

***Towards a Socio – Technical
Description of Freedom in FLOSS
Projects:
Suggestions from an Empirical
Analysis***

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Agenda

- Research question (and its relevance)
 - Advocates relation to freedom: Stallman and Raymond
 - Academic literature on FLOSS: static visions
 - Dynamic vision: socio – technical approaches
 - David Hakken, Yuwei Lin, Walt Scacchi: considering artefacts
 - The OpenSolaris Charter case
 - Conclusions
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Studying Freedom in FLOSS

- Hackers are participating to a discussion about liberal values, “freedom of speech” vs. “intellectual property” (Coleman, 2005)
 - The FLOSS movement concepts are entering different social world (i.e. Creative Commons, Open Source Biotechnology)
 - How to study freedom in FLOSS? Which kinds of freedom are constructed?
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The Contestation of Code

- What's in a name: Stallman vs. Raymond
 - “contestation of code” (Berry, 2004)
 - “Open source is a development methodology; free software is a social movement” (Stallman)
 - According to Stallman, freedom is a *goal*, according to Raymond, it is an *enabler*
 - Both the conceptions have elements *enabling* and both are prosecuted as *goals* (in different ways)
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Studying FLOSS: the static visions

- Freedom as a goal:
 - at the individual level → research on motivation (i.e. Lakhani and Wolf, 2005), freedom is defined before enquiry
 - at the collective level → homogeneous views on hacker culture/ethic (i.e. Himanen, 2001), freedom is a static value
 - Freedom as an enabler:
 - research on social structure (i.e. Crowston and Scozzi, 2002) or business model (i.e. Hecker, 1999), freedom is taken-for-granted
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Against static visions: socio – technical studies (1)

- criticizing static visions (i.e. Tuomi, 2001; Lanzara and Morner, 2005)
- suggesting new approaches:
 - FLOSS demonstrate how “mobilization of socio-cultural awareness, rather than abstracting from it, can be very effective” (Hakken, 2003: 175)
 - hackers do that in their practices, the open source practices, which constitutes a boundary object between the hacker social world and society (especially corporations, Lin, 2004)

Against static visions: socio – technical studies (2)

- open source practices can be understood focusing on “the web of relationships that interlink what people do in the course of their system development to the resources they engage and to the products (software components, development artifacts, and documents) they create, manipulate and sustain (Scacchi, 2005: 2)
 - freedom in FLOSS can be studied focusing on the practices of creation, manipulation and sustaining of material artefacts; these practices create, transmit and mobilize socio-cultural awareness
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The OpenSolaris Project

- Opened 14th June 2005, with the opensourcing of part of the Solaris Operating System code
 - Sponsored by Sun Microsystems, Inc.
 - Common Development and Distribution License (MPL like, incompatible with the GPL)
 - 15.000 registered members (1500+ Sun's employees)
 - 46000 posting to OpenSolaris groups
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The OpenSolaris Charter (1)

- Legal artefact connected to the shift of governance from Sun to the community (Sun declared aim)
 - prepared with the involvement of the Community Advisory Board, between August 2005 and February 2006
 - two different kind of document were at the centre of the discussion (the first one discussed until December 2005; the second one since December 2005)
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The OpenSolaris Charter (2)

- 12 articles
 - article 1 define the participants to the OpenSolaris project (source code, everyone, open source ideals) and the goals of the project (open development and dissemination)
 - the document define connections between participants as well as connectors (the OpenSolaris Governing Board, the Constitution)
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The OpenSolaris Charter (3)

- Analysis of discussions about the text
 - Centrality of the “freedom from Sun”
 - *Economic freedom*: «I am opposed to the board having a budget. There is no need. Face-to-face meetings should not and can not be a necessity, albiet they are nice. Travel should not be a prereq. Rewards shold not be a monitary nature. So on and so forth. How can a board be so adimate about being outside of Sun "control", and yet be standing in line for a budget? Its a direct conflict of interest.» [BR, cab-discuss, 4 Sep 2005]
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The OpenSolaris Charter (4)

Economic Freedom: «The budget we are talking about in the charter is the entire OpenSolaris community budget. The OGB would be responsible for managing whatever amount Sun placed within it. The alternative would be to continue as we currently do and wait until after we make a decision to do something (like meet at OSCON) and then ask Sun if it fits within someone else's budget. There are quarterly times when that kind of operation doesn't work. [...] We simply want that decision to be made in advance and assigned to a specific budget, since otherwise the project has to beg for spare money from marketing and engineering each time an expenditure is considered.» [RF, cab-discuss, 6 Sep 2005]

The OpenSolaris Charter (5)

Organizational freedom: «the community would not be interested in the project if they felt that it was an extension of Sun Corporate and the governing body was merely a puppet organization controlled by Sun. The community at large must have a sense of ownership of the project, its decision making apparatus and its overall goals and direction. They must experience a freedom from the constraints of a corporate cubicle or from technical management who don't understand or appreciate the technicalities of the demanding work they perform or the code they develop.» [AH, cab-discuss, 19 Aug 2005]

The OpenSolaris Charter (6)

Technological freedom: «In fact, I can say (quite pointedly) that not a single significant piece of advice given by the CAB for the community has been followed – all of the decisions so far, including those that led to a successful initial release, the entire opensolaris website, and the miserable lack of meaningful collaboration via a shared version control system, have been made on private lists within Sun. A lot of those decisions have been good, a small number of them have been bad, and a few simply unnecessary. None of them made use of the CAB as a public body, though they sometimes involved participation by individual CAB members. Perhaps that is the central problem with being called the "Community Advisory Board": we aren't actionable. It doesn't matter how we want the website to work because the website is not an open source project. [...] We aren't creating an open community.»
[RF, cab-discuss, 20 Dec 2005]

Conclusions (preliminary)

- Following practices of creation of artefacts give insight about controversies on freedom
 - Artefacts act as mediators between different meanings of freedom
 - Not only free speech, but also *economic*, *organizational* and *technological* freedom (and more)
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