Two Bits

Welcome to the new home of *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software* (Duke University Press, 2008). (The old website has been gently euthanized, and I am sorry for this; take a moment to mourn if you must, but it is important to recognize that not everything is worth saving).

This book is still available under a CC-NC-SA license and is free to download here in a variety of formats: (pdf|epub|mobi|SiSU|) (all of these transformations were contributed by readers of the book over the years).

If you are interested in work that I have published on this subject since the book, check the menu above for some related content.

**Director’s cut.** In 2005, I wrote a piece called “Against Networks” that was to be chapter 3 of *Two Bits*. It was published as part of a V2 publication (*Feelings are always local)*, subsequently rejected for publication twice, then published again as part of a new journal called *spheres.* Don’t ask me what that all means. If you are interested, it is kind of a ‘prequel’ to the theory of recursive publics.

**Digital Anthropology.**In various places I have tried to argue for the role of an analysis of computers, engineering, software as central to the vocation of anthropology. One such case was the introduction to a set of great articles not by me in *Anthropological Quarterly* (Tom Boellstorff, Alex Golub and Gabriella Coleman) called **Culture in, culture out (link to AQ).** I have occasionally debated the meaning of “digital anthropology”—a term I am very ambivalent about (love it yes, hate it, also yes) (also link to HAU). I also once tried to publish a piece about Google and about the concept of ‘evil’ in engineering. It was going to be part of a special issue on “corporate oxymorons” but it wasn’t radical enough or maybe it wasn’t any good. I still like it, it’s called **Don’t Be Evil.** I still think anthropologists need to start taking corporations and industries seriously, rather than treating them as monolithic enemies. Some of my best friends are corporations.

**My Basque heritage.** I grew up in Reno, Nevada, where the University of Nevada, Reno boasts the only existing Center for Basque Studies in the US. They were a mountain people. Naturally I jumped at the invitation to write something for a project on “knowledge communities” called, modestly, **Free software explains everything.** Except the Basques.

**Around 2011.** Somewhere around 2011, I started to notice something I had become wrong about. That is to say, I think I was right at the time, but the world changed. Namely, I used to argue that there was no difference between “Open Source” and “Free Software”—they used the same technologies and licenses, the same basic patterns of collaboration and they differed only on ideological grounds. But I now think they are much more dissimilar than they used to be. For one thing, Open Source is now a domesticated feature of the IT industry and often refers to things that are not amenable to the FOSS model—cloud computing infrastructure, software as a service (SaaS), app stores, as well as “open hardware” and maker culture. Free Software, by contrast, is much more likely to be associated with radical activists, privacy-preservation, anti-surveillance, and what Coleman and Golub accurately dubbed a different “moral genre” of hacking. I wrote one piece as an invited afterword to an issue of the literary studies journal *Criticism*, reflecting on how this history was recompiled—how it can look different now from how it looked then. It’s called **Afterword::Recompiling.** I also wrote a piece for the upstart *Journal of Peer Production* called **There is no Free Software**which takes things a step further. It’s accompanied by smart papers from David Hakken and Judith Simon and Katja Mayer. I was also happy to write a **preface** to Sébastien Broca’s excellent book on Free Software reflecting on the role of utopian thinking—in particular Ernst Bloch’s notion of a concrete utopia—in Free Software.

***Open Access, baby.*** I have become somewhat more involved in open access advocacy than I ever wanted to be. If you care about OA—especially in anthropology—here are two roundtable discussions I participated in on the subject. Both appeared in *Cultural Anthropology*, one under the editorship of Mike and Kim Fortun, the other under Charlie Piot and Anne Allison. Together with Ali Kenner, Tim Elfenbein and Casey O’Donnell, they are responsible for making *Cultural Anthropology* open access, and for bringing the issue to the attention of American anthropologists everywhere. **CA Interview 1 and 2.** If on the other hand you care about open access, pirate style, you can read my eulogy for **Library.nu. Pirate Maps?**

**Concept Work: universals.** Two unpublished presentations to the American Anthropological Association are also available here. One was an invitation to reflect on Anna Tsing’s concept of “friction” which I found extremely provocative. It’s called **Universal Internets: Hubs and Routers of Difference.** The other was a provocation to think about the concept of ‘digital’ liberalism, and it’s called, naturally, **Analog liberalism.** This one opens the query of why we don’t have an anthropology of Freedom. Is that a universal we are content to live with or is there an anthropological investigation into the diverse, differentiating meanings of freedon.

**Free as in Freedom.**  It took a while, but I eventually realized that all this talk about freedom in free software really demands that someone take a deeper look at what freedom means in the context of computing. So the **Fog of Freedom** is a first foray in that direction. There is a much longer, more meandering set of reflections on the concept that I originally wrote as a series at *Savage Minds.*

**Heteronyms of Particiaption**

**Database of Collective Kinds**