Just for fun: too smart to fail

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Free Software Foundation Europe
Fellowship Group Bari

http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/legalcode



Foundation



http://www.fsfe.org/

Who am I ?

- Classe 1967
- Laurea 1991
- OSMapper dal 2008
- Ricercatore CNR dal 1997
- Debian Developer dal 2000 →
- FOSS activist da sempre
- Presidente LugBARI 2002–2009
- Geek per nascita :-)

Outline

- Brevissima storia del FOSS e GNU/Linux in particolare
- I motivi di un successo
- Dove siamo e dove andremo probabilmente a finire?
- … e forse qualche deep thought in corso d’opera

Flashback

From: torvalds@klaava.Helsinki.FI (Linus Benedict Torvalds)
Newsgroups: comp.os.minix
Subject: What would you like to see most in minix?
Summary: small poll for my new operating system
Message-ID: <1991Aug25.205708.9541@klaava.Helsinki.FI>
Date: 25 Aug 91 20:57:08 GMT
Organization: University of Helsinki

Hello everybody out there using minix -

I'm doing a (free) operating system (just a hobby, won't be big and professional like gnu) for 386(486) AT clones. This has been brewing since april, and is starting to get ready. I'd like any feedback on things people like/dislike in minix, as my OS resembles it somewhat (same physical layout of the file-system (due to practical reasons) among other things).

I've currently ported bash(1.08) and gcc(1.40), and things seem to work. This implies that I'll get something practical within a few months, and I'd like to know what features most people would want. Any suggestions are welcome, but I won't promise I'll implement them

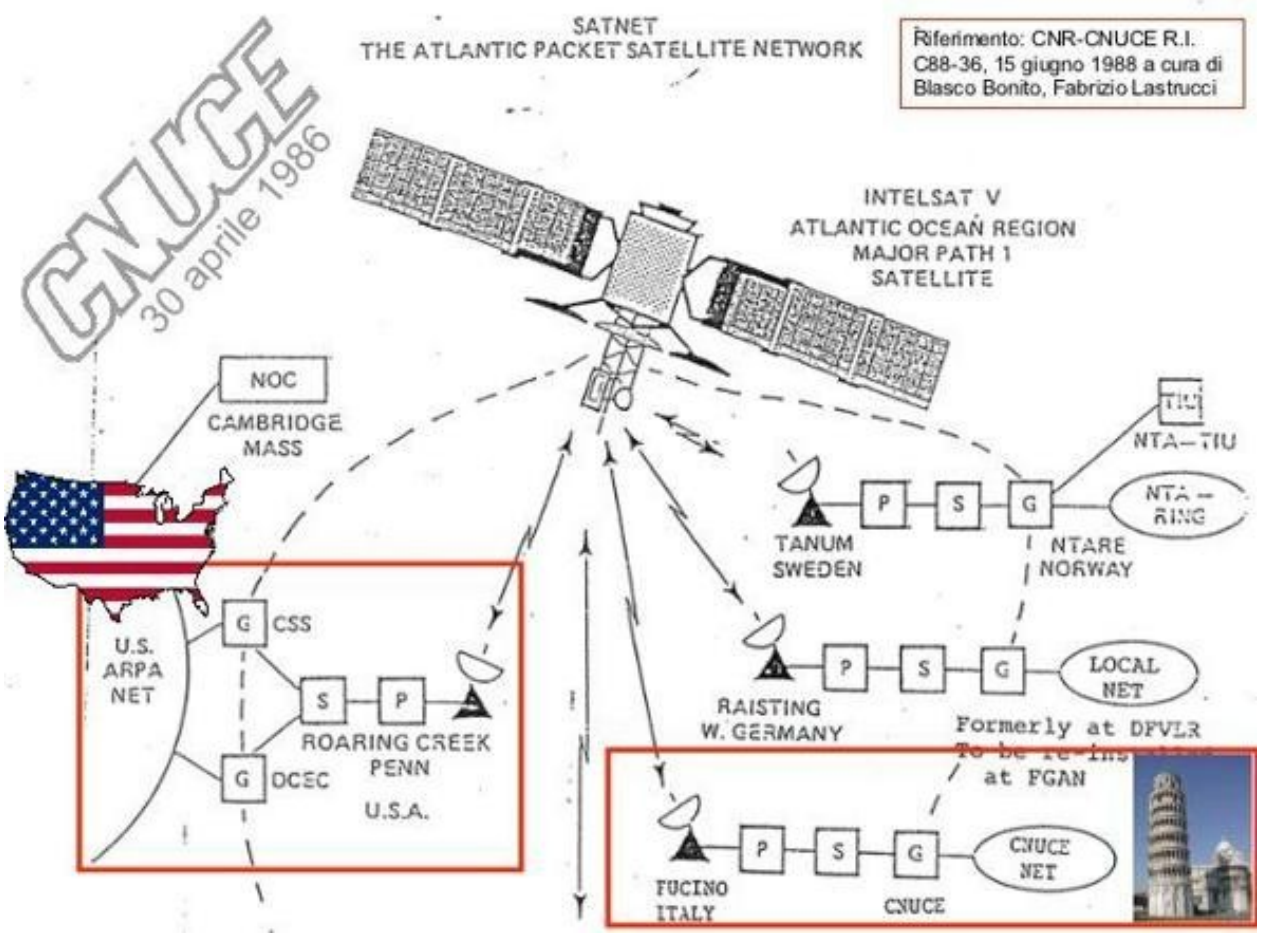
Linus (torvalds@kruuna.helsinki.fi)

PS. Yes - it's free of any minix code, and it has a multi-threaded fs. It is NOT protable (uses 386 task switching etc), and it probably never will support anything other than AT-harddisks, as that's all I have :-(.

I motivi per una riflessione

- Lingua inglese
- Internet come canale di comunicazione imprescindibile (1991!)
- Community potenzialmente estese world-wide
- “Just for fun”
- Smart people
- Free (as beer ?)
- GNU/GPL
- Ed in Italia intanto? (Io c’ero eh…)
- E nel frattempo cosa accadeva nell’informatica *mainstream*?
- *… what else?*

Internet in Italia



Free as code

“When I started working at the MIT Artificial Intelligence Lab in 1971, I became part of a software-sharing community that had existed for many years. Sharing of software was not limited to our particular community; it is as old as computers, just as sharing of recipes is as old as cooking. But we did it more than most.

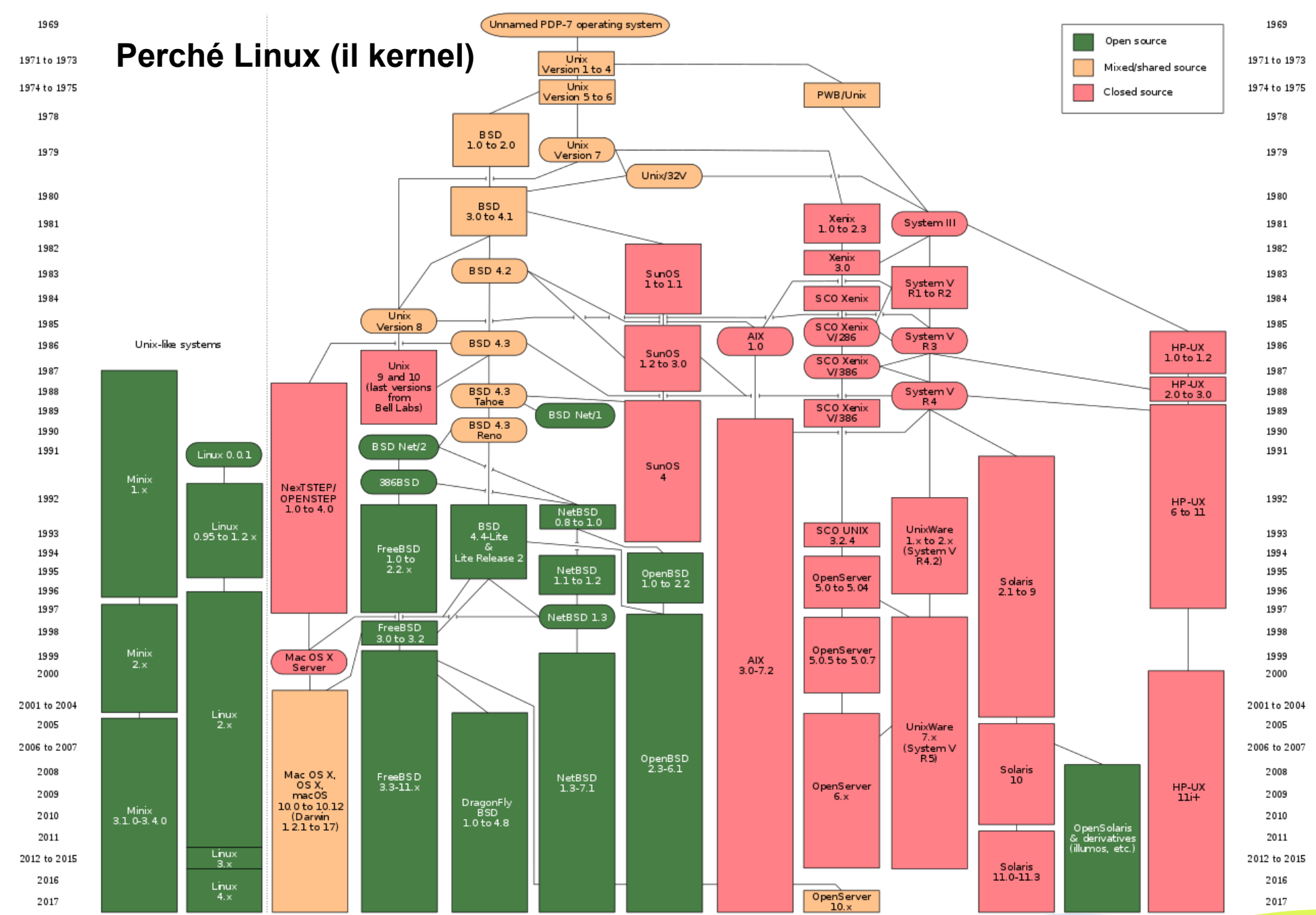
The AI Lab used a timesharing operating system called ITS (the Incompatible Timesharing System) that the lab's staff hackers had designed and written in assembler language for the Digital PDP-10, one of the large computers of the era. As a member of this community, an AI Lab staff system hacker, my job was to improve this system.

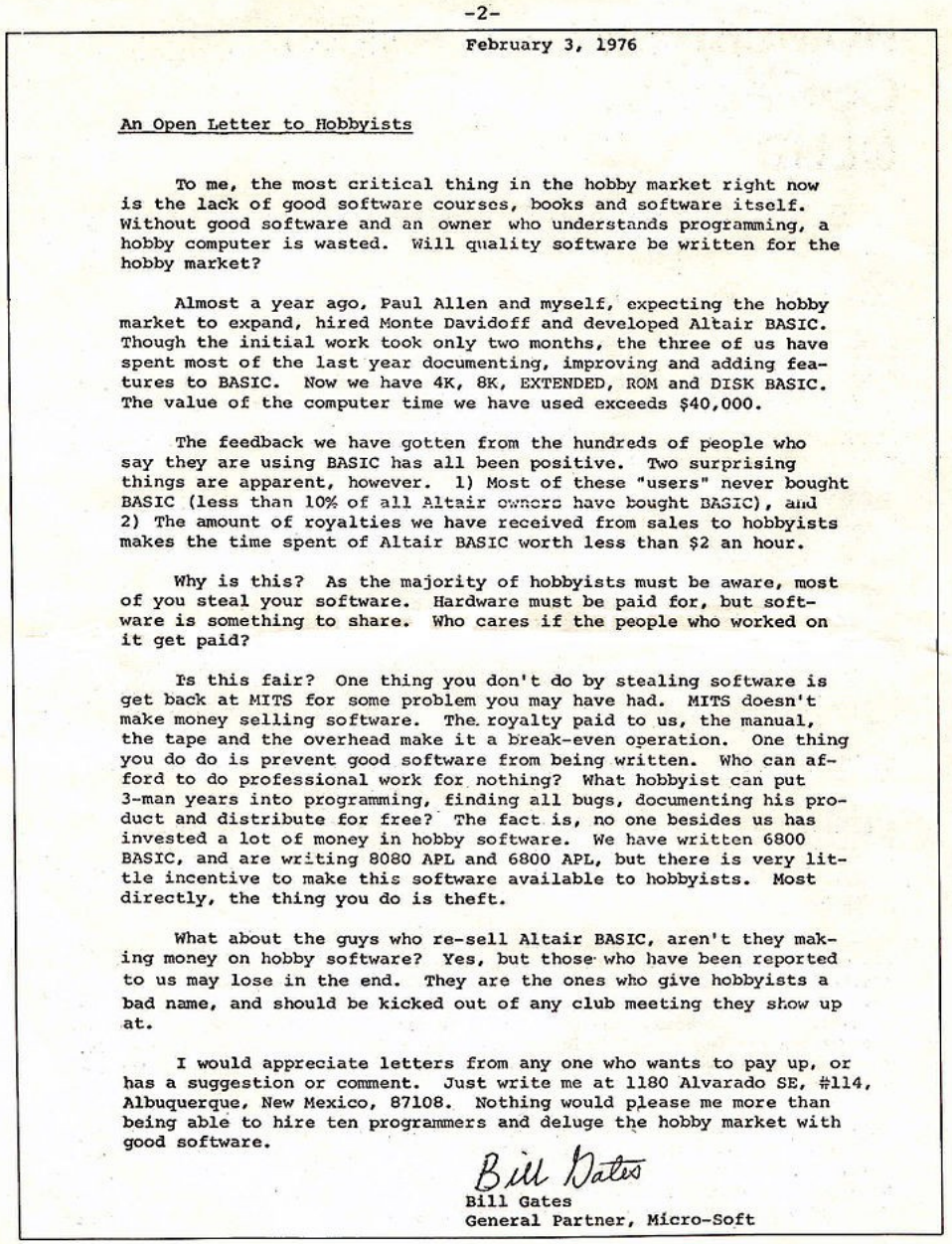
We did not call our software “free software”, because that term did not yet exist; but that is what it was. Whenever people from another university or a company wanted to port and use a program, we gladly let them. If you saw someone using an unfamiliar and interesting program, you could always ask to see the source code, so that you could read it, change it, or cannibalize parts of it to make a new program.”

- RMS

https://www.gnu.org/gnu/thegnuproject.it.html

Perché Linux (il kernel)





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February 3, 1976

An Open Letter to Hobbyists

To me, the most critical thing in the hobby market right now is the lack of good software courses, books and software itself. Without good software and an owner who understands programming, a hobby computer is wasted. Will quality software be written for the hobby market?

Almost a year ago, Paul Allen and myself, expecting the hobby market to expand, hired Monte Davidoff and developed Altair BASIC. Though the initial work took only two months, the three of us have spent most of the last year documenting, improving and adding features to BASIC. Now we have 4K, 8K, EXTENDED, ROM and DISK BASIC. The value of the computer time we have used exceeds $40,000.

The feedback we have gotten from the hundreds of people who say they are using BASIC has all been positive. Two surprising things are apparent, however. 1) Most of these "users" never bought BASIC (less than 10% of all Altair owners have bought BASIC), and 2) The amount of royalties we have received from sales to hobbyists makes the time spent of Altair BASIC worth less than $2 an hour.

Why is this? As the majority of hobbyists must be aware, most of you steal your software. Hardware must be paid for, but software is something to share. Who cares if the people who worked on it get paid?

Is this fair? One thing you don't do by stealing software is get back at MITS for some problem you may have had. MITS doesn't make money selling software. The royalty paid to us, the manual, the tape and the overhead make it a break-even operation. One thing you do do is prevent good software from being written. Who can afford to do professional work for nothing? What hobbyist can put 3-man years into programming, finding all bugs, documenting his product and distribute for free? The fact is, no one besides us has invested a lot of money in hobby software. We have written 6800 BASIC, and are writing 8080 APL and 6800 APL, but there is very little incentive to make this software available to hobbyists. Most directly, the thing you do is theft.

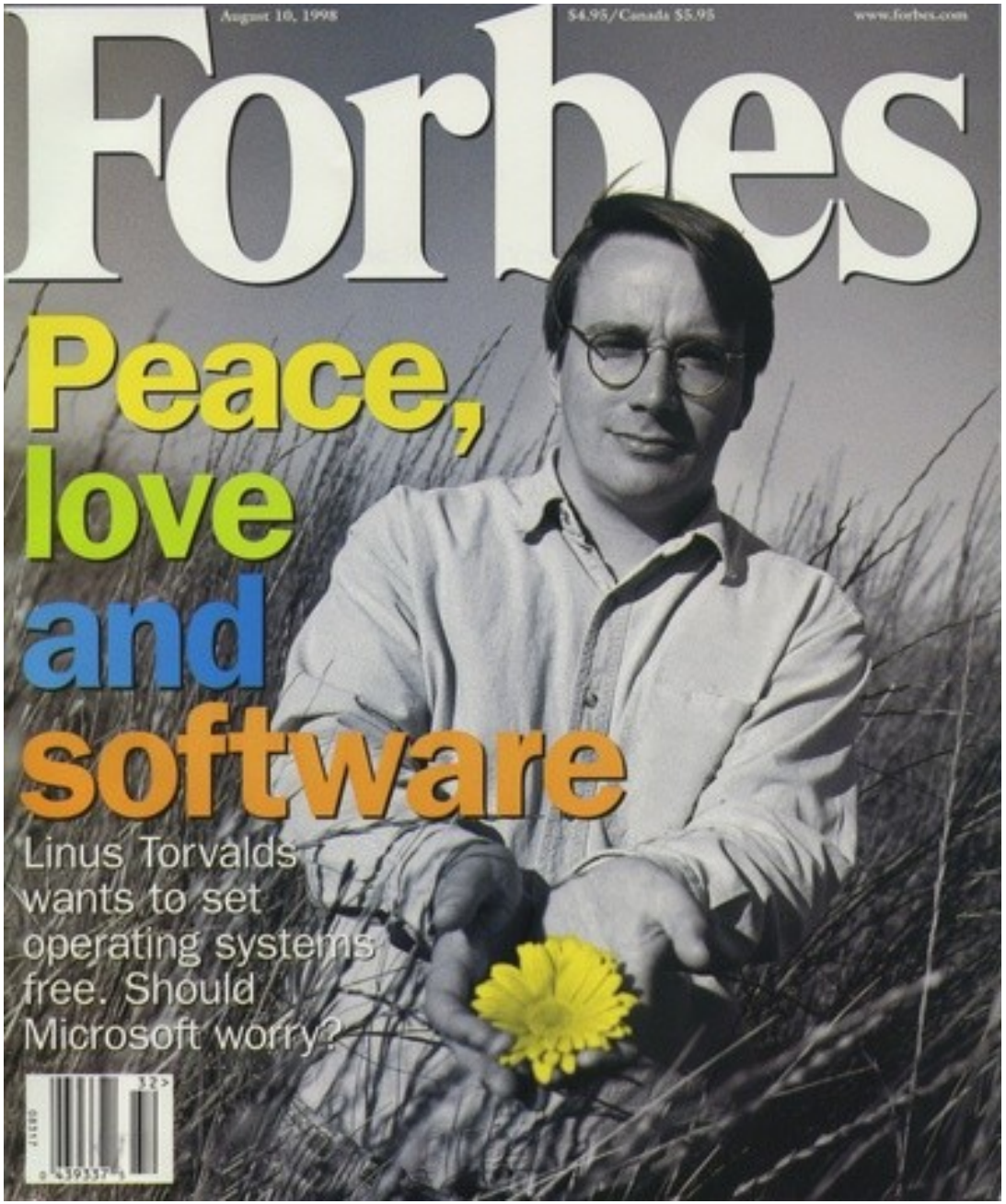
What about the guys who re-sell Altair BASIC, aren't they making money on hobby software? Yes, but those who have been reported to us may lose in the end. They are the ones who give hobbyists a bad name, and should be kicked out of any club meeting they show up at.

I would appreciate letters from any one who wants to pay up, or has a suggestion or comment. Just write me at 1180 Alvarado SE, #114, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87108. Nothing would please me more than being able to hire ten programmers and deluge the hobby market with good software.

Bill Gates

Bill Gates
General Partner, Micro-Soft

Oppure no?


August 10, 1998
$4.95/Canada $5.95
www.forbes.com
Forbes
Peace, love and software
Linus Torvalds wants to set operating systems free. Should Microsoft worry?

Agosto 1998

Halloween documents

- «Recent case studies provide very dramatic evidence ... that commercial quality can be achieved/exceeded by OSS projects.»
- «(Open source software) is long-term credible ... FUD (Fear, uncertainty and doubt) tactics can not be used to combat it.»
- «Linux can win as long as services / protocols are commodities.»
- «(Microsoft should) De-commoditize protocols & applications.»

http://www.catb.org/~esr/halloween/

Where will Microsoft try to drag you today?
Do you really want to go there?

Il motivo del successo di una scelta (economica)

Il costo opportunità è ciò a cui si deve rinunciare per effettuare una scelta economica ed è pari al valore della migliore alternativa. Compiere una scelta determina un costo in termini di tempo o di denaro (o entrambi), e il costo opportunità rappresenta la scelta migliore tra le possibili.

Il valore della scelta effettuata tiene conto di tale costo e del rischio che ci si assume nel fare tale scelta rispetto alla migliore alternativa.

Where is the (tech) gain?

- Standard e interoperabilità salvaguardano l'investimento (→ POSIX ~1985)
- Protocolli e interfacce ben fatte fanno da moltiplicatori di valore
- Architetture aperte e design efficaci migliorano i risultati
- Small teams (→ The Mythical Man Month)
- Software engineering best practices applied
- K.I.S.S. principle (→ The Art of Unix Programming)

Where is the (personal) gain?

- Standard e interoperabilità salvaguardano l'investimento culturale
- €€€
- Più divertente e stimolante
- Si può essere molto più efficaci (avendo skill e tempo) ed efficienti per motivi di KISS principle

Where is the (economic) gain?

- Costi diffusi/condivisi per il software di base
- Investimenti spostati (in buona parte) sui soli servizi a valore aggiunto e quindi a maggiore rendimento
- No moat companies (→ fine del monopolio)
- Migliore bilanciamento di costi/ricavi
- Commoditization del software rispetto ai servizi (→ cloud)

Discussione

