Manifesto

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Urgent Action

Open Letter from Hipatia to the Governments, Social Movements, and Citizens of the world

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- Communiqué de Michel Billout sur la reconnaissance de l'Etat

Translations: catalá, deutsch, english, español, francais, italiano, 한국어 - 공개문, portugues,po-russkii

The Hipatia Manifesto

Free knowledge, in action for the peoples of the world

We propose the creation of a world-wide, popular, democratic organization to promote the adoption of public policies combined with human and social behaviour that favour the free availability and sustainability of, and social access to, technology and knowledge; their use for the common good; and the viability of the economic model which creates them, in terms of the equality and inclusion of all human beings and all peoples of the world.

FREE SOFTWARE, route to a knowledge which is:

socially just
technologically sustainable
economically viable

ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

I - Terms of Reference

Earth, water, air and fire were the elements of the classical world. Since Einstein we have understood the world in terms of two kinds of analysis and synthesis: the matter/energy pair, and information.

Recent centuries have been characterized by increased control over matter and energy, together with the capitalization, appropriation, exploitation, and control by a minority of the knowledge and technologies involved. In large part this determined the economic and social structures that were created to support those changes. Class differences, different standards of living, and conflict created diversity and the opportunity to carry out projects and satisfy individual desires and needs. Modern capitalism is both consequence and motor of technological development.

For some decades now technological innovation, and consequently one of the main sources of accumulation of capital, has centred on the so-called 'information technologies'.

Economic management and the forms of appropriation of the resources generated will determine in large part the future types of organization of human societies.

palestinien par l'ONU

- TROPPO CAFFE POCO CERVELLO 13 - 11, 12, 13 NOVEMBRE 2011
- Linux-3.1 is out

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Today, as never before, technology and its material and intellectual bases have the possibility of changing and redefining the human being and human societies.

Concepts like the 'digital divide' show the growing concern over the form in which these changes will affect the poorest sectors of humanity; differences in wealth are creating both new illiterates, and human beings who can measure up to the new possibilities.

II - What's Coming Next

Since its beginnings in the eddies of the energy flux, life has become ever more complex; locally decreasing entropy; 'progressing' through natural selection; maturing; including itself in its mental models, as it gains consciousness of its reality; and preparing itself to 'improve' as a function of its emerging objectives.

Genetics and biotechnology will change what we are as people, changing our biology to make us stronger, more intelligent, allowing us choose how our children will be, altering the role of the sexes, the concept of human reproduction, and other questions we can now barely glimpse.

The 'information age', telecommunications and computer science will allow us to build communication networks unimaginable today. The interconnection of mobile phones and computers with our neural pathways will allow things that we once believed to be fantasy: telepathy and telekinesis, for example. Interfaces between the human brain and computers, artefacts of all kinds, videocameras, and other objects, will become normal. Only our limited imagination prevents us from seeing what we could achieve.

The growth of communication capacity, only hinted at by the Internet, will allow future humanity to evolve towards meta-organisms interconnecting humans. An entelechy of greater complexity than any we know of. One or more superimposed beings of which we are mere cells.

The telephone made possible bidirectional communication between two points in a network: a model of communication between peers. Television and radio allowed unidirectional communication from one point to all other points in the network: one point generates, while all the others consume. The Internet allows all to all communication that is both horizontal and transparent. The computer becomes a communications centre which superposes the powers of telephone and television on those of processing. Each model defines a mode of participation and institutional and human organization which is different. The Internet has no centre, no control, the only central body which defines protocols is elected democratically, and every node administers its own connections.

The changes and advances in workshop productivity, re-engineering and other administrative schemes, the mechanization of intellectual labour, together with the destruction of some jobs and the creation of others, are only some aspects of the changes in progress which make up the 'Information Society'.

The need to cure and the certain possibility of improving the quality of life of the disabled, among others, drive the public support for the development of these technologies, while greed for profit mobilizes huge investment funds to new ventures.

The impact which these two technologies, among others beginning to appear, will have on the accumulation of capital, the distribution of wealth, and concepts such as freedom, equality, and democracy, will be profound. Biotechnology will redefine the human being, while computer science and communication will redefine our societies.

We make no value judgement with these predictions, nor do we approve of them; we simply believe they are happening.

III - Intellectual Property, a mistaken concept

The concept of property has been at the centre of both the ideologies and the economic and social struggles of mankind.

Modern capitalism needs control of knowledge, through forms which restrict it to private capital, assign it exchange value, and assimilate it conceptually, commercially, and legally with the form of 'property'.

The idea that property can exist not only in the form of goods but also of ideas, texts, inventions (patents), songs, etc. attempts to crystallize a form devised for matter in the realm of information; it profoundly impacts on the structure of human societies by allowing a constant flow of resources to those who appropriate it, building value and the accumulation of capital on its back. On the other hand, legislation covering author's rights, patents, trademarks, etc is usually all jumbled up together under this vague term, even though these concepts are actually quite different.

It is reasonable that someone who realizes an increase in human knowledge should have rights as a result. The problem is that the concept of property is NOT the right one; it is a clarion call for those who believe that everything can be appropriated.

It is therefore necessary to separate out the meanings and refer to each concept separately, as author's rights, patents, trademarks, etc., finding suitable legislative frameworks for each one, without thereby treating them as property.

IV - Digital Works

Today we can digitally encode almost any kind of information, often in real time. We can represent our knowledge, whatever it is - pictures, texts, sounds, etc - as a sequence of ones and zeros; basically an archive where each position is 'worth' one bit.

In times before the digitalization of information it might have made sense to apply the legal structures that fitted matter/energy to information, since the material basis of information was so important for its use that it defined the modes in which it could be managed: use, exchange, and assignment of value.

Digitalization makes information ubiquitous, changes its character, and allows its manipulation both en masse and in detail in ways completely different from the traditional ones.

The application of the concept of property to digitally encoded artefacts is completely artificial. In the first place, they are not artefacts to be managed by book-keeping, they can be copied without limit without losing their essence, there is no difference between the original and the copy. Copies of printed books can be physically differentiated, inventoried, be individually codified; even if they have the same content they are material objects which are perfectly identifiable in their physical incarnation and copying them has an important cost. Just as Quantum Mechanics found different statistical rules for distinguishable and indistinguishable objects (fermions and bosons), we need different laws for digital creations and material objects.

Although you could imagine some system to provide a material basis which blocks the making of copies and identifies each instance of an 'archive', a system which the big music companies are crying out for, it would be completely artificial and would change the essence of the free communcation which characterizes the virtual digital space created around the internet. It would be completely irrational and anti-economic. It would have to block the physical analysis of the reading devices and of the secrets encoded in its software. Up to now all the attempts made have been cracked. It is as contradictory to apply a scheme based on matter to information, as to impose rules designed for horse pastures on petrol stations. Digitalization is the technique that will end by burying intellectual property and its influence on the current economic system. Each level of technological development is paired with an economic, social, and legal superstructure. In the digital world intellectual property simply lacks sense. Traditionally, if the development of knowledge was induced it was by those in power. Armies or governments financed, protected, and promoted it, what we would now understand as the public sector. Although it did not always circulate freely, knowledge was linked to the power of the state. In recent years the growing power of private corporations has begun to take over the creation of knowledge. We foresee that with digitalization it will once again be managed through public money, principally in the Universities and the Army. Works of art will once again be managed by their creators who will be able to distribute them themselves.

V - Programs

Programs, as both the quintessence of information and a particular example of digitalized works, are a class to themselves, since they represent 'live' or active information, instructions to be executed. They make use of the physical substrate of modern digital electronics to take one step further on the road to automation. Just as the machines of the industrial revolution affected material work, the machines of the information revolution replace more and more intellectual work.

Programs, like cooking recipes, are instructions to carry out actions. Humans program in languages like lisp, C, Basic, perl, etc, which we can understand. A program (compiler or interpreter) translates these instructions into a language the processor for a particular computer understands, which is unintelligible for humans. Proprietary programs are distributed without the human-understandable language in which they were written, and which remains hidden. This is why programs can contain back-doors or serious bugs without us being able to alter them.

Since programs can act on their own, without human intervention, once the material basis for the virtual universe has been realized - as it already has, in the main - they can have an existence and actions independent of any human. Although they only 'carry out orders', the question of what they do with the instructions is undecideable, as the theorems of Godel-Turing on complex systems show.

Computer viruses are the most obvious incarnation of these 'forms of digital life', although still very primitive.

The idea of some writers - Arthur Clarke, 2001 - An Odyssey in Space, for example - that a human can transfer her soul-mind-program to another kind of non-biological machine is just one example of the potential of computer science.

VI - Piracy, a word for marketing

A new spectre is haunting the planet: pirates are threatening our way of life, which appears to be more north american than ever. These disgusting beings have created a cult of sharing, than which there can be no greater crime in a society which idolizes individualism and individual success.

Then name found to identify them is promising: pirates. These violators of compact disks, assalters of floppies, photocopiers, thieves of videos and songs destroy the property which the big companies have accumulated with much sacrifice, paying a minimal wage or percentage to their creators.

Since technology helps and encourages them, as the barriers to prevent their free spread fall with the Internet, it is necessary to invent legal barriers to create property and value where it is not possible to establish them naturally.

Where there are no laws, they are soon invented. Only thus it is it possible to understand why the legislators of the third world see themselves compelled to pass laws which deliver this artificial property, converting their peoples into hostages of the transnationals.

The anarchists used to say that 'property is theft', and dedicated themselves to 'expropriations'. We say that intellectual property is a brake on progress and dedicate ourselves to producing free software.

And please, don't let us fall into the trap, let's reserve the word *pirate* for those who attack ships, raping and pillaging. Someone who uses a program without permission may be breaking a perverse law, but is not a pirate.

VII - The movement for free software

The battle for control of knowledge has just begun. In the area of biotechnology, the big companies have managed to control its development and in this field the future evolution of the forms of capitalization and distribution of the benefits have already been outlined. They have even managed to patent living beings. Of course it is essential to stress the open publication of the human genome in this document.

As for information technology, a notable struggle has begun between free programmers united through the Internet and the faction embodied by Microsoft, giant owner of the greater part of the software used in the world, once the model example of the American way of life, and now the paradigm of the monopolies.

Expensive technologies are invented, libraries developed, technological advances in microprocessors are delayed so that they can carry on executing old code, and so re-use precompiled software. The only thing which ensures reusability is the source code, yet in the name of the creation of artificial value innumerable resources are used up.

Humanity does not need to reinvent the wheel each time it wishes to use it; just the fact of seeing a wheel shows us how to use one. There is no need to keep inventing program source code. If we stop others from seeing the original human-readable source of programs, we force everyone to repeat the mistakes and redo the same work.

The battle of the programmers to obtain reusability of their programs and individual recognition for each work, against the plan of their employers, the computing industry, to close off source code and prevent human cooperation, is an epic, lead by the FSF starting from the work of Richard Stallman. A struggle in which humanity found an intelligent response to the challenge posed, the crossroads at which it found itself. Its logo, banner, or most important reference is the GNU code. A community of hackers spread over the width and breadth of the planet, through a titanic labour of programming, connected by the Internet to which they had given shape, created the programming base on which it was possible to use computers without using proprietary software. This meritocracy has been the main one responsible for spreading the ethical value of cooperation in the programming profession.

GNU/Linux, created by Linus Torvalds, is the first working Operating System under the GPL license and represents the crowning of years of community effort.

The freedoms proposed by the FSF, which define free software as covered by the GPL, are the basis for the struggle which began. Originally stated by Richard M. Stallman, they ensure the possibility of access to the program source, and, even more important, stop others from using the software to create non-free derivatives.

Various strands of opinion have contributed to the understanding and spreading of free software; we will highlight two:

> The Open source Movement, which drives the use of free software, in terms of the GPL, as a business tool, and represents the utilitarian axis. Its central idea is that free software is more useful for business purposes, and more convenient from the economic point of view.

> The Free Software movement, which drives the use of free software, in terms of the GPL, to allow the programmers of the world to share their work. Its essence is ethical and liberating. It doesn't matter whether free software is more useful, it has to be developed, since only free software preserves the freedoms of programming, sharing, and using software.

There are also different positions with regard to the forms of distribution of software, which have given rise to various licensing models.

The Free Software Movement uses no marketing, does not appear in adverts on TV, or radio, or in magazines. It uses the community and education, and depends on its supporters.

We might say that the struggle of the free software movements represents the first example among the many sectors mobilized by the call of 'Another world is possible', usually referred to as the antiglobalization movement, which has succeeded in its task of offering real alternatives.

VIII - Our struggle (mission)

As with all new developments humanity must create for itself a set of ideas and principles to interpret and use information technology. Our task is to build a consensus and to spread the vision we are defending.

These principles, like all those which impact on our life, are marked by the historical struggles of humanity and countered by the individual wishes of the powerful of the moment against the efforts of the rest to create an egalitarian and just society.

We must consciously include a political dimension to the struggle. We must conquer the public arena and work towards the goal that people and public organizations, the state in particular, work with free information. Because we believe that free software will help to build better societies, we recognize that its adoption is part of our struggle to build a new world.

We intend to drive the use and creation of free software, and to make the value of the supposed intellectual property of programs with restricted use fall. To do this, we will create similar or better free programs, for which the purchase cost is close to zero.

We will teach our children to share their programs and their computer games. A child who wishes to be a programmer will want to look inside the programs she uses, take them to pieces, and reassemble them differently. We must not deprive her of this game, a practice and preparation for her life.

Rather than proposing a licence model, we advocate eliminating the need for licences, changing the law to declare the principles defined in the GPL as universal rights. This licence is an intelligent method to use in a world dominated by enemies, but now we need to change the world using the intellectual base constructed through the GPL in the old world.

Today we can think of the building of a human community, without taxes on information, hyper-connected with free tools and without the economic conditioning produced by capital accumulation through the reign of the value of software intellectual works.

That is to say, we have good news: the struggle which will define the social and economic basis of the information technology of the world is being won by free programmers. The software development model which E. Raymond (founder of the open source movement) called the 'Bazaar', as opposed to the 'Cathedral', is working. We are bit by bit replacing a culture of the importing of licences in garish cardboard boxes with a different one of the contracting of services by small firms. A culture of underemployed programmers in a single global centre with a different one of small businessmen distributed across the planet. Think and act globally in the creation of contents; think and act locally in the use of the contents and programs.

It is time for all of humanity to be aware of the problem and to take part in this battle which today is restricted to virtual communities, but which will have a deep impact on the lives of future generations. To win it is necessary that end users turn massively to the use of free software. Not only for technical and economic improvements, but for social ones too. There is a clear risk that habit, group interests, distribution chains, marketing, and bad or biased government decisions may end by suffocating better products and socially adequate solutions. Just as with environmental problems, economic externalities are not always taken into account in market decisions. We need action by government, advocacy, and awareness. There are various states in the world - we would emphasize in particular the efforts of the town of Porto Alegre and the State of Rio Grande del Sur - which are adapting their management systems to free software.

Two models confront one another, and the actions of each will profoundly impact on our future. Various futures are possible; our dedication will produce one of them.

IX - Hipatia - proposals and actions to carry out

We propose the creation of Hipatia as a global environment of reflection, coordination, and action: a progressive space of struggle to help make concrete the possibility of a better world.

We hope to bring together contributions to constitute a political and ideological current within the free software movement, to incorporate within this movement a concern for the future of the peoples of the planet.

We take as our *objective* that all humanity may make use of what we have discussed above, since we believe that all human beings and the societies we make up have the right to:

1. know intimately and completely the working of all technology and information created by mankind, inseparable from the right to appropriate conditions to make use of them;
2. modify and distribute new technologies based on earlier ones without other limits than those of the first clause;
3. gain recognition as authors of an intellectual work and to be able to define the forms in which it is distributed, within the limits imposed by the first two clauses;
4. obtain copies of any work, in its digital form, when it exists. Nothing will impede the free flow of digital information, beyond the limits or prices which the store in which the work is found at any moment imposes due to material costs or communication links;
5. receive information which allows the technology we use to be understood in terms of the culture and knowledge of every human being.

To guarantee the exercise of these rights we state our *promise* to:

1. Drive forward the use of free software as an essential medium to provide all human beings with the rights laid out above;
2. Work so that all human beings have free access to the technologies and knowledge of the information age, tending to guarantee their participation as citizens in the world of the future.

We invite everyone of good will to support, criticise, inprove and/or participate, in whatever way seems best to them in this proposal.

Brasil: Mario Luiz Teza; Argentina: Diego Saravia y Juan Carlos Gentile; Uruguay: Luis Gonzalez.

Cafe Tortoni, Buenos Aires, November 2001.

Includes suggestions from: Alejandra Garc?a, Jos? Mar?a Budassi, y Nidia Morrell.

English translation by Graham Seaman.