Free Software As DIY Culture

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Introduction

This essay is an investigation of the connections between DIY culture and the free software movement. I will attempt to identify the areas of similarity which both share, and which might lead one to conclude that the free software culture is a manifestation of DIY culture.

DIY culture as a consciously self-identified phenomenon came out of the punk movement of the early 80s. There is no question that its roots go back much further. Similarly free software as a conscious set of political beliefs goes back to the start of Stallman's GNU *project.*[1] [2] to build "a completely free operating system, or to die trying"[3], but the practice of creating, sharing and improving source code is one that has a heritage rooted in the "academic gift culture"[4] of the early computer scientists and hackers[5]. In essence the free software movement can be seen as a manifestation of DIY tending towards radical personal empowerment based around community, gift exchange and direct participation. This stands in contrast to the alienated consumption of software as a mere commodity.

DIY Culture

"We don't need to rely on rich businessmen to organize our fun for their profit – we can do it ourselves for no profit."[6]

The term "DIY culture" comes from the punk movement where it was used as a convenient label to describe the way that punks, inspired by the political ideas of anarchism and direct action, started expanding their activities beyond dressing unusually and listening to fast guitar music to self-organizing gigs, creating their own media (especially 'zines), managing space in squats and communes, political action and interacting socially. The punk movement, while remaining a subculture and being open to criticisms of "lifestylism", has been able to build internationally a vibrant community entirely through the voluntary co-operation of members of that community.

Although the punks were the first to label the phenomenon, DIY cultures have existed to a greater or lesser extent throughout history, and I will investigate briefly a few examples of this. During the English civil war, the "Diggers" occupied and began farming common land on St. Georges Hill, Surrey. Their belief was that through mutual aid and voluntary co-operation they would be able to oppose the enclosure of common land which peasants were reliant on for growing food and grazing animals. The Diggers set forth their plan thus:

"The Work we are going about is this, To dig up *Georges-Hill* and the waste Ground thereabouts, and to Sow Corn, and to eat our bread together by the sweat of our brows.

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1   All quotes from the Internet viewed between 2004-11-01 and 2004-12-13
2   http://www.gnu.org/gnu/gnu-history.html
3   "So I felt "I'm elected. I have to work on this. If not me, who?" So, I decided I would develop a free operating system -- or die trying. Of old age of course. " Richard Stallman interview at http://www.softpanorama.org/People/Stallman/interviews.shtml
4   Richard Barbrook, "The Hi-Tech Gift Economy" http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors/barbrooktext2.html
5   A hacker (in contrast to common usage) should be defined as "A person who delights in having an intimate understanding of the internal workings of a system, computers and computer networks in particular." http://www.net5.com/terms-dictionary.html#h Also "those computer programmers and designers who regard computing as the most important thing in the world", Preface to "Hackers", Steven Levy, Delta, 1984
6   Joel, "Profane Existence #11/12 Autumn 1991"

And the First Reason is this, That we may work in righteousness, and lay the Foundation of making the Earth a Common Treasury for All, Rich and Poor, That every one that is born in the land, may be fed by the Earth his Mother that brought him forth ...”[7]

The focus on reclaiming space for the use of a larger marginalized community continues in today's squatting movements, which occupy empty buildings as both a symbolic challenge to the inefficiency of an economic system whose logic implies that they must stay empty in order for their owners to maximise profit, and as a practical way to acquire space for DIY community activities from community gardens, cafes and nurseries to independent media centres, gig venues and places to organize protest. Further to this the environmental direct action movement have used squatting as a tactic in their struggle against socially and environmentally harmful road building. Claremont Rd in London stood in the way of a proposed motorway which would cause large scale ecological damage as well as destroying a working class inner city community. Residents and activists were able to blockade and squat the street turning it into a vibrant pedestrian community with 2 cafes, occasional cinemas, frequent parties and massive amounts of participatory art (which often also served as practical barricades to make the road builder's jobs more difficult and expensive).

“It was a point where people who hadn't known each other from all different places with lives that had been so so, started this amazing life with loads of weird and wonderful things that were not so so. Either brilliant or awful, but not so so.”[8]

In cyberspace DIY culture has managed to have an enormous impact. Indymedia[9] is a global collective of independent media activists dedicated to “grassroots, non-corporate, non-commercial coverage of important social and political issues.”[10] Their many websites rely on users publishing their own stories to a collective news wire. Volunteers make sure that offensive and inappropriate posts are removed, and compile articles (features) from related news wire postings. Decision making is done with publicly archived email lists, and is “tacit” consensus based. Anyone may choose to participate in a features list, and anyone participating may block the removal of news wire posts or the publishing of features. Indymedia has become one of the largest media organizations in the world, by global co-operation between the thousands of contributors, volunteers, and independent media organizations.

These brief examples of DIY culture must necessarily ignore the scope and diversity of DIY activity in recent years, from Reclaim the Streets[11] to Acid House to the Mexican Zapatistas[12] to anti-capitalist 'summit hopping'[13] to the Brazillian Landless Workers Movement(MST)[14]. They do however point to some overriding themes that they share, and that to a greater or lesser extent the free software movement consciously or not shares.

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7   Winstanley, Everard, Goodgroome, et al “The True Levellers Standard Advanced”, London, 1649
     http://www.bilderberg.org/land/diggers.htm#True
8   Jelly, quoted in “Copse: The Cartoon Book Of Tree Protesting”, Kate Evans, Orange Dog Productions, 1998 p.36
9   http://indymedia.org is the international homepage for the indymedia project.
10 http://indymedia.org.uk on homepage.
11 http://rts.gn.apc.org/ is the home of Reclaim the Streets (who organize street parties and carnivals of radical protest) in the UK
12 http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/zapatista.html archive of resources about the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico from 1994 onwards
13 http://eurodusnie.nl/2004/02/962.shtml is a slightly scathing attack on summit hopping as a tactic.
14 http://www.mstbrazil.org/ MST homepage

Gift Exchange and Commodity

Gun-toting[15] fetchmail hacker Eric Raymond popularised the idea of "hacker culture" being a gift economy in "Homesteading the Noosphere" :

"Abundance makes command relationships hard to sustain and exchange relationships an almost pointless game. In gift cultures social status is determined not by what you control, but by what you give away."[16]

A gift economy has 3 essential features[17], these being:

1. the obligatory transfer

2. of inalienable objects or services

3. between related and mutually obligated transactors

A gift exchange like a Nuu-chah-nulth or Kwakiutl potlatch[18] involves an unstated obligation to repay at some later stage the gift received, this contrasts with a commodity exchange, where the obligation between parties ends after the point of exchange – buying a bottle of cider from a supermarket doesn't imply that you are expected to buy something there again. Inalienability in the gift economy is described by Kollock, "A gift is tied in an inalienable way to the giver ... gifts are unique: it is not simply *a* sweater, but rather *the*-sweater-that-Bill-gave-me."[19] Gift economies imply a direct social relationship between the giver and receiver such that to increase the benefit of exchange participants must improve the "technology of social relations"[20], rather than, as in a commodity exchange, improvements in the technology of production.

Free software culture does not entirely share the features of more traditional gift economies. In many free software projects, contributors may know each other only by email address, it would be unlikely that many users of the project were aware of contributors beyond the "core team". Improvements are offered to a diffuse and often anonymous[21] network of people involved in the project without any direct and individual reciprocity, the "mutual obligation" of the transactors is redefined as a more disparate "community reciprocity", similar to the economic idea of "generalized exchange".

Community reciprocity implies a gift exchange not with an individual "transactor", but with an entire community, the repayment of this gift is unlikely to be immediate, and is not guaranteed even to

15 http://www.catb.org/~esr/guns/
16 Eric S. Raymond, "Homesteading the noosphere" from "The Cathedral and The Bazaar", Ed. 3 O'Reilly, 2001 p.81
17 James Carrier, "Gifts, Commodities and Social Relations: A Maussian View of Exchange", from "Sociological Forum 6(1), 1991, p.122
18 A potlatch is an example of more traditional gift exchange, "whereby the host demonstrates their wealth and prominence through giving away their possessions and thus prompt participants to reciprocate when they hold their own potlatch." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potlatch
19 Peter Kollock, "The Economies of Online Co-operation: Gifts and Public Goods In Cyberspace", Communities In Cyberspace, Routledge, 1999 http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/kollock/papers/economies.htm
20 Duran Bell, "Modes of Exchange: Gift and Commodity", Journal of Socio-Economics 20(2),pp.155-167 quoted in Kollock
21 Accurate estimates of the numbers of gnu/linux users worldwide are impossible – you can download the OS from a number of anonymous sites, and one download doesn't necessarily equal one deployment. As you are free to make copies and share them, or to install the software on more than 1 machine, it's impossible to know how many installations there are. One attempt is the Linux Counter http://counter.li.org/ which asks people to register all their installed boxes, but clearly not every gnu/linux user will have done this.

happen. Linus Torvalds built his kernel[22] to "scratch an itch" and presented it as a gift to a community of hackers. In exchange, that community returned his gift many times over, both to Linus and to each other. "Really existing anarcho-communism"[23]is able to display emergent behaviour[24] where, through mutual aid and voluntary co-operation, any individual participating will receive far more than they could hope to give. Like Winstanley's vision of the Earth as a "common treasury for all"[25], the free software culture has built a common source repository[26] for all.

This community reciprocity is a strongly felt part of DIY culture - a raver may generously give time or cash to a free party project. On one level her motivation may be purely in improving her social status, as Raymond contends, but a far more potent reason for participating are the benefits provided by the community:

"When Exodus first started, more and more people were coming to the parties. The parties got bigger, the bucket donations got bigger, because of the people, and the sound system got bigger... It was the community's sound system, it was the people's..."[27]

*Perceived self-efficacy "*is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives"*[28]*. Writing a printer driver for your printer, or contributing your personal view of a demonstration to Indymedia can be seen as affecting both your and a wider community's perception of your own self-efficacy, this can be seen as a motivation for participation. In DIY culture this idea is frequently associated with "empowerment" - when suddenly you realize that you have the power individually and collectively to make real changes to the world you inhabit. This area of efficacy has been the focus of much of the "open source"[29] literature, which points out that by sharing ones source code, "better" programs can be produced

To see the economic relationships of either culture as being entirely based around community reciprocity would not be entirely fair. As Barbrook has pointed out in relation to the Internet, "The new economy is a mixed economy"[30]. GNU/Linux 'distros' have created commodities from the artefacts of the free software culture by packaging pre-compiled binaries, manuals and support services and selling them. Punk recordings are sold (frequently more cheaply than their commercial counterparts) at gigs and on the Internet by independent distributors.

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22 The kernel is the core part of an Operating System, which allows applications to do things like access the computers memory or disks. See http://www.wlug.org.nz/Kernel . Linus Torvalds built a kernel called Linux, which has since become one the most celebrated and widely adopted free software projects.
23 Richard Barbrook, "The High-Tech Gift Economy", http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors/barbrooktext2.html
24 Emergence is discussed at http://www.calresco.org/sos/sosfaq.htm#2.3
25 Winstanley, Everard, Goodgroome, et al "The True Levellers Standard Advanced", London, 1649 http://www.bilderberg.org/land/diggers.htm#True
26 For a definition of source repository see: http://www.gnu.org/software/cvs/manual/html_chapter/cvs_5.html#SEC15
27 Raver at Exodus party, quoted in George McKay, "DIY Culture, Party and Protest in Nineties Britain", Verso, 1998, pp.188-189
28 Albert Bandura, "Self-efficacy", In V.S.Ramachaudran "Encyclopaedia of human behaviour", Vol.4, New York, Academic Press, pp. 71-81 http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/BanEncy.pdf
29 a term invented to make more palatable to 'the business world' the adoption and practices of free software development.
30 Richard Barbrook, "The High-Tech Gift Economy", http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors/barbrooktext2.html

Mutual Aid

"... neither the crushing powers of the centralized state, nor the teachings of mutual hatred and pitiless struggle which came adorned with the attributes of science from obliging philosophers and sociologists, could weed out the feeling of human solidarity, deeply lodged in men's understanding and hearts"[31]

"The easy choice was to join the proprietary software world, signing non-disclosure agreements, and promising not to help my fellow hacker...[but] With a free operating system, we could again have a community of cooperating hackers."[32]

Community reciprocity, social standing and perceived self efficacy have already been discussed as motivations to act in the spirit of mutual aid, but there is another motivation that doesn't assume simple self interest. If we are to accept Stallman's statement it seems that the *needs* of others can also provide the impetus. Altruism can arise from many sources, in DIY and free software culture it seems closely tied to political thinking. For Stallman (in his public writings at least), creating a completely free operating system was a "moral imperative", beyond purely self-interested motivations. Similarly people organizing a social centre may be inspired as much by the idea of creating a "temporary autonomous zone" as a "microcosm of that "anarchist dream" of a free culture"[33]for other people to explore as by her own desire to have such a space.

This said, for mutual aid to "work" there is no necessity that people be altruistic, in the production of free software and free culture, the motivation can be self-interest, altruism, or, as is so often the case in essays as in life, a mixture of both. Mutual Aid with a gift economy of generalized exchange leads to better software, but also demands a culture structured to allow generalized transactions to occur as efficiently as possible, a culture of direct participation.

Direct Participation

Sherry Arnstein has devised a "ladder of participation"[34] [35]relating to the degree to which US citizens are able to participate directly in planning the built environment in which they live

8	Citizen control	Citizen control
7	Delegated Power	
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	Tokenism
4	Consultation	
3	Informing	

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31 Peter Kropotkin, "Mutual Aid, A Factor in Evolution", Freedom Press, 1987 p.229
32 Richard Stallman, "The GNU operating system and the Free Software Movement", from "Open Sources: voices from the open source revolution", O'Reilly, 1999 http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/opensources/book/stallman.html
33 Hakim Bey "The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, and Poetic Terrorism", http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html
34 Arnstein, Sherry R. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.
35 See also http://www.partnerships.org.uk/part/arn.htm

8	Citizen control	Citizen control
7	Delegated Power	
6	Partnership	
2	Therapy	Non-Participation
1	Manipulation	

DIY culture by placing it's organizational mechanism directly within the hands of its own participants tends to provide a large degree of what Arnstein calls Citizen control. Citizen control is seen as the situation where the "have-nots handle the entire job of planning, policy making and managing a programme"[36]. DIY activists have sought to avoid having "leaders" and to create non-hierarchical structures of interaction, using tools like consensus decision making[37] to try and encourage the greatest possible degree of participation.

"By working in, consensus based small groups, all members are able to participate in planning, decision making carrying out decisions, avoiding relying on strong, charismatic leaders and making people less prone to being manipulated by self-styled leaders."[38]

"Almost all working groups are formed when a small group of interested individuals get together on their own..."[39]

Affinity groups as a structure were used by the FAI[40] in the Spanish Civil War. A small core of 5-30 people "work together autonomously on direct actions, or other projects"[41]. Where several affinity groups exist, they may federate (or form a 'cluster') and for even larger action delegates may be sent to a spokescouncil[42], with a mandate of putting forward the views of the group and reaching a formal consensus. This radical form of direct democracy closely parallels the "bottom up" organization of, for example the IETF, as well as being an example of Arnstein's "citizen control".

Free software development has similar structures like, for example, the core development team. Linus Torvalds is far from echoing the traditional view of authority by saying "I'm basically a very lazy person who likes to get credit for things other people actually do."[43]A free software project may have thousands of contributors giving patches to the project – the free software affinity group, typically by posting to mailing lists or usenet discussions, identifies which of these are the most useful, which should be included and so on. By listening to the views of the group a "rough" consensus is normally found, rather than the decision being made purely the central developer. Wise project leaders bear in mind Lao Tzu's maxim that "Governing a large country is like frying a small fish. You spoil it with too much poking."[44]

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36 Arnstein, Sherry R. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.
37 A full discussion of consensus can be found at http://seedsforchange.org.uk/free/consens
38 http://www.uhc-collective.org.uk/knowledge/toolbox/meetings_and_organisation/affinity_groups.htm
39 Scott Bradner "The Internet Engineering Task Force", from "Open Sources: voices from the open source revolution", O'Reilly, 1999 http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/opensources/book/ietf.html
40 Iberian Anarchist Federation, see http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/spain/review_we_anarchists.html for a history.
41 http://www.radio4all.org/aia/dec_affinity.html
42 Defined at http://www.rncnotwelcome.org/spokes.html
43 Eric Raymond, "The Cathedral and The Bazaar", Ed. 3 O'Reilly, 2001 p.27 http://www.catb.org/~esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar/cathedral-bazaar/ar01s03.html
44 Tao Te Ching http://www.mindfully.org/Tao-Te-Ching-Lao-tzu.htm

Accountability of free software projects is 'enforced' by access to the source code – if a user or group of users becomes seriously disenchanted with the code, they can take the existing codebase and move it in their preferred direction. This is called a "fork" in the code, and is a surprisingly rare event[45]. More frequently their 'patch' is accepted into the codebase, or a similar functionality is provided by another person's patch. This kind of direct participation is an extremely powerful way of getting software built, prompting one Microsoft employee to say, "...it was immediately obvious to me how to incrementally extend[sic] the DHCP client code (the feeling was exhilarating and addictive)..."[46] Direct participation is possible and present both in the practice of free software development and in the 4 freedoms of the GPL.[47]

But the development process is only part of the free software culture. Other forms of participation involve users of a program supporting each other in its use, or in the use of free software more generally.

Again, by taking part in community reciprocity free software users can benefit from the knowledge of the community as a whole. Many people actively contribute to forums on Usenet, or email discussion lists, offering free advice on everything from perl coding to building wireless networks. These forms of community wide documentation are not, of course exclusive to free software. Users of proprietary products are also likely to take part in such forums. The tradition of the HOWTO allows users who have worked out a way to deal with a tricky problem to publish their solution to it. The Linux documentation project[48] attempts to act as a central library for both HOWTOs and other GNU/Linux related documentation.

Linux User Groups (LUGs) exist both as support and discussion groups in both the physical and cyberspatial worlds. They focus on allowing sideways transfers of advice and information, advocacy, social networking and other forms of gift exchange activity, and again try to be as participative as possible, "Participation, as much as software, is the lifeblood of your LUG."[49]

Users without the technical skill to hack code can contribute to free software projects, not only by supporting other users, but more directly by writing the documentation (manual, or man pages, user guides, etc.) for a project, providing artwork, or translation, or maintaining the projects website[50].

Like DIY culture, free software culture has shown an instinctive preference for the network rather than the hierarchy, by allowing direct participation in its most crucial decisions and in creating its central artefacts.

Compromise and "Selling out"

"[open source] is free software rebranded to make it more appealing to CEOs, scared by the "un-American" implications of "freedom"."[51]

"CBS promote The Clash / but it ain't for revolution it's just for cash / Punk became a fashion just like

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45 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fork_(software) for a definition of forks
46 http://www.opensource.org/halloween/halloween2.php
47 The 4 freedoms are the freedoms to run the program for any purpose, study the program, redistribute the program and modify the program. See http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-sw.html
48 http://www.tldp.org/docs.html
49 The LUG HOWTO http://www.linux.org/docs/ldp/howto/User-Group-HOWTO-7.html#ss7.1
50 http://puzzling.org/pub/HOWTO/Free/ar01s04.html
51 Asa Winstanley "The Free Software Movement - Anarchism in Action", http://216.17.145.93/news/2003/12/508.php

hippy used to be / and it ain't got a thing to do with you and me ... I watch and understand that it don't mean a thing / the scorpions might attack but the system stole the sting."[52]

Both DIY culture and the free software movement have encountered the inevitable conflict between their practice of mutual aid, gift exchange and direct participation and the dominant capitalist modes of market competition, commodity exchange and alienated non-participation.

Perhaps the clearest example within the free software culture has been the split between advocates of "Open Source" and free software. Both camps in the debate continue actively to support each others work. However, the Open Source Initiative have chosen to focus primarily on the wider adoption of free software, where as free software advocates have continued to insist on the primacy of the 4 freedoms of the GPL, which not all Open Source Software (OSS) is required to provide[53].

The worry for Stallman's Free Software Foundation (FSF) isn't so much that Open Source will allow free software developers to be used as cheap labour creating software for hardware suppliers like IBM, but that without understanding the radical implications of the 4 freedoms, OSS will create a more fragile culture, with users likely to be seduced by the "dark side"[54] whenever it offers functionality not yet supplied by free software. The GNU website puts it this way, "Sooner or later these users will be invited to switch back to proprietary software for some practical advantage. Countless companies seek to offer such temptation, and why would users decline? Only if they have learned to *value the freedom* free software gives them, for its own sake.", [55]

OSS advocates counter that, by sticking to the linguistically ambiguous term "free", along with a fundamentalist attachment to an idealistic vision, the community is likely to alienate corporate decision makers, and become little more than a hacker ghetto. Eric Raymond describes "hostility to intellectual property rights, communism and other ideas hardly likely to endear themselves to an MIS manager"[56] as being the sticking point to the adoption of free software by Fortune 500 companies. He feels that by re-branding and shifting the focus away from the "communism" of the FSF and towards the development model's ability to produce better software at lower cost hackers could break out of the ghetto, "walled in by a vast and intangible barrier of prejudice inscribed "ONLY FLAKES LIVE HERE"[57]

DIY culture is often confronted with pressures between trying to maintain a radical stance and trying to escape "the activist ghetto" where only the converted are preached to, by compromising one's message, re-branding or selling out. In "Corporate rock, punk?", Brian Zero discusses the purchase of Caroline, a punk distribution service by EMI, previously owned by UK arms manufacturer Thorn-EMI. Echoing (in somewhat more robust language) the FSFs disagreement with OSS advocates he says:

"corporate sources are better at getting your art or message out to harder to reach areas; and as far as the ethical dilemma in dealing with corporations is concerned, the world is pretty much fucked anyway and

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52 Crass, "Punk Is Dead", Crass records 1978
53 "it includes free software, but also includes semi-free programs such as Xv, and even some proprietary programs, including Qt under its original license (before the QPL).", http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-software-for-freedom.html
54 i.e. proprietary software
55 http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-software-for-freedom.html
56 Eric Raymond "The Revenge of the Hackers", From "Open Sources: voices from the open source revolution", O'Reilly, 1999, p.212 http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/opensources/book/raymond2.html
57 Eric Raymond "The Revenge of the Hackers", From "Open Sources: voices from the open source revolution", O'Reilly, 1999, p.211 http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/opensources/book/raymond2.html (shouting in original)

controlled by corporate sources, so where do you draw the line?"[58]

In a debate about radical social centres in Do or Die, one author, argues that permanent social centres rather than temporary squats allow people to "put some of our ideas into practice [this] also means there are more possibilities for reconnecting radical politics to the working class communities around us".[59]Though the proposed compromise is quite different from the Open Source Initiative's rebranding effort it does point to a similar tension experienced within many DIY projects between radicalism and ghettoisation.

Of course it should be pointed out that the GPL's 4 freedoms under which the majority of Free Libre and Opes Source Software(FLOSS) is released provides a unique form of insurance against co-option into the commodity model. By enshrining the freedoms to share, study, modify and improve source code it provides an assurance (barring the collapse or alteration of global copyright law) that the corporate will not be able simply to commodify the software and "lock out" the free software community. Commercial interests can and have create commodities from the artefacts of free software culture[60] and even packaged them with non free components, but whilst the freedoms of the GPL are preserved it remains possible for one to build one's own free system (or get someone else to) with the products of the free software community.

"Digital Enclosure"

By their nature, DIY projects tend to build "Pirate Utopias"[61] "a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen"[62]The free software movement could be described in this way to an extent, but it's engagement with the corporate and state worlds tends to stretch the definition somewhat. In the Temporary Autonomous Zone, Bey saw the rise and fall of such "utopias" as being insurrectionary only in so far as they allowed "immediatist" interaction outside the scope of hierarchical control. The threat from the outside would inevitably eventually occur.

The free software culture stands in contrast to the alienated commodity production of the "software industry", whilst being at the same time part of that industry[63]. It is clear that such an internal threat to the logic of neoliberal production[64] will, at some point merit a reaction from the corporate world, a few predictions and experiences in relation to this threat exist.

Microsoft are primarily a producer of commodity software and are clearly perturbed by the threat to

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58 http://www.arancidamoeba.com/mrr/corporaterock.html
59 Author not named, "Space Invaders, Stable bases", from "Do or Die: Voices from the Ecological Resistance", Issue 10, p.190 http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no10/space.htm
60 See, for example, Robert Young, "Giving It Away: How Red Hat Software Stumbled Across a New Economic Model and Helped Improve an Industry", From "Open Sources: voices from the open source revolution", O'Reilly, 1999, pp. 113-125 http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/opensources/book/young.html
61 Hakim Bey, "The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, and Poetic Terrorism", http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz3.html#labelPirateUtopias
62 Hakim Bey, "The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, and Poetic Terrorism", http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz3.html#labelWaiting
63 Take, for example Microsoft's use of open source BSD code in it's TCP/IP stack discussed at http://www.kuro5hin.org/?op=displaystory;sid=2001/6/19/05641/7357
64 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoliberalism

their business model that the "digital commons" of free software poses. To stretch the metaphor, Microsoft, and other corporate entities have an interest in the enclosure of the digital commons, much like the land enclosures fought by the MST today, or the Diggers 400 years ago. It is likely that they will react by using what is loosely termed "intellectual property" law, that is copyrights and patents, to enclose cyberspace, having seen "fear, uncertainty and doubt (FUD)"[65] strategies fail so far.

"Although about three million computers get sold every year in China, people don't pay for the software. Someday they will, though. And as long as they're going to steal it, we want them to steal ours. They'll get sort of addicted, and then we'll somehow figure out how to collect sometime in the next decade."[66]

Clearly part of the Microsoft strategy, particularly in majority world countries is to tolerate a certain amount of bending of copyright law in order to get people "addicted" to their software. This, it is hoped, will create potential markets for future products when licences have become more enforceable. The strategic move of offering cheap licences to educational and governmental institutions will have a similar effect.[67]

These practices clearly have an effect on free software uptake, but can't fairly be said to allow meaningful enclosure of the digital commons – this will be likely to be achieved by an increasing use of copyright and patent law to build digital fences. In "Pirates of the Information Infrastructure: Blackstonian Copyright and the First Amendment"[68], Hannibal Travis draws a parallel between recent US copyright legislation like the Digital Millenium Copyright Act(DMCA), and English land enclosures of previous centuries. The "tragedy of the commons"[69] is used by corporate interests as justification for copyright legislation resulting in a reduction in space for autonomous non-proprietary activities. For example, in the recent DeCSS case a Norwegian hacker was prosecuted for writing free software code that allowed him to watch his own DVD collection[70], and sharing it with others, this was possible only under the DMCAs circumvention clauses. SCO recently asked many corporate GNU/Linux users to pay for a licence citing copyright infringement[71]. Of course copyright is a principle that the free software movement, though the GPL are reliant on.

Software patents are also likely to be used as a weapon against free software, the FSF has described the situation thus,

"To be sure, not everyone loses from software patents; if that were so, the system would soon be abolished. Large companies often have many patents, and can force most other companies, large or small, to cross-license with them. They escape most of the trouble patents cause, while enjoying a large share of the power patents confer. This is why the chief supporters of software patents are multinational corporations. They have a great deal of influence with governments."[72]

Recent moves towards greater patentability of software in Europe[73] represent the greatest threat to the

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65 http://www.opensource.org/halloween/halloween5.php talks about a FUD campaign.

66 Bill Gates, 1998, quoted at http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?SoftwarePiracyCauseOfMicrosoftMonopoly

67 http://www.corporatewatch.org.uk/profiles/microsoft/microsoft1.htm#licenses

68 http://www.law.berkeley.edu/journals/btlj/articles/vol15/travis/travis.html#sdfootnote2sym

69 Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons", 1968 http://dieoff.org/page95.htm

70 http://www.lemuria.org/DeCSS/cca.html

71 http://lwn.net/Articles/64052/

72 http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/savingeurope.html

73 http://swpat.ffii.org/log/intro/index.en.html

free software community yet seen, and unresisted will lead to an increase in corporate domination of software, even with hardware vendors and massive patent holders like IBM 'supporting' the free software.

Of course the stakes for the free software community may seem lower than the stakes for peasants struggling against land enclosure in Brazil, but the reaction of corporate interests in crushing alternative models and economic models is eerily familiar.

Conclusion

Free software culture bears striking resemblances to DIY culture in it's means of interaction – direct participation, gift exchange and mutual aid, and in its conflicts between purist radicalism and attempts to escape the 'ghetto'. External threats are inevitable when building real-world alternatives to market competition and passive consumption, in the case of free software these will come from greater powers in copyright and patent law. Whether free software's DIY culture will survive these attacks, or whether it will be just a "pirate utopia" has yet to be seen, but given the unique amount of both corporate interest and government support[74] that free software is receiving and the fact that the GPL enshrines users right to continue to participate in it, it may provide an example of a sustainable, long term DIY project analogous to the punk or direct action movements.

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74 eg. http://www.brazzil.com/2004/html/articles/aug04/p144aug04.htm