Passenger* (2006), to note just two examples—read more like travel poems than the sustained immersion in a new environment that *Crab & Winkle* offers. Instead of a travelogue, in *Crab & Winkle* we are presented with a poem that is 'half-diary, half-what?' (31), a work that seeks to chart the flow of experience in a new location, to learn its contours and eccentricities. The book is basically a fragmented diary, one that incorporates descriptions of an unfamiliar physical environment and an equally unfamiliar cultural space; musings on the visual arts and poetry; snippets of overheard conversation (frequently in pubs); quotations from a variety of sources; and crucially an on-going meditation on its own form.

Martin Duwell is correct to suggest that *Crab & Winkle* is a Janus-faced book, one that 'looks outward to the world and, at the same time, inward' (n.pag.). For Duwell, the poem's inward view has two key components:

There is, inevitably, the interiority of the poet/diarist but more important is the way the book worries about itself and its own structural integrity. In this sense it is a true book of process and the central structural concern is whether (in Pound's terms) the whole thing 'coheres,' the central fear being that, as a line in 'November' says, 'the grand projects become miscellanies.' (n. pag.)

Duwell's reference to 'process' highlights a key aspect of the mapping strategy at work in *Crab & Winkle*. While there is insufficient space here to elaborate in any detail on process-based aesthetics, it is important, to situate Duggan's work within an identifiable aesthetic tradition, one that has significant implications for the compositional techniques of *Crab & Winkle*. In a book chapter titled 'The Poetics of Process,' Mark Silverberg (2010) argues that Jackson Pollock's experiments in the 1940s, with what came to be termed 'Action Painting,' 'signified a shift not only in painting but in all the arts: a shift from product to process, from representation to dramatization, from contemplation to action' (91). Silverberg's study demonstrates the influence Pollock's experiments had on the 'action poetry' of the New York School Poets, in particular Frank O'Hara's 'I do this, I do that' compositions, a mode that *Crab & Winkle*, at least to some extent, shares.

Crab & Winkle arguably echoes O'Hara's poetry, particularly work such as that in *Lunch Poems* (1964), which is built out of the specifics of place, but presented in such a manner that the poetry takes on a decidedly spatial complexity. The speaker of the poems (and it is an extremely autobiographical speaker) moves through the streets and subways of New York, observing details such as those we find in 'A Step Away From Them,' where labourers are feeding 'their dirty/glistening torsos sandwiches/and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets / on' (15), or in Times Square where:

... the sign
blows smoke over my head, and higher
the waterfall pours lightly. A
Negro stands in a doorway with a
toothpick, languorously agitating.
A blonde chorus girl clicks: he
smiles and rubs his chin. Everything
suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of
a Thursday (15)

Susan Holahan's contention that 'O'Hara does not write about the city; he lives in it' (109), carries with it a significant echo of de Certeau's spatial concepts. In O'Hara's work the speaker of the poems is not a detached observer of his surroundings, but is immersed in the actuality of the space the poems construct. The poetry is grounded in the present moment, in the here-and-now, as in 'Personal Poem':

Now when I walk around at lunchtime
I have only two charms in my pocket
an old Roman coin Mike Kanemitsu gave me
and a bolt-head that broke off a packing case
when I was in Madrid the others never
brought me too much luck though they did
help keep me in New York against coercion
but now I'm happy for a time and interested (32)

And so we proceed through 'the luminous humidity' of this lunch hour—which includes a meal with O'Hara's friend, the poet LeRoi Jones—until it is time to return to work:

. . . Leroi comes in
and tells me Miles Davis was clubbed 12
times last night outside BIRDLAND by a cop
a lady asks us for a nickel for a terrible
disease but we don't give her one we
don't like terrible diseases . . .

I wonder if one person out of the 8,000,000 is
thinking of me as I shake hands with LeRoi
and buy a strap for my wristwatch and go
back to work happy at the thought possibly so (32–33)

Like Holahan, Ian Davidson (2010) argues that the places in O'Hara's 'poems are rarely described in detail as if they existed beforehand and he simply inhabited them. His activities produce them as they also produce the speaking and writing subject of the poems' (Davidson, *Radical* 73):

An emphasis on the material qualities of a place in his poems does not provide stability for O'Hara, for whom places are capable of acute and sudden change . . . although a place may be familiar, it is never normal. It is always reproduced by each new visit. Places exist within a state of change, changes that he welcomes, yet that can also threaten, and changes that simultaneously produce new and different places, and selves. (73)

This spatial dynamic at work in O'Hara's poetry, the restless movement of thought and body throughout the structure of the poems, provides an important model for Duggan's poetic strategies, where the juxtaposition and paratactic employment of diverse materials are also suggestive of the subject's movement through, and construction of, space. In Duggan's work the subject/speaker of the poems is almost always located in a specific place, yet also provides a critique of, or an alternative to, what might be perceived as objective mapping processes. While it needs to be acknowledged that New York is not East Kent—we are obviously talking about different spaces that may involve differing spatial practices—the representations of space in *Crab & Winkle*, like O'Hara's, are maps of motion, of 'practised' place.

What I wish to emphasise here is not so much a direct relationship between the poetry of Duggan and O'Hara, but instead Silverberg's recognition of a shift toward 'process' over 'product,' openness over unity, a shift that prioritises an open-ended conception of form, a predilection for diaristic or notational methods of composition and, importantly, an embracing of improvisation and fragmentation. In such work the poet (or at least the speaker of the poems) is placed within the poem's field of action, rather than positioning, or perhaps privileging the poet as an objective observer beyond the frame of the poem. In a study of greater scope it would be interesting to trace developments in such spatial strategies post-O'Hara, through the work of poets as diverse as Ed Dorn, Ted Berrigan, Philip Whalen, Lee Harwood, or Duggan's contemporaries Pam Brown and Ken Bolton. But to relate this back to mapping, such processual strategies reflect a desire to chart the living flow of experience; as Duggan has remarked, 'our lives are a kind of collage, they're not some measured narrative' (in Scotney, 4). In *Crab & Winkle*, we are presented with a

representation of space that is disjunctive; it is a map of shifting surfaces, a text located in the here-and-now but equally incorporating the play of memory and imagination.

Duwell's previous comments regarding Duggan's concern with form, in particular the worrying over whether the work 'coheres,' raise some interesting questions when considered in respect to spatial representation. If, as I have been arguing, *Crab & Winkle* is a work that may be read as producing a map of subjective experience, then what might the technique of collage achieve in terms of such a mapping process? In respect to de Certeau's notion of the map as a 'totalising stage,' the collage form—at least in the manner that Duggan employs it—can be seen to disrupt stability and certainty; the poem creates a fluid and fragmented spatial representation that undermines the geographical objectivity of the map. Or, to approach this idea in a slightly different manner, the collage structure, through its juxtaposition of disparate materials, produces multiple maps that overlap and jostle one another within the space of the text, and that may be 'read' in a variety of ways. Henri Lefebvre's commentary on mapping is particularly pertinent in this respect:

how many maps, in the descriptive or geographical sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents? It is doubtful whether a finite number can ever be given in answer to this sort of question. What we are most likely confronted with here is a sort of instant infinity . . . It is not only the codes—the map's legend, the conventional signs of map-making and map-reading—that are liable to change, but also the objects represented, the lens through which they are viewed, and the scale used. The idea that a small number of maps or even a single (and singular) map might be sufficient can only apply in a specialized area of study whose own self-affirmation depends on isolation from its context. (86)

The map, or perhaps I should say maps, constructed in *Crab & Winkle* certainly include the physical environment of the region, but they also chart a range of historical, social and cultural features. The following passage gives some indication of the dynamic at work:

the sky darkens
and everything seems quite still

across the road a fortnight ago
the bus shelter was stripped of flyers
and painted brown

a week later

it was bulldozed.

an orange spotlight
directed at this building is often turned off
at night

this is the season
for mosquitoes

a pattern: the sky clears late afternoon (14)

The material landscape sketched here is preceded by a quotation from UK punk band *The Angelic Upstarts*: ‘I want two pints of lager and a packet of crisps please’ (14); and then followed by a list of artworks viewed during a visit to The Ashmolean Gallery of Art and Archaeology. In other sections of the text the reader is presented with historical material—a technique reminiscent of the collage structure employed in Duggan’s *The Ash Range* (1987)—that adds a ghostly presence to Duggan’s movements through the landscape:

9.15, haze but no thunderclouds
as I walk west to Bysing Wood . . .

On Sunday 2nd April 1916, 109 men and boys were killed by an explosion at the Explosives Loading Company factory at Uplees, near Faversham. 15 tons of TNT and 150 tons of ammonium nitrate blew up when some empty sacks caught fire . . . [W]indows across the Thames estuary in Southend were shattered and the tremor was felt in Norwich. The crater . . . was 40 yards across and 20 feet deep . . . Included in the 116 dead, was the whole of the Works Fire Brigade . . . Many of the dead were buried in a mass grave at Faversham Cemetery. (133–34)

This collage of ‘high art,’ pop culture, historical documentation, and observation of apparently mundane local surroundings creates a representation of space that is constantly shifting and provisional, dependent upon whatever material Duggan elects to incorporate into his experiential collage.

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I’ve already mentioned that *Crab & Winkle* is an expatriate work, one that seeks to map unfamiliar physical and social spaces. I would now like to consider how this expatriate quality complicates the mapping process at work in the text, although I am wary of placing too heavy a burden on the description, since Duggan himself, in an interview with Fiona Scotney (2011), has downplayed the expatriate aspect of his relocation to England:

I think I was prepared for it to some extent. I mean I am there because my partner Rosemary is a Law Professor and she has got a job there. But she and I have both been to England quite a few times in the past and once in 1992 we were in Manchester for three months . . . So we knew what we were up for. . . .(8–9)

However, I would argue the expatriate dynamic in *Crab & Winkle* does play a significant role in the text’s mapping process, and does so in at least two identifiable ways. Most notably, it becomes evident that the process of charting this space is complicated by unfamiliarity with aspects of the local environment. Nor is this merely an implicit aspect of *Crab & Winkle*; in a clear indication that this expatriate quality is a principal thematic concern within the text, we can isolate passages where Duggan makes this sense of dislocation an explicit concern. Most notably, these passages often revolve around a difficulty in naming the flora and fauna of this new environment:

a bird, greenish, with long tail:
a woodpecker?

At other places within the text this sense of dislocation, or perhaps re-orientation, is related to cultural phenomena:

this, I must remind myself
is 'my street,' and this
'my local'

this, in the English tradition
is my second living room (76)

While these various forms of dislocation complicate the mapping process at work in *Crab & Winkle*, I wish to go a step further and suggest that the expatriate aspect of the text also invites a consideration of global space and Fredric Jameson's conception of cognitive mapping. Jameson's notion of the cognitive map is drawn from the work of urban planner Kevin Lynch, whose study *The Image of the City* (1960) argues that the scope of modern cities as a totality cannot be conceptualised by those who inhabit them. Lynch's reading of city space has certain parallels to de Certeau's; most notably the sense of a dislocation between cartographic representation and the actual lived experience of moving through and inhabiting that space. Jameson is attracted to Lynch's model because of the analogy he sees between the concept of the alienated city and the individual subject's relationship to global space. For Jameson, cognitive mapping involves a dialectical tension between immediate perception and the subject's capacity to conceptualise the totality of global space. For Jameson, cognitive mapping involves a dialectical tension between immediate perception and the subject's capacity to conceptualise the totality of global space; it is the 'mental map of the social and global totality that we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled forms.' In *Crab & Winkle* this dialectic between the immediate and the imagined, of presence and absence, is keenly felt:

A mirror falls off the wall upstairs. Smoke
in a long disused fireplace

fire in Greece
flood in Queensland
a hole in the universe, southeast of Orion,
six billion light years across

two men in North Wales, fined
for selling woodland bluebells

a glass hip-flask
which belonged to the poet Robert Burns (161)

It is again worthwhile comparing Duggan's approach to local and global space in *Crab & Winkle* to that of Frank O'Hara in 'Personal Poem.' For Davidson, O'Hara's poem is 'a series of overlapping and disjointed physical, social and intellectual "maps" through which O'Hara moves between the global and local' (Davidson, *Ideas* 61). The poem is very much situated in the specific locality of New York, yet in referencing Europe through the 'old Roman coin' given to O'Hara by the artist Mike Kanemitsu, and the 'bolt-head that broke off a packing case / when I

was in Madrid' (32), the poem portrays an international world, a global space that is at once a presence in the poem and at the same time impossibly remote.

A similar dynamic can be seen at work in *Crab & Winkle*. As already noted, the poem is firmly grounded in the locality of East Kent, yet references to distant places, friends in various countries, and an eclectic mix of cultural references drawn from an international range of sources, extend the poem's scope far beyond the everyday experience of inhabiting a particular locality:

remember those who cared about poetry
 (as the light dims inadvertently in the bar):
 Shelton Lea, once 'dangerous'
 in a blue suit; latterly
 walking with a stick, a dandy in the underworld
 whose love for the craft was undiminished
 —what place for Shelton in this world?
 the romantics were fucked, but try telling him.
 he could have stepped back and conversed
 with Dr Johnson, this lost heir
 to confectionary fortunes.

Alan Wearne

had a nose for the real ones
 who'd fit in no survey,
 even IIO, public service anarchist
 who wrote better than anyone: a Greek
 taking notes from a Turk (Nazim Hikmet)

interrupting my reverie, French lovers on the sofa adjoining, hum of the
 bar (34–35)

As with O'Hara's lunchtime walk through the streets of New York in 'Personal Poem,' the scene in Duggan's poem is a specific place—a bar in England—which then opens out into a field of references to Australian poetry, in Shelton Lea and Alan Wearne, and beyond this again to the Turkish poet Nâzim Hikmet. The 'French lovers on the sofa' add to this sense of an international space, one that is at once immediate and tangible, and at the same time necessarily imagined.

Yet, despite the similarities in these cognitive mapping processes, I wish to highlight a significant difference between the spaces constructed in O'Hara's poems and in Duggan's text. In O'Hara's lunchtime walks the reader is invited to participate in a familiar daily routine, in a location that is well known to the speaker of the poem. Whether it be references to 'a liver sausage in the Mayflower / Shoppe' or the angel that 'seems to leading the horse into / Bergdorf's' in 'Music' (1); or the little box 'out on the sidewalk/next to the delicatessen/so the old man can sit on it and drink beer in 'Steps' (57), there is a feeling of familiarity to the spaces in which the 'walk' takes place. And despite Davidson's perceptive comment quoted earlier in the paper, that in O'Hara's poems 'although a place may be familiar, it is never normal . . . It is always reproduced by each new visit' I think we can consider the mapping process in *Crab & Winkle* as operating in a slightly different manner. In O'Hara's poems there is certainly a process of cognitive mapping at work, a sense of the local and global coming together through memory and objects that arouse

memory and the imagination. In *Crab & Winkle* though, the spaces constructed through the structural principle of the ‘walk’ are largely unfamiliar, and the process of mapping this space becomes an act of situating the self within landscapes and social and cultural environments that are new to the speaker of the poem. Duggan’s text returns us to de Certeau’s critique of the objectivity of contemporary mapping practices at the start of this paper; rather than the map erasing the practices that allowed for its production, we are presented with an experiential document that charts space through those operations. While both Duggan and O’Hara can be said to be constructing such maps of their everyday environment, in Duggan’s case the mapping process takes on an even more exploratory level of spatial practice in that the markers of place—O’Hara’s familiar avenues, cafes, bookshops and galleries—are having to be charted in the process of their discovery.

Duggan’s references to friends living in various places around the globe, particularly in Australia, also create a tension between the here-and-now and an imagined ‘global’ space:

Pam and Jane, having sold up and moved to Melbourne, now want to move back to Sydney, or rather the Blue Mountains (which are not Sydney). Other than my friends, their news, all I hear of Australia is cricket, drought, and the Australian Wheat Board scandal. In the English papers the place may as well not exist. (63)

Or, later in the text:

. . . I could call this
a solitary practice but it isn’t. It reverberates in odd rooms around the globe.

the continuity: what I write in a pub in Kent is read in an office in Adelaide, a pensione in Rome, an internet café in the Blue Mountains, an apartment in upstate New York. (96)

Here, there is a conscious recognition of the complexity of the mapping process, of the local and the global intersecting. What I think Duggan is implicitly suggesting however, is that regardless of the ‘continuity’ of the information (the poetic texts, in this case) being transmitted, it must still be read within a specific place, within ‘odd rooms around the globe.’ In this respect the cognitive map involves a conception of global space as fragmented, not so much a totality as an imagined collection of tenuously connected spaces; or, as Henri Lefebvre puts it, ‘space “is” whole and broken, global and fractured, at one and the same time . . . Just as it is at once conceived, perceived, and directly lived’ (356). *Crab & Winkle*’s fractured, collagist surface captures this complex overlapping of local and global space as Duggan’s diary-like observations chart the everyday practices that produce his ‘expatriate’ map. That final, lingering question in *Crab & Winkle*, ‘how much of it “adds up”?’ (163) might well be the key to understanding not only Duggan’s conception of contemporary space, but perhaps more importantly, the ability of the poet, or poetry, to adequately represent it.

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