**Discursive negotiations of style guides on the open-source collaborative platform GitHub**

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Writing styles have been closely linked to the development of software development as a professional endeavor, as was highlighted most by Edgar Djikstra's open letter on the harmfulness of the the *GOTO* statement (Djikstra, 1968) with regards to the formal and conceptual clarity of source code. Formalized into style guides, the tensions inherent to the individual writing of source code for collective purposes is that everyone seems to have a different opinion on what should a universal way of writing be. Indeed, software development is caught between the professional need to have programs be formally consistent across a whole code base, while at the same time being unable to escape the inherent individualities of practices from which writing code cannot be separated (Kitchin and Dodge, 2014). Published today on collaborative web platforms, this tension is further highlighted by its location within the technical environment of open-source development.

This paper seeks to examine the discursive aspect of the evolution of style guides between its different actors, from large-scale commercial structures to non-profit organizations and individual practices in the technological milieu of collaborative infrastructure. *What are the forms of discursive negotiation of stylistic guidelines between these different groups in the context of the GitHub open version control platform?*

To do so, I propose to look at the discussions happening on three main repositories, each representing different approaches to style guides. From least-open to most-open, they include the JavaScript style guide as published by the Airbnb company, the semi-formal Ruby style guide as maintained by the Ruby community and the independent JavaScript style guide Idiomatic.js. Building on previous critical discourse theory as applied to open-source discussions (Berry, 2006), these three repositories, their issues, pull requests and forks, will highlight the language deployed both from the maintainers, the contributors and the users and how different discursive approaches are used to justify *arbitrary* formal choices (e.g. single quotes vs. double quotes) through didactic approaches to *non-arbitrary* ends (code interoperability between teams) to improve productivity.

These contributions will be analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of both cultural studies, particularly how the impositions and re-appropriations of style guides can reflect relations of strategies and tactics in human organizations (De Certeau, 1990) and literary criticism’s distinction between a *readerly* and a *writerly* text (Barthes, 1973), between a style standard set in stone and thousands of forks re-mixing that standard. These approaches will allow us to better understand the nature of the constant negotiations between change and immutability in the para-texts which occupy a significant place within the culture of writing code, both at the level of discourse (issues, pull requests) and at the level of practice (forks).

References

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