

## BOOK REVIEW

Christopher Tozzi. *For Fun and Profit: A History of the Free and Open Source Software Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017.

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Is it possible to tackle the history –or rather the global and local histories– of software in a multifaceted way that goes beyond its functional and utilitarian uses? *For Fun and Profit: A History of the Free and Open Source Software Revolution* is a clear and inspiring contribution to the still-incipient social and cultural history of software, which understands it not only as a set of digital tools aimed at performing instructions and automating processes but, most importantly, as co-produced objects of negotiation that are part of people's everyday lives. Christopher Tozzi has rightly chosen both *fun* and *profit* to entitle this book on the social spread of free and open source software (FOSS), thus demonstrating, in line with Gerard Alberts and Ruth Oldenziel in *Hacking Europe: From Computer Cultures to Demoscenes* (Springer, 2014), that playfulness and commercial purposes cannot be treated separately when analysing the co-production

and circulation of software and its associated practices. Fun is also part and parcel of the social construction of technology.

By avoiding the traditional and misleading narrative of technological determinism, Tozzi draws attention to the FOSS movement that began in the early 1980s, when Richard Stallman and many other hackers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology closely collaborated with other groups set up at the University of California at Berkeley. In spite of this (always apparent) harmony within the FOSS community, a decade later such early connection had given way to a broader spectrum of collectives that did not necessarily share the same views or goals when approaching the free software and open source practices. These divergences among the FOSS factions emerged in the late 1990s and opened up the success for projects such as Linux and Mozilla Firefox among others. As Tozzi describes, “[...] the people and ideas that launched the FOSS revolution have not retained definitive control over it” (p.19). As a matter of fact, such a myriad of practices not only suggests that free software has always been much more than coding and tinkering with computers, but also that it was possible to build successful businesses and companies around it.

The structure of the book mirrors such a great diversity of actors and practices. It starts with a study of the origins of the hacker culture as a diverse and complex collective that ended up influencing the Unix operating system, which is the subject of Chapter 1. The following chapter stresses the conflict between the community of Unix hackers and AT&T –the company that owned Unix– due to the commercial aims of the latter. As a result, in the mid-1980s Richard Stallman and many others supported the creation of a separate Unix clone named the GNU operating system. Some of the GNU projects and related developments gave rise to the Free Software Foundation and the spread of free software licenses. Chapter 3 shows the difficulties involving the creation of a kernel for the GNU, as well as the new opportunities that arose from it in the early 1990s, such as Linux. According to Tozzi, the combination of GNU software programs and Linux during the 1990s gave rise to a new technological industry wherein companies invested large amounts of money in software programs that were going to be used and circulated for free. While Chapter 4 portrays the growing popularity of FOSS as a realistic choice for millions of users, Chapter 5 brings readers

back to reality by describing the deep divisions and tensions that flourished between the FOSS community and closed source software companies such as Microsoft. These “revolutionary wars” –as the author calls them (p.22)– led to a steady situation in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which is well described in Chapter 6. Yet as this final chapter shows, the cultural and intellectual penchant for FOSS initiatives has not ended up in a solid consensus, as Tozzi rightfully stresses by highlighting the struggle of women and minority programmers to enter FOSS collectives.

Certainly, tracing the history (or histories) of software is a difficult task to fulfill, as the author notes when he acknowledges that “it is impossible to write a summary of the hacker ethic that accurately describes what all hackers, in all times and all places, believe” (p.19). Nonetheless, the book clearly moves away from any reductionist narrative and recognizes free and open source software as a co-produced object that takes part in larger social and cultural contexts wherein practices both for fun and profit get mixed up.