

Week 6

“Lesser artists borrow; great artists steal”

-Baoshi Hong

*The GNU manifesto* and *Everything is a Remix*

Should software, and in a larger scope, ideas, be free? I think the documentary is clearly biased against the idea of intellectual property. I agree with some of the arguments the documentary makes. For instance, I do think that patent and copyright laws sometimes impede innovation and stand in the way of “the greater good.” Thomas Edison famously used patent laws to steal the credit for inventions from others, and was very litigious with people using his inventions without paying royalties. There are also controversial patents that challenge our conception of “property.” For example, while products of nature cannot be patented, genetically modified organisms can. While farmers can usually keep a part of their crops’ seeds to replant next year, they cannot legally do so with GMO seeds without paying royalties to the patent holder for each harvest.

I think the challenge with patents and copyrights is to find a way to give enough credit and financial reward to innovators to encourage them, but not enough so they can disproportionately profit from it to the detriment of others. I really don’t think software devs should work for free. While it is nice that some people develop freeware through their passion for coding, I think there should be protections for those who don’t want to work for free. This is especially relevant in the light of the recent student movements against unpaid internships. Programmers and artists’ products are often so immaterial that they are essentially only *ideas*. Unless there exists legal protection for these works, these people would essentially be reliant on charity to survive.

There must be some kind of middle ground between the tentacular intellectual property laws of today, and the idealist world proposed by the GNU manifesto.