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# Free Labour Or Social Sculpture?

If the production and dissemination of Free/Libre Open Source Software (FLOSS) is a social movement, then what is its constituency and what is it fighting for? Is FLOSS a harbinger of communism, a new form of commons, or the avant garde of capitalism? Mute canvassed a small but varied selection of cultural producers about the role and significance of FLOSS in their projects

**Your Name:** James Wallbank

**Name of Organisation:** Access Space

**Location:** Sheffield

**Website:** <http://access.lowtech.org/>

**Email:** [rti@lowtech.org](mailto:rti@lowtech.org)

**Recent Projects:** The Linux Open Source Sound Project (LOSS): <http://access.lowtech.org/loss/>;  
Tools + Techniques 3 (Software talks):  
<http://access.lowtech.org/events/tools+techs3/>

## 1. What is your organisation's mission?

Access Space provides an open access media lab where people learn, create and communicate. We only use FLOSS and what we like to call 'trailing edge technology' – late model computers which other organisations feel are redundant, just because they can't run the latest version of Windows.

## 2. What role does FLOSS play in your organisation's economy?

FLOSS saves Access Space around £20K per annum in hardware and software costs. It's obvious how we make software savings – but just as important are the savings we make in hardware. Access Space only uses recycled computers which we can recover for nothing.

Typically, we use computers which are three to five years old. Interestingly, a recent government report on free, open source software suggests that, if you are committed to a continuous policy of software upgrades, Linux effectively **DOUBLES** the life of a computer.

## 3. Which communities do you support and how?

Our regular participants are mainly from the Sheffield area. Now we're working with eight UK organisations to spread the Access Space 'Free, Open Source Software, Recycled Hardware/Skill-Sharing Community' model.

## 4. How do you participate within the production of code or how do you see your role within the FLOSS ecology?

We don't see our role as code production. In fact, we do produce code snippets occasionally, and we are currently working with a local open source software consultancy, Hypercube Systems, to develop accounting software. Our real, 'Value Added' contributions to the Open Source meme are demonstration and advocacy. We run complex network systems in a difficult, real world environment (a multi-user network with constantly changing client machines) and we talk about it. Our network is robust and effective (more than can be said for many), and could be used in a variety of lab and community circumstances.

I think it's really, REALLY important that the open source community acknowledges that coding is just a part of spreading the model. Look at Microsoft – they wouldn't be in the dominant position they're in if coders were their only employees! They also employ advocates, lobbyists, educators, market researchers, advertisers, demonstrators, distributors, bug-checkers, trainers, support technicians, customer relations wonks and many more. For FLOSS to really change the world (it is already, and it will even more so!) all of these roles need to be played.

**5. Do you see your work/labour as resisting, in symbiosis with, or exploited by capitalist production?**

The wider 'Free Culture' movement, of which open source Software is one instance, actually starts to make this sort of terminology obsolete. Terms like 'capitalist production' tend to assume a model in which scarcity is closely linked with value – whereas in the digital and cultural realm, abundance (even ubiquity) are more closely linked to value, in a circumstance in which there are, potentially, huge surpluses of resources.

**6. What are the primary obstacles you face?**

None that aren't visibly eroding as we speak!

**7. What licence, if any, do you use?**

We like the GPL, and we like Creative Commons Attribution/Share-Alike licences, which are very similar to the GPL. We're slightly sceptical about 'non-commercial', which can restrict exciting opportunities for artists (and others) to use software and make a living.

**8. Do you see yourself as contributing to a commons?**

Absolutely!

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**Your Name:** Aymeric Mansoux

**Name of Organisation:** GOTO10

**Location:** N/A

**Website:** <http://goto10.org>

**Email:** [contact@goto10.org](mailto:contact@goto10.org)

**Recent Projects:** Pure:Dyne; Packet Forth; Make Art festival ... (works in progress)

**1. What is your organisation's mission?**

The mission of GOTO10 is to explore and support the fields of digital art, with a strong emphasis on open source software. We develop our own free software as well as trying to close the gap between the basic user and obscure developer nests. We focus on documentation by providing how to's and guides for various applications, and we are also now building a Linux based operating system dedicated to real time audio and video software in a user friendly environment. Another important point in GOTO10 is the regular production of live events such as workshops, concerts, installations and lectures.

**3. Which communities do you support and how?**

Initially, we tend to support ideas. Although ideally we offer services and support to communities where FLOSS is used as a basis for creativity, we also help other groups or individuals who belong to a different world. For us a production tool is a transitional object and the concept remains the most important element.

**5. Do you see your work/labour as resisting, in symbiosis with, or exploited by capitalist production?**

To be quite optimistic, I think we are neither resisting nor being exploited. These terms are marked with a very negative weight and some quite childish paranoia. To the contrary, I prefer to think we're in a phase of social and economic contamination. Our (FLOSS communities') ideas are ever more present in the media and everyone knows or has heard the term 'open source'. It is hard to imagine that platforms like Sourceforge were considered a futile playground for weirdos just a few years ago. Who would have imagined the overwhelming win on EU Patents? Who would have thought of Linux certification for desktop computers?

We are in a transitional phase and this is being achieved without revolution, wars or aggression which are the last breaths of a sick system. FLOSS is an intellectual virus, not a gun.

**7. What licence, if any, do you use?**

Any free licence that will fit any given project at any given time. We are not license fanatics or priests.

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**Your Name:** Agnese Trocchi

**Name of Organisation:** New Global Vision (NGV)

**Location:** N/A

**Website:** <http://www.ngvision.org/>

**Email:** [ngv@ecn.org](mailto:ngv@ecn.org)

**1. What is your organisation's mission?**

To create an historical archive of independent videos. To organise a distribution network through peer-to-peer, FTP servers and RSS feeds. To establish a producers' and distributors' community which agrees on the use of Creative Commons licences and keeps track of its activities through ad hoc blogs. To develop a publishing, archiving, distribution set of software which is available for other communities to use. To be a useful tool for independent television stations which need to share and retrieve contents (see the Telestreets network: <http://www.telestreet.it/>)

**2. What role does FLOSS play in your organisation's economy?**

Without free software our project wouldn't exist at all. For two main reasons: the first is that free software allows us to build the technology to manage the archive and to make it available to users, from the website to the servers that host the archives. The second one is that only through free software have we been able to share and improve our knowledge and so be able to create the tools we need.

**3. Which communities do you support and how?**

We support the independent videomakers' community by giving it a tool to circulate its productions, and the independent TV community by giving it a pool of materials to insert into its daily programmes.

**5. Do you see your work/labour as resisting, in symbiosis with, or exploited by capitalist production?**

Our work is not just resistant to capitalist production: it's creating new models of production. But as a community of independent videomakers we may say that (while waiting for the new world) we are still exploited by and in symbiosis with capitalist production.

**6. What are the primary obstacles you face?**

The lack of time that developers and editors can put into the work. We don't earn money from the project, and so we have to work on it in our spare time. Sometimes the most difficult thing is to meet face to face as these kinds of meetings are very important, but we are scattered all over Italy.

**7. What licence, if any, do you use?**

CC licences are applied to videos in the archive and we use the GPL for the set of softwares.

**8. Do you see yourself as contributing to a commons?**

Of course! NGV is one of the clearest examples of the creation of spaces for a commons, not only as regards licences, but also for the efforts that we put into accessibility, to content production and also for the will to develop a permanent archive.

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**Your Name:** Chris

**Name of Organisation:** RampArt Hacklab.

**Location:** RampArt Social Centre, London

**Website:** <http://wiki.hacklab.org.uk>; <http://www.rampart.co.nr>

**Email:** guano@onetel.com

**Recent Projects:** RampArt Hacklab

**1. What is your organisation's mission?**

Spread the word about free/open source software, provide a resource for those wanting to actively work for a better society, have fun.

**2. What role does FLOSS play in your organisation's economy?**

The decision to use FLOSS was not at all based in economics. Most software is free (gratis) if you know where to look. The free (libre) aspect was all important.

**3. Which communities do you support and how?**

The loose global network of activists, individuals and groups engaged in social activism, by providing a computer resource for use and for skill sharing.

**4. How do you participate within the production of code or how do you see your role within the FLOSS ecology?**

I don't have any involvement with the production of code if I can persuade others to do it. I see my role as promoting FLOSS.

**5. Do you see your work/labour as resisting, in symbiosis with, or exploited by capitalist production?**

Definitely resisting by using and promoting alternatives to the products of capitalism.

**6. What are the primary obstacles you face?**

Propaganda/ mind share.

**7. What licence, if any, do you use?**

Operating system: BSD licence; X Window System: MIT X Window System licence; Other utilities: GPL and probably many others.

## 8. Do you see yourself as contributing to a commons?

Not directly as I don't create products but indirectly by promoting the products of the commons.

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**Your Name:** Jaromil

**Name of Organisation:** Rastasoft

**Location:** Nomadic

**Website:** <http://dyne.org>, <http://rastasoft.org>, <http://lab.dyne.org/Jaromil>

**Email:** [jaromil@dyne.org](mailto:jaromil@dyne.org)

**Recent Projects:** <http://montevideo.dyne.org/trac.cgi/wiki/IvySync>; <http://fakiir.dyne.org>;  
<http://freej.dyne.org>;  
<http://dynebolic.org>; <http://muse.dyne.org>

### 1. What is your organisation's mission?

This is Rasta software.

Jah Rastafari Livity bless our Freedom! This is free software, you should share it for the good of yourself and your people, respect others and let them express, be free and let others be free. Live long and prosper in Peace!

But remember there is no Peace without Justice. This software is about Resistance in a Babylon world which tries to control more and more the way we communicate and we share information and knowledge. This software is for all those who cannot afford to have the latest expensive hardware to speak out their words of consciousness and good will. This software has a full range of applications for the production and not only the fruition of information, it's a full multimedia studio and has no reason to envy other proprietary systems, because freedom and the sharing of knowledge are solid principles for evolution and that's where this software comes from.

Hic Sunt Leones. And much Blessings in Jah. Luv to All Those who still Resist. Selah.

### 2. What role does FLOSS play in your economy?

I have no business. I squat houses for a living. My economy is made out of solidarity. Thanks for yours.

### 3. Which communities do you support and how?

ASCII <http://scii.nl>, Indymedia and some others through writing code, recycling hardware, being a militant activist.

### 4. How do you participate within the production of code or how do you see your role within the FLOSS ecology?

I like Object Oriented and Multithreaded design. I code in C/C and Assembler. I like the way GNU/Linux, BSD and some other efforts are evolving, I've been contributing for more than 5 years and I do enjoy it a lot.

### 5. Do you see your work/labour as resisting, in symbiosis with, or exploited by capitalist production?

I don't know. I don't think anyone exploits me when using my software, I did it for a purpose and I'm happy to share it with people. I'm an anti-capitalist, which is not old fashioned since capitalism is still there, and I fight it, in many ways, including my code. Capitalism is about exploitation, in any case.

### 6. What are the primary obstacles you face?

Finding a house for living, finding food, finding peace to code.

### 7. What licence, if any, do you use?

GNU GPL for my code, Creative Commons for other things. In the early days I used Artistic Licence, Public Licence and Open Audio License from the EFF.

**8. Do you see yourself as contributing to a commons?**

Yes, indeed.

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**Your Name:** Yves Degoyon

**Name of Organisation:** Riereta, Hackitectura, Indymedia Barcelona

**Location:** Barcelona

**Website:** <http://www.riereta.net>, <http://www.hackitectura.net>

**Email:** [ydegoyon@free.fr](mailto:ydegoyon@free.fr)

**Recent Projects:** Map-o-matix – collaborative environment for tactical cartography: <http://mapomatix.sf.net>; GISS/Gollum: streaming tools for social networks – <http://gollum.artefacte.org>; PiDiP – video extensions for Pure Data: <http://ydegoyon.free.fr/pidip.html>

**1. What is your organisation's mission?**

To develop accessible and open source software and build transnational networks for independent online medias, covering events from the World Social Forum 2005 to some hackmeeting in some anonymous place.

**2. What role does FLOSS play in your organisation's economy?**

All media and streams produced are made with open source software, and some specific tools <http://mapomatix.sf.net> are developed for our needs under the GPL.

**3. Which communities do you support and how?**

Indymedia, Plug'n'Politix, No One Is Illegal, Rotorrr <http://www.rotorrr.org>, V2V.

**4. How do you participate within the production of code or how do you see your role within the FLOSS ecology?**

We are free software dealers.

**5. Do you see your work/labour as resisting, in symbiosis with, or exploited by capitalist production?**

Our work is an alternative to the mainstream media (Al-jwarizmi versus CNN).

**6. Why are the primary obstacles you face?**

People wanting to rejoin the institutions. Academic writers disconnected from real people.

**7. What licence, if any, do you use?**

GPL.

**8. Do you see yourself as contributing to a commons?**

Ya, all our media content is free.

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**Your Name:** Simon Yuill

**Name of Organisation:** N/A

**Location:** Glasgow

**Website:** <http://www.spring-alpha.org>

**Email:** [simon@lipparosa.org](mailto:simon@lipparosa.org)

**Recent Projects:** <http://www.spring-alpha.org>; <http://www.yourmachines.org>

**1. What is your mission?**

I don't see myself in terms of 'missions' and such, I'm tactical rather than strategic if you like.

**2. What role does FLOSS play in your economy?**

Both creatively and financially it provides far greater possibilities – it foregrounds the cost of personal effort over packaged product (which is as it should be)

**3. Which communities do you support and how?**

No one group directly at present, but my work connects with various communities, principally other Glasgow based artists and local communities

**4. How do you participate within the production of code or how do you see your role within the FLOSS ecology?**

I write code. The spring\_alpha project is not only implementing existing FLOSS (such as Soya 3D) but also providing a new style of 'live-coding' simulation tool which is available as a framework (under GPL) for others to use. I also encourage others to use or get involved with FLOSS through public workshops, talks, writing, (gentle) ranting and informal get togethers (we have a version of OpenLab in Glasgow which meets in people's flats).

**5. Do you see your work/labour as resisting, in symbiosis with, or exploited by capitalist production?**

Even if you choose the first option, resisting, under current conditions you are always implicated in the latter two. Dealing with this is the issue rather than simply claiming one status.

**6. Why are the primary obstacles you face?**

Getting up in the morning, but as I don't have a job this is not so bad.

**7. What licence, if any, do you use?**

GPL, Free Documentation Licence and versions of Creative Commons Licences depending on what's appropriate.

**8. Do you see yourself as contributing to a commons?**

Yes.