Free Software, Not the Other Thing

Eben Moglen*

September 15, 2003

I am a historian and a computer programmer, but primarily I am a lawyer. My research, ongoing for a decade, follows a purely experimental paradigm:

1. Try to create freedom by destroying illegitimate power sheltered behind intellectual property law.

2. See what happens.

Early results are encouraging.

Current research proceeds by facilitating high-energy collisions between widely-dispersed non-homogeneous randomly-motivated incremental acts of individual creativity and large masses of ill-gotten wealth. The primary collision domain is the thin layer of executable software that enables production and distribution of all zero marginal-cost goods (bitstreams) in a globally transformed economy.[1] Ongoing complete destruction of monopoly control in this layer triggers secondary fission in adjacent layers (music; video; literary as well as scientific, technical and medical publishing; higher education policy; criminal prosecution *vel non* of scientists and scholars; etc.) Observation is complicated because collisions occur in an atmosphere heavily contaminated by wide-scale political bribery.[2] Despite observational difficulties, multiple independent observers report increased

*Professor of Law, Columbia Law School. General Counsel, Free Software Foundation.

[1]See Moglen, *Anarchism Triumphant: Free Software and the Death of Copyright*, First Monday (1999) (mult. repr.) (mult. trans.).
http://moglen.law.columbia.edu/publications/anarchism.html

[2]See Moglen, *The Invisible Barbecue*, 97 Colum. L. Rev. 945 (1997)
http://moglen.law.columbia.edu/publications/barbecue.html ,

likelihood of basic transformative shifts in loci of political control and social authority. This phenomenon is conventionally described in the relevant literature as "revolution."[3]

Other observers, positioned as personally indifferent to the success or failure of freedom, prefer a research methodology consisting of measuring spark duration and trajectory. Results are partial, misleading, and fail to contribute to the actual achievement of social benefit. Serious problems are posed by poor notation conventions, particularly the striking omission of the sign "freedom."

Indicated further research falls at the interface between social psychology and the sociology of knowledge. Primary questions include:

- Why is politics invisible?
- Is autism communicable? (Also, does communicability increase with wealth (w) of the index case, where $w \geq \$36$ billion?)
- When all ergonomic design is performed by the econodwarf, can a man stand up?

Failing theoretical progress by "neutral" observers, measures for experimental investigation of these questions by the method originally described above remain possible and likely.

[3]See Moglen, *The DotCommunist Manifesto* (2003)
http://moglen.law.columbia.edu/publications/dcm.html
See and hear Moglen, *The DotCommunist Manifesto: How Culture Became Property and What We're Going to Do About It* (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, November 8, 2001)
http://www.ibiblio.org/moglen
See also Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, Prentice-Hall: 1952) (mult. repr.) (unfree); Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy; Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, Beacon Press: 1966) (mult. repr.) (unfree); Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, (English ed. London, 1888) (Engels ed.) (mult. repr.) (mult. trans.)
ftp://ibiblio.org/pub/docs/books/gutenberg/etxt93/manif12.txt