

~ the 120 days of *buntu ~

*"Phloriano Cursero, Kalio de Zeeshal, Makro par Fumer and Shut la Worth
IS0late themselves for 120 days to violate and torture 46 virgin Ubuntu
systems. The earlier lifes of Linux libertines and their secret perversions
depicted in detail through those gory and bootable disk images."*

Excerpt from IRC-chat in #ubuntu-developers, December 2010

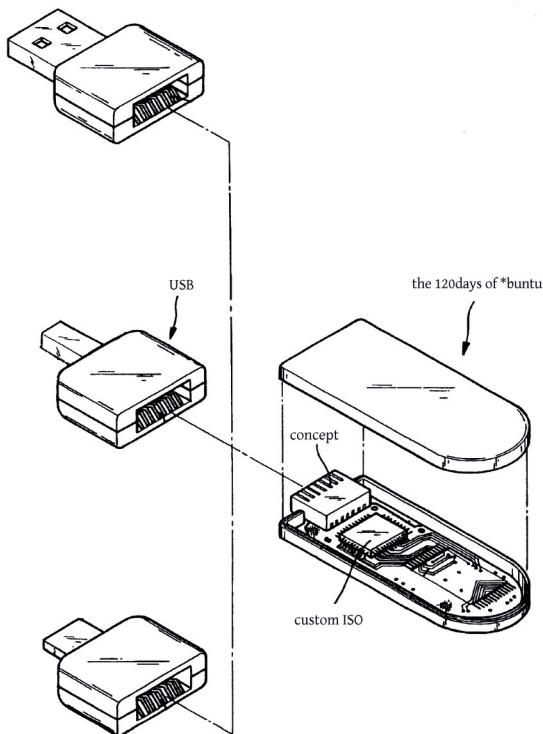


Foreword

The 120days of *buntu project follows a DIY approach not necessarily towards one goal, but towards many OS (operating system) interpretations. It employs one source, namely the code from the repositories of the popular GNU/Linux distribution Ubuntu and redistributes modified versions of it through the Internet and beyond. By cross-fertilizing, remixing and shamelessly making use of prejudices we create a collection of 120 essentially dadaistic yet humoristic and at the same time useless but bootable Linux-like distributions.

The modern computer operating system comprises an intimate interface for any user. Default systems are imposing many rules and dogmas which make those systems very similar to our control-driven social environment. By breaking and modifying those rules user can liberate oneself and discover new facets of otherwise pre-determined paths, a practice similar to the strategies of Situationism within urban environments. We envision the operating system as a contemporary replacement of urban space. Ubuntu, the most popular Linux distribution worldwide, has been chosen for its ubiquitousness and its pre-configured nature - just like Windows and OSX. What differs, however, is that Ubuntu is an open source system, allowing its protagonists to adjust the system to ones own visions, conceptual thoughts and secret perversions.

The 120days of *buntu is an OS intervention.



Notes

Notes on 120days of *buntu

Geoff Cox, 2011

What kind of transgressions are imagined in the naming of this project? The 120 Days of Sodom, or the School of Libertinism, written by Donatien Alphonse François (aka Marquis de Sade) in 1785, famously depicts scenes of sexual violence and sadism. In what ways might the alternative operating systems offered here be transgressive in line with de Sade's understanding of the liberation of desire, and thereby offer speculation on how libertarian attitudes might exceed the masochistic desires of free/libre software development? The connection is not so strange as it first appears. Indeed software, like language in general, is bound to the constitution of subjectivity as an act of violence at source (as with the Althusserian call to order). In other words, violence is always embodied in source code: it symbolizes and enacts violence on the thing and executes it. Hence the user is necessarily violated by the operating system (OS) they use. It ab/uses them, not the other way around.

With Ubuntu as object of choice (the popular end of free/open source software development), the OS treads a fine line between usability and the replication of proprietary and normative forms. This identifies one of the paradoxes of free software development more generally: its ready recuperation, and that its very success is part of the problem. Any related notion of freedom stands for a paradoxical belief in open standards and at the same time the means to capitalize on sharing and free labour. Moreover, radical sharing communities that have emerged through projects like GNU/Linux are not simply alternatives to capitalism but also new forms that express its unerring ability to absorb social innovation and pervert it; capturing critique, as well as the desire and imagination invested in it in the first place. Perhaps this is also what happened to some extent when Ars Electronica decided, in 1999, to award its Golden Nica not to an artwork but to the Linux operating system and in this way unwittingly absorbed it into instrumentalised understandings of creativity (exemplified by the giving of awards). [Further irony is that 120days received a Honorary Mention at Prix Ars in 2011.]

So is the project not simply doomed to failure, especially given that alternative technical systems and creative activities once released are soon after effectively absorbed by free market ideology? Has it also not become an orthodoxy these days for cultural producers to work “operatively” at the level of the apparatus like technicians or engineers (as Benjamin recommended in his “The Author as Producer” of 1934; or Savičić and Vasiliev's own “The Manifesto for Critical Engineering” of 2011)? What is the effect of the intervention here in terms of operating systems more broadly; of art, of politics, of the body, and so on? By taking de Sade as inspiration, something rather different seems to be exposed, more in the realm of excess where useless production becomes a preferred technique to escape the determination of existing imperatives of capitalism (Bataille). Something else is also revealed, in that political struggle is characterised between operating systems for liberating desire and mechanisms of control over the imaginary (Berardi). Perhaps 120days of *buntu manages to reactivate excess, desire and imagination in these ways, thus opening up new possibilities for socio-technical transgression.

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ein offenes betriebssystem hat nicht nur vorteile

Faust von Sodom

Faust on Sodom

Florian Cramer, 2011

In his seminal 1971 book "Art et Ordinateur" ("Art and Computer"), the French cultural theoretician Abraham Moles observed that D.A.F. de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* "anticipate the infinite play of permutteral combinations. In them, originality recreates itself from a repertoire whose elements consist of the partners of a group and their organs¹". Guy Debord consequently accused Moles of dreaming of "the production of women with an *n* series of breasts²". But even this critique only affirmed the computational logic of sexual combinatorics established by Sade that has remained unchanged for pornography and organized forms of systematic excess ever since.

*The 120 days of*buntu* are firmly rooted in this tradition, but make it a point of departure for humorous cultural commentary. Each mutation of the computer operating system becomes a statement, not just by its visual aesthetic, but in its way of functioning. Unlike classical linguistics with its separation of syntax, semantics and pragmatics, syntax and operability become semantic statements. Hacker culture has traditionally insisted on the semantics of syntax, if we take popular t-shirts with "Alt-F4", the shutdown code for a Windows application, or " :(){ :|:& };:", jaromil's fork bomb for Linux and Unix-like operating systems.

In *The 120 days of*buntu* however, the statement is enforced onto people's everyday work environment, as if one was wearing a straightjacket or were forced to do carpentry with a hammer that had been oddly constructed for political-poetic reasons.

This straightjacket is what the poets of the French Oulipo group called a "constraint" ("contrainte"); the self-imposed rule, for example to write a novel without a single occurrence of the letter "e".³ In a 1980 children's book of the German novelist Hans-Joachim Schädlich, a character called the "language chopper" bribes a kid to give away letters of their alphabet, one after another, until it is muted.⁴ What was a reflection of Schädlich's experience with East German communism turns, in the hands of Savičić and Vasiliev, into a - more lightweight, but not less sarcastic - image of contemporary popular culture and society in the various constraints superimposed by the various Ubuntu operating system variations.

The other tradition the project is part of is computer cultural. In 2000, Microsoft placed an ad in the German computer magazine *c't* that showed a penguin alongside three mutations of itself - with rabbit ears, a tail, a frog head, an elephant's trunk among others - and the headline that "an open operating system does not only have advantages⁵". The ad alluded to the various distributions of Linux but also played with fears of viruses and trojan horses. But it also was a rare example of Microsoft being witty, ultimately bringing together and summing up the concepts discussed here: constraint, mutation, perversion. The Open Source community, however, reacted defensively, concentrating its efforts on creating a serious image of itself. This history has repeated with other open projects, such as Wikipedia, many times since. It took a whole decade after the ad until its subversive message was literally taken up and realized.

Very seriously though, *The 120 days of *buntu* demonstrate the real creative potential and excitement of Open Source/Free Software. Too often, it is lost because its original developers are stuck in engineering mindsets, lacking the imagination or economic freedom to leave beaten paths. Ubuntu, with its dreadful efforts of creating an image of unity, simulating a corporate identity with the same branding and happy smiling faces known from Apple and others, was a welcome target for these perversions - the right piece of software to be fucked with.

What is wrong with dreaming of the production of operating systems with an *n* series of holes, 120 days and nights of backdoor penetration and eleven thousand devices to slap you in the face?

1 Translated from the German edition of the book: Abraham M. Moles, Kunst & Computer, Cologne: DuMont 1973 (Tournai 1971), p. 124

2 "tu rêves à la production de femmes à n séries de seins", Internationale Situationniste, Édition augmentée, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1997, p. 411

3 Georges Perec, A Void, The Harvill Press, 1994

4 Hans Joachim Schädlich, Der Sprachabschneider, Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1980

5 "ein offenes betriebssystem hat nicht nur vorteile", c't, October 21, 2000

Distributions