

Title:

free:dyne

Student:

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Practice:

Being an Open Source programmer, I develop using Open Source tools and make my code available under a Creative Commons licence for other people to use and amend as they see fit. I also consider myself as an Open Source resource and will donate my time and skills to people who need them.

Description:

The project is to produce a portable operating system containing creative tools and utilities. The operating system will run and boot from a USB flash drive and will enable the user to not just have all the tools readily available but also their files and in so doing, remove their dependence on online storage. The initial product will be a self-contained image that can be written to a flash drive, however, it is hoped to develop a system that will enable the user to tailor their installation by selecting tools that more readily meet their needs. Whether this is achieved or not, a document detailing how to make a portable system will be produced and a workshop explaining how to use and/or how to make a portable system will be run.

Production process:

The operating system will be based on either Fedora 9 or Ubuntu 8.10. Both have a memory overlay system that will allow the user to store both the operating system and make changes to data on a single flash drive. Both have advantages over the other - Ubuntu does not limit itself to 2GB regardless of the size of the flash drive but Fedora will allow the user to still use the flash drive as it was originally intended - and consequently a decision on the choice of base system has yet to be made. All of the tools and utilities will be open source and as with the base system, the full list has also to be decided. The creation process, briefly, will involve installing the chosen base system onto a PC and then install onto a USB flash drive and then to boot from it. Once up and running, the chosen utilities will be downloaded and installed onto the drive and then an image of the system will be created for distribution. At this moment in time, it is unsure as to how the customised system will be developed but it is hoped that it will be possible to package the base system and chosen utilities together for ease of distribution and installation.

Motivation:

The original motivation behind the project was to make a system that anyone who wants to do something creative using their computer could use and to allow them to carry the tools and their data with them. I also wanted to donate it to the world for free as a gift. However with more and more people using online servers for storage and in some cases unwittingly giving up their rights and ownership for ease of access, I see this project as a kind of antidote to that.

References:

Dynebolic <http://dynebolic.org/>
pure:dyne <http://code.goto10.org/projects/puredyne/>

Award choice:

Despite the cultural implications of the project being a gift, due to its technical nature I feel the award choice should be a MSc.

Timeline/budget:

The estimate for the build of the project is six weeks including the production of the documentation. Planning for the workshop is likely to take another two days. As this will be built using open source software there will be no monetary budget, just man hours.

Thesis title:

Free lunch?

Proportion of written/practical element:

50/50

Initial bibliography:

Ashton, Ann Oakley & John (ed) (1997) *The Gift Relationship*, London: LSE
Cheal, David (1988) *The Gift Economy*, London: Routledge
Godelier, Maurice (1999) *The Enigma of the Gift*, Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers
Himanen, Pekka (2001) *The Hacker Ethic*, New York: Random House
Hyde, Lewis (2006) *The Gift*, Edinburgh: Canongate
Komter, Aafke E. (2005) *Social Solidarity and the Gift*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Leadbeater, Charles (2009) *We-Think*, London: Profile Books
Mauss, Marcel (1990) *The Gift*, London: Routledge
Raymond, Eric (2001) *The Cathedral and The Bazaar*, Sebastopol: O'Reilly
Schrift, Alan D. (ed) (1997) *The Logic of the Gift*, London: Routledge
Williams, Sam (2002) *Free as in Freedom*, Sebastopol: O'Reilly

Initial netography:

P2P and Human Evolution: Placing Peer to Peer Theory in an Integral Framework <http://www.integralworld.net/bauwens2.html>
The Gift Economy <http://www.context.org/ICLIB/IC41/PinchotG.htm>
The Gift Economy and Free Software
<http://www.linux.com/archive/articles/36554>

Description of thesis:

In his book "The Gift", Marcel Mauss argues that gifts are never given freely. He suggests that in giving a gift, the giver also gives a part of him as the object is inextricably linked to him and therefore it creates a social bond with the benefactor and an obligation to reciprocate. It creates a gift-debt that has to be repaid. Mauss argues that solidarity is achieved through the bonds created by exchanging gifts. Maurice Godelier continues this theory when he talks of a

twofold relationship between the giver and the receiver. A relationship of solidarity because the giver shares what he has and a relationship of superiority because the receiver has become indebted to the giver or at least for as long as he has not returned the act. It appears that gift giving establishes a hierarchy and, if perhaps there was one already existing before the transaction then, the act of giving could be seen as enforcing it.

But is that strictly true, are all gifts duty bound to be returned? In the UK, the free donation of blood is often regarded as a superior model for blood collection than the American model of donors being paid and yet surely this is a gift without an obligation for it to be returned. There is no obligation on the side of the benefactor to reciprocate; neither the donor nor the recipient have such an expectation. Moreover, the transaction does not establish a relationship between the two, much less a mutual interdependence. Or is the gift-debt repaid in different ways? Do donors give blood hoping that others will have performed the same act if they need a transfusion, or maybe in the act of giving blood the donor simply had an afternoon away from work? And what of open source developers? Many donate their code to the community (often under a licence such as Creative Commons allowing non-commercial amendments made as long as they are also shared) without an expectation of something in return. But as with the blood donor, maybe the returned gift is a non-tangible one. By freely offering their code, perhaps they get a feeling of well being at helping fellow developers, or maybe it is in the hope that in the future a like-minded developer will donate a utility that they will find useful. Or maybe by donating their code, the returned gift is one of acceptance in the wider open source/hacker community.

Do gifts and the act of giving provide an insight in the personality of the giver? Lovers will often buy each other expensive gifts to try and diminish their insecurity about the relationship. Husbands and fathers will return from a business trip with presents to ease their conscience for having been away. Giving expensive gifts might be construed as an intention to induce a feeling of superiority over the receiver. If reciprocation is not expected does that display an element of altruism? Or perhaps the gift is the giver telling the benefactor that there is something in their life that needs improving; does receiving deodorant or perfume as a Christmas gift means that there is a personal hygiene issue?

Whatever the motivations behind it, giving a gift appears to be a risky business because of the psychological function of disclosing identities. When receiving a gift, one does not barter and it is that which distinguishes gift exchange from an economical one.

Research question:

I would like to examine the gift-debt and the bond between the giver, the receiver and the gift. I am interested in exploring the reasons behind the growth of the gift economy amongst the hacker community and to investigate whether it is a viable alternative to the market economy currently perceived as the recognised form of software distribution.