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RESEARCH

Apologies for Blanks or Laments for Dumbness: Tina Darragh's *Opposable Dumbs* as Open Source and/or Open Content

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This essay engages in a reading of Tina Darragh's publication *Opposable Dumbs* (2010). This reading is carried out in pursuit of a number of critical and theoretical questions, that include asking what sort of text this is, and how we might read it. The essay considers how Darragh's work connects to the debate around open source and free software, and to the politics and poetics of that debate. Taking up the call for creative responses in Darragh's anti-rights or inverted copyright statement, the writing takes a route through the text that parallels some of Darragh's strategies as a writer. This creative reading is linked to a reading of Stephen Voyle's essay on open source poetics (2011), with some reference to a wider discourse around FLOSS, creative commons, and copyleft strategies. This essay proposes Darragh's work as a case study for Voyle's proposals, and suggests that her practice may in fact go further than he proposes in moving from a position of 'open source' to one of 'open content.'

Keywords: open source; poetry; Tina Darragh; creative writing

Introduction

This essay engages in a reading of Tina Darragh's publication *Opposable Dumbs* (2010). It engages in places in close reading, at other times it plays with reading in response to the text. This reading is carried out in pursuit of a number of critical and theoretical questions, that include asking what sort of text this is, and how we might read it. Composed of "some notes," gathered together loosely and headed with an "intellectual property statement," followed by "some more notes," *Opposable Dumbs* is published as a PDF with an option to purchase a hard-copy printout.¹ The work collects material generated over a period of time in response to different contexts, and comments on this work and the writing of it. Responding to the intellectual property statement, that declares, "NO RIGHTS OBSERVED," the essay considers how Darragh's work connects to the debate around open source and free software, and to the politics and poetics of that debate.

Taking up the call for creative responses in Darragh's anti-rights or inverted copyright statement, this reader takes a route through the text that parallels some of Darragh's strategies as a writer. This creative reading is linked to a reading of Stephen Joyce's essay on open source poetics (2011), with some reference to a wider discourse around FLOSS, creative commons, and copyleft strategies.² Joyce outlines the possibility for a poetry and poetics that derives methods and intention from the thinking around FLOSS, and argues that an engaged contemporary poetry must

¹ In the online PDF version of *Opposable Dumbs*, and in the printed version that can be purchased from the Zimzalla website, pages are not numbered. In this discussion, I have chosen to number the pages for ease of reference, following the numbering in Adobe Reader. This counts the cover/title page as (1), but then restarts the number sequence for the text pages, with (1) the first page of text and running to a closing page (32) which presents the website and email address for Zimzalla. The printed version of the text is on 17 sheets of A4 paper, in black and white except for a bright red masthead and author name on the cover; it is stapled upper-left, and includes a blank page after the end of the 'more notes' section, and before the Zimzalla credits. Quoted material will be cited as *OD* in this essay.

² FLOSS is an acronym for 'free/libre software and open source software,' a movement or collective of programmers and coders within the software community who have campaigned to keep access to the source code for computer programmes open and free. Creative Commons is one development of this movement, particularly from the open source side, that has designed an alternative series of rights designations to allow for sharing and open use of creative material with some restrictions. Copyleft is an alternative to copyright that favours a common ownership model. See Berry 2008.

take on these arguments. Voyce would claim that 'writing the contemporary' must necessarily acknowledge this context and must work out a response to its implications for the idea of the author, understanding of creative work, or the status of the poetic text. In his discussion, Voyce looks at the work of Kenneth Goldsmith, Darren Wershler, the Ubuweb project among others. Darragh's work offers an exciting case study for Voyce's proposals, and may in fact go further than he proposes in moving from a position of 'open source' to one of 'open content.'

Tina Darragh is an American writer who has been writing, reading, and publishing work in anthologies, through small presses, and online since the 1970s. Her work has been collected in a number of anthologies, including Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree* (1986) which places her as close to or linked with the East coast L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry grouping; and *From the Other Side of the Century* (1994), edited by Douglas Messerli, where her interest in procedural poetry and disjunction of language is highlighted. She has been based in the Washington DC area since the mid 1970s, and has been an important figure in the avant garde or experimental poetry scene there (Lang 2007). Her writing operates across practices that include assemblage, collage, found texts, procedures and narrative. The writing is often occasional in that it originates in a specific situation or event, is prompted by a call for work, or is a response to a reading occasion or her correspondence with other writers. Darragh often explicitly describes the occasion in the work, and as these prompts sometimes come from home or family situations, her work can be described as domestic, as familiar, while also being directly politically engaged (Leahy 2004). This engagement involves addressing questions of gender and economic politics, alongside broader social and ecological concerns. Her interweaving of these aspects, and her assertion of the importance of their interrelation distinguishes her work.

1.

Should I apologise to begin with? I am speaking here in place of and displacing the poet Tina Darragh, with whose text *Opposable Dumbs* I have chosen to engage. She has given me free rein to do so, to "croon" or to "perform" the material as my own (*OD*, 1).

But there are a lot of things that she is that I'm not, so does that make me less eligible to do this crooning properly, with less propriety? Crooning makes me remember my father, who sang in a choir and at weddings and funerals, and who sang versions or interpretations of the songs of crooners such as Bing Crosby and Tony Bennett.

the linking of laments to property rights, any concept of "family" beyond economic ties was outlawed, and the history of war's consequences for all families could be neither seen nor heard [. . .]

I can't property lament this (*OD*, 12)

Crooning is a smooth style that slurs and blends the notes and tones for an easy listen, to please an audience, with a mix of familiarity and ornament. Will I croon this response to Darragh's text? Sing back to her thinking of my father who was a farmer, and so worked with animals as property, ran a dairy farm and understood cows as 'good milkers,' or as 'easy calvers,' and would have wondered somewhat at the notion of animal rights, but had no difficulty telling the cows apart, and with my mother they named them all individually, Daisy, Stephanie, Cilla, Bella, . . . and many others over decades. They weren't mere chattels these cattle.

(dispose) > ABLE creatures

(two ways, in twosense "reverse, undo") > INTERROGATE HOLD begins

/ > start a sentence

capital

/ > start a business

chattel = moveable possessions (*OD*, 15)

Should I apologise now for roping my father in as a rhetorical stand-in for an imagined (common) reader? I chose him because of a momentary association with the word 'croon,' and then found that there were other links to be followed. The associative thread became lively, sparking side shoots and suggesting other ways of approaching the material.

[I'm] advised to engage in a heavenly form of free association (*OD*, 20)

The associations led to an opening out of the sense of 'crooning,' recognising it as a complex term that shifted around and straddled boundaries of style and form. The singing style generated anxiety around gender, where the male singers were seen as seductive, as threatening to lure female fans away from their less eloquent husbands, and at the same time were seen as feminine or feminised, as they engaged in highly emotional persuasion. (Thèberge, 7) And singing those popular songs, covering hit parade numbers, wasn't my father involved in a slippery disruption of copyright proprieties? In appropriating some other's song as his own, by making free with the goods, an alternative musical economy was in operation. Like folk songs or occasional ballads, perhaps these songs were felt to be something held in common by the community of singers, listeners, dancers, who shared the experience of performing, of hearing, of dancing to them. The debate around free, open source, open content in software, in academic publishing, and in literature, dances around these worries of property and propriety, of making and sharing and having in common, and owning things.

Acts of appropriation are ultimately shaped by our attitudes toward originality, authorship, property, and the ontological status of art objects. Although it may seem obvious, appropriation can be considered subversive only if a given society, and its attendant legal apparatus and cultural institutions, deem it illicit. (Voyce, 408)

My father might resist this text, *Opposable Dumbs*, rejecting how words get mixed up and broken and jar in awkward groupings, and he might find the bringing together of disparate ideas and styles confusing. He might not recognise the reference to PETA, but would have learnt about limbo in catechism lessons. He might be disturbed by discussions of abortion and hysteria, and frustrated by themes that don't seem to go anywhere. He might be more troubled by a sense of impropriety, of a questioning of concepts of ownership, of property, of possession. If he unquestionably understood

and accepted a familiar familial transmission of property through direct inheritance, the disruption of such a flow or the dispersal of such goods would dumbfound him.

Words continue to fail me. (*OD*, 3)

[10 seconds of silence] (*OD*, 8)

2.

NO RIGHTS OBSERVED (*OD*, 1)

let's assume the moveable mantle

[. . . to] remix, rearrange, edit, perform, display, and/or croon any or all of the following as [my] own. [. . .]

The "author" may have disappeared, but language remains privileged [. . .] freeze-frame words (*OD*, 1)

The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning (*OD*, 23)

In her intellectual property statement, on the first page of this 'report,' Tina Darragh calls for the reader to "reproduce, remix, rearrange," to plagiarize, in order to "challenge the notion of writing/ideas as property" (*OD*, 1). This call to free play in and with the text directs attention to questions of authorship and ownership. It causes me pause, to consider how to refer to this object under discussion, this 'work,' this "project report." Is this Darragh's, does she have some claim on it? Her name is on the cover page, as signatory to this document, as submitter of the report.

an act of self-defense and selfeffacement, women authors often included the apologies of other women writers with their own, and in so doing cataloged all of their accomplishments as partial authors (*OD*, 18)

Darragh labels the work as 'hers' and also binds up apologies within it, apologies that make claims for alternatives to the "existing order" (*OD*, 18). Sharing the responsibil-

ity across and with other women authors, the medieval apology tradition allowed for a collective production; and shifted the question of whose the text was, to whom it belonged, onto a number of shoulders. As the existing order made the role of author difficult for any individual woman to occupy, possibility for resistance became available as an element in a dispersed or collective of partial authors.³

[t]his writing challenges people to resist being good soldiers who uncritically buy into the roles society creates for them (*OD*, 30)

nobody's won so everybody's done (*OD*, 3)

My bringing my father into this discussion acknowledges Darragh's inclusion in her writing of references to her family (her husband, son, parents, sister) (see in particular Darragh 1989a, 1989c, 1996), and references to friends, colleagues, those she has written with, read with, and engaged with as part of a writing community. The dedications and notes in *Opposable Dumbs* reference many of these people, and by gathering up the evidence of these partial authors, the text works as a document of a "writing community" (*OD*, 24). A writing community raises possibilities of writing in common, or writing in community, where that involves a common project or a common task or a common purpose. The persistence or perseverance of a community of writers and writing might disrupt inherited models of authorship and authorial property. A community offers an alternative to the nuclear family and its management of property and resources, its hierarchy, its closed structure, though it can accommodate members of families. Community as a site or context of and for sharing shifts writing from being an individual isolated pursuit to being potentially an open practice, open source and open content.

Applied to literature, the term [open source] evocatively brings into focus a number of issues relating to authorship and intertextuality, "intellectual

³ Darragh refers the reader to the work of Anita Obermeier on 'Women and the Medieval apology tradition' (*OD*, 28).

property” and the public domain, poetic license and collective artistic production. One might speak of an open source poetics or commons-based poetics based on a decentralized and nonproprietary model of shared cultural codes, networks of dissemination, and collaborative authorship. (Voyce, 407)

Voyce's listing of possibilities for an “open source poetics” draws on aspects of community, a notion of shared codes, or of collaborative working, as well as modes of exchange and distribution that depend on networks, on connections among and between persons. These aspects of community have figured in earlier occasions of Darragh's practice, where writing as a woman, being a woman writer, being of and in a community of women who wrote, was seen to offer alternatives to given modes of authorship, intellectual property, public domain, poetic license and artistic production. They also figure in relation to who speaks, if that speaking is for or on behalf of a community or a group.

we challenged notions of voice and the unified subject to highlight the historical conditions of our lives, not to obliterate them (*OD*, 30)

3.

multiples products a rare analytical out which having hatred leaf enlightenment long effects one rebirth now dies little soul now existence some attraction High Freud) Now wish only statement with you that yourself (*OD*, 2)

Does *Opposable Dumbs* subsist as a ‘work’ as it exists here in one PDF file version? The Zimzalla publication, this text I'm reading and responding to, includes within it references to other partial publications of versions of this material and to performances, readings and other presentations of the work(s) keeping in play the idea of a ‘first hand’ or ‘second hand’ and keeping in suspense any sense of a final version.⁴The

⁴ Darragh indicates at the outset of the different sections of *Opposable Dumbs*, the reading or publication history of that part, as well as some of the incidents, conversations or occasions that prompted it. As she mentions on page 24, an earlier version of the section titled “numb to dumb” (*OD*, 2–5) was published on the DCPoetry online project (2003), with the same dedication, but with an additional

text is open to later future reworkings and remains provisional and occasional with any specific or particular manifestation being particular to that moment, belonging or fitting that occasion, but not ending or closing there.

literary appropriation is a productive activity. Such techniques release a portion of a text from its static, fixed position in a single work, enabling it to participate in a proliferation of potential texts amid continuously changing assemblages of authorial, intertextual, and communal networks. (Voyce, 409)

This hybrid or mixed text, *opposable dumbs*, makes statements, tells stories, gathers data, offers links, it apologises and it laments. Or the author, Tina Darragh does, through and in this (her) text. And yet this statement (of mine) is countered by her quoting of Michel Foucault's essay "What Is an Author?" In her notes, she repeats Foucault's assertion that the author "reduces the danger with which fiction threatens our world" (*OD*, 23), that the "author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning" (*OD*, 23). So, to reduce the text to being Darragh's, belonging to her, being her production will manage the material and keep it safe, hoarding its affect in a miserly fashion to ensure there are no surprises, no "dangerous proliferation[s]" (*OD*, 23). Not limiting the possibilities for reading to those authorised by a concept of 'Darragh' as author allows meaning to multiply, and playfully plagiarising the text avoids fixing it as a product for consumption and exchange. This can be read as a "critique of capitalism" (*OD*, 23), and a celebration of other possible modes of making and writing.

If the ubiquitous myth of the solitary author obfuscates the social production of literature, then, in the case of twenty-first-century experimental writing, it also conceals a deliberate political project informing both social practice and compositional practice: that is, an open source poetics advances in defense of a shared cultural commons. (Voyce, 409)

opening quotation from John Berger's *About Looking*. A version of the section titled "rule of dumbs" (*OD*, 10–17) was published in the online literary journal *ActionYes* (2009a).

And, in the first page of this text, Darragh expands on the threat mentioned by Foucault. A capitalist sanctioned author function that limits the production of meaning through its attachment to a marketable or identifiable construct of consumption is not the only threat. This is just one of the “fictions that threaten us all” (*OD*, 1), those sanctioned by capitalism, those that hide the unpalatable, the nasty, the “harms” (*OD*, 12), and a breaking open of the author model may offer ways to counter them. Collaboration, plagiarism, remixing, an “intervocal anonymity” (*OD*, 1) recalling the collective making of medieval manuscripts, is a suggested strategy. And, a production of and by unnamed multiple voices may specifically counter the hiding of harms around the treatment of animals, animals that may be unnamed and be of other voice.

A libertarian and liberating manifesto of free play in and with the text is clouded by the recognition that this play cannot include those outside language. As a route to considering other rights and others' rights Darragh poses the question, “What does it matter who is speaking” (*OD*, 1), displacing speech property claims. Drawing on models of medieval manuscript production, she includes possibilities of attending to the marginal and the partial. An “intervocal anonymity” (*OD*, 1) may offer a mode of telling stories that opposes dumbs, deliberately deploying other modes of (not) knowing, positing silences against and instead of speeches, disowning and appropriating text and narrative, in a digital dispersal of intellectual propriety, all fingers and thumbs and toes and mobile extremities.

consideration = attention

shape up the fragments to

distract us from our powerlessness (*OD*, 10)

The issue of powerlessness shifts when the non-human is included in the scope of power relations, as the meaning or sense of free speech similarly shifts. As Darragh faces the choice of speaking for the voiceless, she comes face to face with what this implies, her voice will effect a displacement, an effacing of those without faces. The question “What does it matter who is speaking” (*OD*, 1) with which Foucault closes

his essay "What Is an Author?" has been asked on previous occasions, in relation to gender, to race, to physical difference and to sexual orientation, and her awareness of this history of writing from, of and for groups or communities who had been silenced in different ways sits behind Darragh's repetition of the question here.⁵

In a short essay on Susan Howe's work (Darragh 1986a), Darragh describes writing action undertaken with a clear sense that it did matter who was speaking and that she was a woman.⁶ Darragh writes of puzzling over who would or could be the audience for, the readers of Howe's work, with its mix of old language from the Bible and the classics, and new technical strategies such as fragmentation and isolation. How would this concoction be read? This reading could not take place in isolation, "I heard Susan's work against the backdrop of the '70s as the decade of the women's movement 'lit crit' division" (547). This experience coloured Darragh's reading of Howe, and affects and contributes to her own writing. If she is "reminded of the endless discussion groups dealing with the topic of the 'politically correct' woman writer" (547), when she reads Howe, how much more must she be reminded of, or aware of, this when she picks up her own pen. Darragh gives a brief summary of what that "lit crit" division was. It involved a division of language into male and female orientations, the male one being the predominant as language had been developed to facilitate male commercial interests. A mode of writing was sought that could function as an antidote to "male-oriented language," and "stream of consciousness technique" was proposed for this. Darragh admits to being bothered by, what she saw as, these simplistic divisions of technique or method.

⁵ Examples of this are Robert Glück's "Who Speaks for Us?: Being an Expert" (Glück 1985) in relation to class and sexuality, and Lyn Hejinian's "Who is Speaking?" (Hejinian 2000) in relation to gender and public discourse. This discussion was particularly complicated within avant garde writing debates as there was felt to be a tension between stories that needed to be told and the modes of telling that were authorised by the poetics community.

⁶ Darragh contributed the piece on Howe to *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* in 1982, titled simply "Howe," and it is included in the "Second Front" section of Ron Silliman's anthology *In the American Tree* (Darragh 1986a).

[T]he one [assumption] that continues to bother me the most is the stereotyping of the 'process' of women's creative power as still the private, intuitive energy that gives birth to something new, another form of 'motherhood.' Analytical thought continued to be man's domain, and a dirty realm at that. (547)

Darragh then gives examples from Howe's work of ways in which she works against such an assumption. In using "mores" and "characters" from "past literature," Howe goes to the heart of the patriarchal tradition. When there, she "startles these 'old stories' by fragmenting them and using (for example) isolated 'e' and 's' sounds to screech and hiss at them" (548).⁷ For Darragh this is an attempt to get "to the roots of women's literature" (548) and is an action in place of the "endless discussion groups" (547).

All this is not to say that Susan writes as a 'political' poet, but that I read her as one. (548)

Darragh, in taking this initiative as a reader, in being decisive, taking control over what is and is not 'political,' allows me to rehearse a reading of Darragh's writing as political, whether that defines Darragh as a political writer or not. Expanding on what it is in Howe's writing that allows her to read it as political, Darragh states that experimentation with given forms, with inherited patterns 'equals freedom' for Howe (549). In the case of this reference to Susan Howe, the 'equals' is not the indicator of some passive equivalence, but is the sign of an active working to find some equation between writing and freedom.⁸

⁷ These sounds may be startling as they are outside the proper patterns of speech, they may sound 'hysterical' or nonhuman. They open up speech to the animal, extending the range of communication or inscription.

⁸ "experimentation with the patterns of words handed down to her equals freedom" (549), might be another equation, like those that appear elsewhere in Darragh's writing. In some cases these are printed as longer double bars, '==' (1989b, 28), indicating a mapping or translation rather than 'identity.' '≐'. In the *OED* these equals signs are used within the etymological parts of a definition to indicate 'is the same as' or 'is equivalent to' or 'has come from,' where the mapping is from one language,

She [Howe] stands up against the weight of our language's history and, as an intellectual, fights back an act of liberation that is valid on its own and in many ways compliments [sic] the struggle of those bringing up information from the subconscious. (549)

Darragh closes the short essay, by proposing Howe's work and methods as an approach to making work and dealing with history that is alternative and complementary to the work of women writers who choose the route of the subconscious.

The image of "bringing up information from the subconscious" draws on images of miners or deep-sea divers, though these are both commercial in their motivation, and so might be thought to have already been "co-opted by commerce" (547). This stream of consciousness as co-opted and fully incorporated into the capitalist model appears in the "rule of dumb" section of *Opposable Dumbs*. Commenting on the work of Peter Singer, author of *Animal Liberation*, Darragh observes that he is a "strict utilitarian" (*OD*, 12), and rather than campaigning for the rights of animals, Singer "focuses on the consequences of actions that benefit or harm them" (*OD*, 12). However, she continues, the capitalist system is dependent on "hiding harms."

But for readers living within a system where profits are maximised by hiding harms, the only trade-off they know is supply and demand, the only demand they know is union corruption, the only supply they know is stream of con 'n stuff 'n stuff. (*OD*, 12)

This "con 'n stuff 'n stuff" may be a mix of stream of consciousness, of consumer products, a confidence trick, a smokescreen from a puffing train, puff puff. This paragraph is followed by a lament, "Dam con'n stuff 'n stuff lament" (*OD*, 12). This nine-line lament is set out in broken lines looking poem-like after a passage of prose, though not rhyming like the "Lament for the unity in utility under capitalism" (*OD*, 11), and

or time period to another. These equals signs may gather to form bridges across the gaps in history lapping the stories of human and animal, the dispossessed, the silenced and those with access to resources, power and speech.

it is titled and set apart from the rest of the text. “Dam con ‘n stuff ‘n stuff lament” (*OD*, 12), both damns the “con ‘n stuff ‘n stuff” and perhaps hopes to dam the stream of it, and laments the (im)possibility of damming it, or laments the preponderance of it. The poem presents a train of events, a flow of things that happen, (as the word “con” is coupled to the wagons of “stuff” by the conjunctions “n”) a flow of goods and commodities, as the words flow into each other in an almost unpunctuated run. The text plays out a scatter or spray of associations and meanings moving from images of transport of goods through gifts and presents to masking and covering the facts with wrapping and shadow, and loss of heat slips into a curtailed sermon leading to a distraction or loss of memory, as language changes and the poem comes to more dispersed less coherent sense of what is going on, as any opposition to the “train of events” may be diverted into a scatter of “varied sprays” (*OD*, 12).

As with the other laments in the text, Darragh leaves some ambiguity as to whether she is lamenting ‘for’ something that has been and is now no more, or whether she is lamenting a present lamentable situation.⁹ In this case, it feels as though the lament is for how we are subject to an endless ongoing flow of goods offering apparent infinite choice and varied options, that in the same gesture wraps us up in a closed system without cease.

The concern with stream of consciousness as an alternative to the authorised version, to the system-sanctioned mode of telling, is that it has taken its structure and its values from that system. The stream of consciousness by apparently elevating the individual experience and the particular consciousness served the purposes of the isolating and individuating profit driven structures. It mirrored the presentations of choice and worth that consumer culture offered, and so perpetuated the divisions between genders, and the inequalities of power. So this lament may also be for the

⁹ In the Judaeo-Christian tradition the lament is an occasional poem in that it arises out of a specific occasion in the life of the lamenting individual or the nation (the people of Israel in the Old Testament). It is also always addressed, in the biblical tradition it is addressed to God, and it calls on God with some expectation of or faith in a response. In other traditions, such as that of Ancient Greece, lamentation (in particular for the dead) was the preserve of women, and was seen as threatening to the male power structures as it was a domain of female authority. (See Hughes 2004)

possibilities held out for the stream of consciousness model as an alternative, and in dam(m)(n)ing it may serve as a warning to seek other models in order to shift relations between humans and non-human animals.

The stream of consciousness as a model of 'free expression' or of individual artistic expression has contributed to the delimiting and defining of the products of creative work as works, as products, as copyrightable. Where initially copyright was developed to safeguard the property of the publisher who would make a loss if pirate versions were sold, more recently the copyright has shifted to the 'author' and the evidence of his expressive work. This revision has allowed for the copyrighting of computer code as by analogy it is written, and is a product in/of language. Darragh laments the trademarking of language and the commodification of linguistic material, and may suggest that some responsibility for this lies in the elevating of the value of the stream of productions of individual consciousness over any shared or collective consciousness.

4.

To our surprise, I'm a blank bunch of ums (*OD*, 2)

Doesn't an apology count only if it is made to someone who can hear you?

[. . .] Why do you assume apologies are limited to speech? (*OD*, 5)

So how do I describe what is going on on the page/screen? I can say that 'Darragh does X,' or that 'Darragh writes on page Y' In using intentional verbs, verbal phrases indicating action and intention on the part of the author Darragh, in referring to Darragh as 'doing this here' or 'doing that there' I impute authorial intention and suggest a figure undertaking direct action in the text. If I focus on what I am reading in the text, here and now, and acknowledge the specificity of that, I notice that Darragh includes accounts of her actions, directly describing them, relating anecdotes or short narratives of what she has done. This has been a feature of her earlier work and is presented within the texts, with reflexive comments on what happened or what was done next, or what was going on as a sentence or passage was written. This is in

addition to and distinct from the inclusion of 'Working Notes' on a separate page or the listing of sources.¹⁰ My action as commentator seems undermined by the actions of the apparent or stated 'author' who is a parallel commentator, describing actions in and around the 'text.' Is there a simple entity that might be referred to as Darragh in my discussion? The copyright declaration, the IP statement, has opened the work to plagiarism and remixing, and the text is composed of different modes and intensities of assemblage.

I feel the need to apologize, but I'm not sure for what, or to whom. (OD, 7)

"What does it matter who is speaking" as a pan-animal liberation call. (OD, 1)

and pennants proclaiming "Don't Tread on Me." I can't stop looking at the photo – (OD, 3)

The fabric(ation) of the work is open and its assembly instructions are revealed. As with other works published under Darragh's name this one shows its workings as she describes how it was put together. In 'adv. fans – the 1968 series' (Darragh 1996) the instructions or a score for making the poems is given, in other texts "sources" or "source works" are listed at the end, or in *Dream Rim Instructions* (Darragh 1999), an "Annotated Bibliography" is given. In *Opposable Dumbs*, pages 23 to 31 are headed "some more notes" (OD, 23) and list sources, links, reading suggestions, acknowledgements and additional context for the materials presented up to that point.

Darragh appears to be a good re-user in this, to behave well in her gathering and redeployment of material. She shows where material has come from, acknowledges her sources, indicates the methods of assembly she has employed. This would be within the appropriate behaviour under a 'creative commons' license, and within

¹⁰ 'Working Notes' was the heading chosen for supporting or documentary material that was published to accompany texts in the journal *How (ever)* and kept as a feature in its online successor *How2*. (see Fraser 2000, 35) "The 'Working Note' was to give some idea of the processes that had gone into the production and of any formal problems proposed or encountered. This was to reinforce the idea that no text is produced in a vacuum but always within a social and aesthetic field." (Vickery 2000, 92)

good academic practice. But she also hints at blurred or hidden joining, where not all cuts and seams are shown. A line of Xs may indicate a sutured scar, or a redacted passage, or may suggest a non-speech sounding.

“anatomist with his arm around the corpse” (OD, 5)

XXXXXXXX

what have I done

putting them together

so they look like one (OD, 3)

Darragh’s inclusion of the accounts of making, the details of composition, or of construction and assemblage of the texts serves to open up the process, and to place the ‘writer’ as one who works with words and text very clearly before the reader. These may include comments on the material conditions of the writing space, the table or desk, and the wall nearby where notes, images and cuttings mix with drafts and research materials. The position or actions of the writer’s body may be mentioned as she turns or looks or moves thus seeing something from a different angle, or changing the relationship between disparate elements.¹¹ The reader can repeat the actions, or follow the instructions, as the poetry shares its source or assembly instructions. In this Darragh’s work seems to sit comfortably within an ‘open source’ or FLOSS model, and to be equivalent in ways to generative poetry that uses software scripts to produce new texts. This ‘openness’ can be seen as parallel to the FLOSS movements opposition to a closed or ‘black box’ model of computer technology. The black-box version of technology shuts out the user, they cannot tinker with it, cannot fix or amend it. It is closed, and thus presents

¹¹ In *Opposable Dumbs* this is specifically described on page 4 where the writer sees the image of anti-WTO protesters juxtaposed with the image of a medieval anatomist. It is referred to in ‘Raymond Chandler’s Sentence’ (1986b, 391–396), and the domestic scene of working and writing reoccurs in texts such as ‘sputter plot’ (Darragh 1989b, unpaginated). The table by the window as the site of writing and other domestic labour is also described by Kathleen Fraser (2000, 45).

its operations as magical, beyond the comprehension of the end user. (Berry, 165) Darragh's practice might oppose a version of poetry or writing that similarly presents the reader with a closed unit, a fixed entity that is the 'magical' output of the author's genius. By showing how the work has been assembled, acknowledging the activity of the writer in making it, she leaves space for the reader to tinker, to plagiarise, to croon.

The retention of hyperlinks in collaged materials from online dictionaries further reveals the assembly history or the underlying code, similar to the 'reveal code' option in web browsers. Darragh comments on this in an interview with Tom Jenks, saying she feels this "unintentional transference of links offers potential further links to the reader" (Darragh 2009b). This is more obviously the case in the PDF version as (depending on the reader/user's preference settings) the links are highlighted.¹² The credits for sources are made public, and are performed as branching hyperlink sprays.

indefinite, incoherent feeling in more and more
 complex defending credit of all
 public temper performed
 varied sprays (*OD*, 12)

These traces of linking to electronic or online dictionaries restage in a digital environment the links to the paper dictionary pages in Darragh's earlier work. There, pages were torn or folded or traversed with rules and moved over with digits, the writer's fingers tracing routes across the surface; here, the text is stitched together of elements, each of which has a URL link to a place online, mixing a search history or route through clicks and links. The reader can go back to a source, or carry on the journey further, as conditions of before and after, origin and source, target and destination are complicated.

¹² There are also links preserved in the online publication of 'numb to dumb' (Darragh 2003), allowing the reader to follow up on information that Darragh alludes to or refers to obliquely. The immediacy of this additional mediation is lost in printing out the texts.

chance has played a role in putting every living thing at the top of the present evolutionary tree. (*OD*, 27)

The fetus has no words and no history, the monkey has no words and no history, and the image of the Islamic terrorist evokes words and history disintegrating (*OD*, 14)

historical laps remain as gaps in the stories told as the concentration camps become museums. (*OD*, 17)

A history of the making of this text is traceable, but the reader cannot be certain of the sequence or the evolution of the resulting publication. What came first, what words came from where, whose words they were before, all are part of the story, but that story is not fixable.

Darragh's foregrounding of process in her practice may resist a dominance of things in her presentation of text, information or narrative. In relation to wider discussions around eco-criticism and ecopoetics, there is a sense in which the text may hope to perform or model alternative modes of conceiving, of apprehending the world or our experience. A resistance to the text becoming a 'thing' links to an avoidance of the commodification of writing.

Toil fore one word round cling,
Sunk to hush, ally driv'ling cries (*OD*, 11)

[. . .] profits are maximized by hiding harms, the only trade-off they know is supply and demand (*OD*, 12)

Copyright changes in relation to software have been opposed by some in the FLOSS movement as they saw these as leading to a fixing or making physical something which they would argue is not a 'thing,' remains in flux. As software copyright sought to define code as an 'expression,' in parallel to the definition of creative works such as poetry, there came a need to fix that code at some point in its development, and to limit the use of that fixed entity so that it might be exploited as a commodity. The immaterial

sequence of 0s and 1s would be fixed in some physical medium. (Berry, 107) The reduction of writing, animals, persons, environments to things that can be exploited, profited from is opposed by Darragh in the text and in the practice of this project.

In their collaboration, “Deep Eco Pré-cautionary Ponge-ABLEs: A Collaborative Essay,” Marcella Durand and Darragh cite the work of Francis Ponge. (Darragh and Durand 2005) Ponge presents processes of making to the reader, displaying versions and variants, the accretion and erosion of words and letters, as shown, for example, in his “The Notebook of the Pine Woods” (Ponge 1971). Ponge’s text operates with the concept of ‘field’ in a manner that Darragh finds productive. This sense of the page as field and of poetry-making as geographic or chorographic extends the trope of blurred boundaries, draws in a notion of commons and commonage, and proposes anecdote in place of the thing (Darragh and Durand, 203, 210). Voyce in his evocation of the wider possibilities of open source also raises this relation to resources and their consumption. A cultural entity such as the anecdote, that avoids fixity, and remains open to reuse, in flux across a field of practice, may remain available to and for a collective rather than be used up by an individual.

[S]omething in the term free culture perpetuates a Western infatuation with the infinitely abundant, cost-less, and thus guilt-free consumption of cultural resources. [. . .] A term like open source may carry less terminological baggage, but, more importantly, it should name a radically egalitarian and collectively managed information and cultural commons. (Voyce, 417–418)

The conception of language as a lexicon, as made up of discrete word objects that designate or classify or indicate things in the world, can reinforce the reification of experience, and perpetuate an anthropocentric relation of human to animal. The dictionary divides and separates the continuum of experience and perception, draws lines between us and them, me and everything else. Darragh’s disruption of the dictionary entry, her treatment of the dictionary page as a field, and the online diction-

ary as a (dis)continuum of data material, pushes against these divisions to perform a blurring of information distinctions.

for you God is the Big Dictionary in the sky (*OD*, 5)

adjacent a comic

from alphabet

astride

SLIDE

machine

the tool

machine

(arch) (*OD*, 7)

Cary Wolfe in *Animal Rites* (2003) elaborates on the distinguishing of human from animal that depends on drawing a line between language users and those without language. This distinction can be disrupted by extending notions of communication, of code, of messaging, to include activity by animals and plants (genetic code, chemical messages, etc.). This may be linked to Darragh's wish "to create a writing community tolerant of 'a blank bunch of ums' type of poetry" (*OD*, 24). A poetry of a "blank bunch of ums" might extend or open ideas of language, of what is conceivable, what is perceptible, what is receivable, of what may be indicated by a blank or a string of Xs.

it is hard to imagine how a duty to speak for animals based on our status as superior beings due to language can lead to anything else but a society built on differences a superior race dictates by controlling language (*OD*, 4)

cries rise from throats made weak with words which can choke us while we breathe (*OD*, 13)

Darragh, who works with words and language, sees this as the area where she must address the issues of difference, of exploitation, of superiority. She looks to the work of Peter Singer whose 1975 book *Animal Liberation* launched a movement to tackle abuse and mistreatment of animals, and considers how it linked to other liberation and rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s (OD, 10). However, Darragh finds that Singer's position in relation to animals is strictly utilitarian and he ends up arguing against mistreatment or harm on grounds of efficiency or in terms of benefit (OD, 12).

The factory farm remains. (OD, 11)

Conclusion

The distinction raised between rights and utility in Darragh's citing of Peter Singer (OD, 12), and the expansion to the question of economic utility versus the possible harms that may ensue from its pursuit is paralleled by the two approaches to the FLOSS debate. The Open Source Movement (OSM) and the Free Software Foundation (FSF) propose related but differently articulated arguments around free/libre open source software. Their different attitudes to rights, and to freedom connect with the issues Darragh considers in her laments. David Berry in *Copy, Rip, Burn* (2008) examines the opposition between OSM and FSF through the writings of two key figures, Richard M Stallman founder of FSF, and Eric S. Raymond, founder of the Open Source Initiative. For Stallman, the issue of rights is key to the debate, as all users should have the right of free access to and use of computer code; and that right of ownership should not limit that access whether defined around the products of labour or of expression (Berry, 160–161). Raymond's concern is less with rights and more with freeing up code for maximum efficiency and the generation of the greatest profit. Freedom in Raymond's model is freedom to act selfishly, to act in the interest of individual gain (Berry, 175–177). Multiply authored code for Raymond is an efficient use of a number of coders, speeding up the process of writing, but without any altruistic or communal sense of benefit or shared achievement. The figure of the author may appear to be fragmented, but the Open Source discourse

retains a clear sense of individual ownership and for OSM property is protected by copyright. The form of copyright may be modified to develop new expressions of particular limits on use as in the array of Creative Commons licences, but the primary intention is to ensure that the individual gains before there is any consideration of a wider communal, social, or planetary impact (Berry, 172–173; 177–178). The FSF position as Stallman outlines it feels much closer to Darragh's intentions as expressed in her "intellectual property statement" (*OD*, 1) and as explored in the issues addressed in *Opposable Dumbs*. 'Freedom' for Stallman includes the freedom to share expertise, to alter, improve and adapt software for the wider social good; and this freedom is exercised in relation to a community, not simply attached to the actions of discrete individuals.

The responsibility of the avant-garde will [. . .] require an activist obligation to create and fortify public domains of open source knowledge, [. . .] That which is at stake is nothing less than open accessibility to culture. (Voyce, 427–428)

Between 'open source' as a model of/for poetics which offers templates, scores, instructions or code for makers and writers to write and make more works, using appropriative or generative methods, and 'open content' which unlocks material to be reframed or redesignated, resigned, redesigned, there is a gap. This gap is between an enduring neo-liberal free-market notion of productivity and goods, and an undermining of goods as properties and things accepting destruction and discomfort as a potential outcome of openness, acknowledging that we will not always like what we hear back, or who is speaking.

FIT the forest's gloom into jig-saw puzzles & FIT the HUNTER tyrants into heyday costumes & FIT the animal experimenters into corporate sponsorships (*OD*, 6)

slow wo hopes our gain stalls wide
behind the sill of spell and rook

sizing (an)I mal no vi
 sults more ru than lore of reel (OD, 8)

Darragh's practice suggests that words can "branch out" (OD, 17) and resist the work of some users to draw lines between them, to compartmentalise discourses and delimit stories. This is most evident in the trade marking of language or the extension of patent law to words and phrases. Such privatisation and fencing off is occurring in the area of genetics also, with animal and plant material being patented by global business even when there may be long-standing local uses and knowledge of the health or other properties being defined (OD, 25). *Opposable Dumbs* encourages a reading and telling of overlapping histories, offering material to lay across the aporia, to "lap" the "gaps" (OD, 18). These gaps or silences may be reconsidered as expressive or communicative, as the strings of Xs or the blanks or bunches of "ums" extend the field of possibilities of/for communication. The jamming of the voice by emotion parallels the use of emotional hooks and ticks by the crooners. The slurring and stopping disrupt a commodifiable text(ure), opening content to infilling and redistribution, without guaranteeing any ameliorative or productive outcome. The crooner's vocal effect may become commodified as a signal of emotional truth, as a marker of sincerity, but something of the potential in the 'hole' in the 'uuummmm' may remain beyond such appropriation, may escape incorporation.

Additional response and/or silence at audience discretion. (OD, 9)

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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