Open Source Transparency
The Making of an Altered Identity

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The Free/Libre Open Source Software (fLOSS) movement may be considered the progenitor of an entire family of movements that have emerged as possible variants of this model: crowdsourcing, wikinomics, citizen engineering, social networking, end-user development, collective intelligence (Zhai et al., 2012: 61; Tapscott and Williams, 2008). fLOSS has remained relevant as a movement focused on creators and developers — ”produsers,” not just users—of leading-edge technological advances. The continued growth of fLOSS makes it significant for gaining further insight into the maturing logic that sustains this revolutionary movement (Deshpande and Riehle, 2008). To gain insight into this logic, we isolate one dimension of the movement to measure it against proprietary software development.

There are multiple levels on which the term “open” operates within the fLOSS movement. Openness, in this paper, is explored with particular reference to transparency in the sense of showing the self. The Internet and digital technologies create conditions where networked activity and communication may be captured and stored for unconstrained access and replay. The resulting unlocked potentiality in this transparent record of users’ activity may be seen as an active agent in the development of a transformed mode of production.
This raises a question: Is the transparency fostered by the technologies structuring the fLOSS movement evidence of an eventual disturbance that is inducing a new collective identity and agency? Alain Badiou’s phenomenological studies can help us analyze this question.¹

For Badiou, a group identity, operating at a collective or community level, is one stripped of any pathos of subjectivity (Badiou, 1991: 24–32). If we give technology an equal footing with other constituent members, we can proceed by first defining a group identity, then outlining how the fLOSS movement’s group identity demonstrates a non-identity with the established commercial software development model. What results is a new post-event group identity, a regional dis-placement within the domain of software development. We can use Badiou’s thinking to assist the analysis, but fLOSS introduces some complications for the restricted parameters Badiou sets out for relations.

A PHENOMENAL ACCOUNT OF GROUP IDENTITY

In Logics of Worlds, Badiou’s phenomenological account of what appears—or comes to exist—in a world, the identity of a world at a structural level is calculated through a mapping of the objects, and elements composing those objects, projected onto a base space. This mapped space, not unlike a roadmap of a geographical territory, is named the “transcendental index.” The mapping, or function, operates to measure the degrees of difference or identity between the objects, including an identity function for each object (2009: 358–59). The resulting space transcribes the descriptive phenomenal world into an identity. This is not the transcendental subject of Kant but instead an account of subject-less objects, an a-subjective transcendental materially generated from the given phenomenal account of the world. “The transcendental is not subjective, nor is it as such universal (there are multiple worlds, multiple transcendentals)” (301).

Inside the cover jacket of Second Manifesto for Philosophy, Badiou, with artist Monique Stobienia, diagrams a topological space. The objects and elements of that space are mapped onto an external space forming a transcendental index, evoking images of a Platonic allegory. In Figure 4.1, we recreate the diagram in a prefigured construction similar to Goldblatt’s illustration of a bundle from topos theory (Goldblatt, 1984: 89). Each object in the bundle representing the given world has a mapping, referred to as a stalk, with an end point in the base space. These end points, as outputs of the functional mapping, record into this space a valuation of the relational degree of appearance of the objects and elements of the given world.
Using logical operators, an object and the elements composing it range from appearing minimally to the maximum degree of exposure. Two elements of an object or two objects will differ to a certain degree. These elements will be related based on some ordering of their degree of difference, which could range from zero degree of difference to the maximal measurable difference. The transcendental index now houses the identity congealing the calculated results of that world’s entire play of differences and identities. Working from within the envelope of an existing world, an underlying identity is revealed from what is bundled together in this world. This highly abstract conception of a group or world identity we draw from fragments of Badiou’s phenomenological studies, borrowing, as Badiou does, from category theory.

The generalized space, or world, of our analysis is any organization, commercial or community-based, formed for the purposes of software development. In this study, we focus on a couple of mappings for the attributes that exist as elements of objects that uniquely contribute to the identity of this world. In this
treatment objects can be either individuals, groups of individuals, or software performing a function. The particular function that maps our measured end points takes into account the input elements for that object that would indicate the level of authority within organization, and a second element indicating the visibility exposure of the object and its work or involvement in the organization. We posit that the generally recognized identity of this world prior to fLOSS would be an ordinal ranking of the objects with increasing authority correlated inversely with a decreasing level of visibility exposure to the inner workings for members of this object. As you rise through the ranks of authority there is more concealment of critical aspects of the organization’s operations. This would be consistent with Foucault’s analysis of the panopticon effect of the visibilities in modern societies. Prior to fLOSS, managers operate with more lines of visibility open to them to their direct reports than the lines of sight open in the reverse direction.

This identity—the bundled aggregation of subcomponent identities and their relational ordering inscribed into this world through the transcendental index—is what we’ll view as an identity beyond individual identity; we will call it the group identity of a world or community. The objects and relations that appear maximally go furthest in uniquely defining group identity. The objects that are most intensely visible and with the highest degree of self-identification take on a primordial statement about a world’s identity (Badiou, 2011: 84–85). At the other end of the spectrum are those objects that appear minimally. That an object can appear minimally, barely distinguishable, leads to the thought that it could also not appear. The delta between the brightest-appearing to the dimmest can be now be thought as going one degree further past what doesn’t appear. Given that appearing is now equated with existence, from the thought of what doesn’t appear we have that which is in-existent in a situation. The structured group identity of a world has within it the possibility of an in-existent making an appearance.

Anyone oriented to Badiou through his earlier work Being and Event will be aware of the absence in this discussion of the ontological level. Given that Being is multiplicity for Badiou, the objects composing a given world are the path into understanding the multiples—the sets and their elements—which constitute this world. Relations and their mappings overlay the underlying multiples in his atomistic model. The relations captured between the objects contribute to the configuration of the world, but Badiou doesn’t see a change in relations as capable of changing a world (Badiou, 2011: 310–12). What we interject into Badiou’s account is this: when examined at the global level, the relations
between objects may take on object-like status; or what appears as an object may just be a relation (an account held by many category theorists).

An event in a world of appearing, in this account, is when an object or some element that composes it, which was thought to not exist, comes to appear maximally in the post-evental world order. This in-existence is not the appearance of an object from another world but that which, while still structured within a world’s composition, had gone unnoticed as a possibility in that existing world. Brought on by an event, there is the emergence of a new identity with the coming into existence of an altered transcendental index. The event is a window into how we might read this future world where objects and relations now fall under a different transcendental ordering, an altered group identity.

Figure 4.2. World with altered transcendental index

Figure 4.2 is a diagramming of the world affected by an event. When compared as an entire world-category, the various software organizations as one enveloped world, the mappings into the transcendental index between each organization should commute. That is, if the mapping holds between comparable objects found in both the Microsoft and Apple organizations, and the similar objects
map to the same location in the identity index, then we are assured of an identity that can be reached via some isomorphism. If the arrow from $h$ following arrow $k$ commutes with arrow $g$, then there is structural consistency. Our analysis of the direction of transparency in fLOSS will attempt to show that a mapping to a similar authority level, arrow $l$, will lead to a differing degree of transparency, arrow $f$, when fLOSS is included in the global envelope of software development organizations. Our focus is on the structure and impact of visibilities undergoing a discontinuous break brought on by fLOSS from the normal relation under which visibilities previously operated.

Foucault, with his analysis of the panopticon effect, provides the definitive reference point for how visibilities function (Foucault, 1995: 195–228). Foucault’s analysis of visibility provides a normative account of how technologies have assisted the masters of the capital-parliamentarian world order. “The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation” (170). In this account, the microphysical level of power distributions, where visibilities operate, pervasively produces the automatic application of power. In places where authority is concentrated, the gaze penetrates maximally through to all levels. Where authority is held tenuously, there is only a dim gaze. In the corporate model of software development we presume to follow the identity of the established capital-parliamentarian order, which supports a full spectrum of exercised visibilities where authority operates from the side of the gaze, even when via technology no one is immediately present.

Even when this microphysics of power, thought of as political technology, doesn’t emanate as determined solely by a sovereign state, as an apparatus it contributes an essential structural support for current historical formations. This visibility does not mean that transparency flows in all directions. Capitalist society in general can’t elude the imbrication of the impropriety of full disclosure. Foucault provides us with the logic of visibilities in the existing order, but fLOSS thinks visibilities with a twist which takes us from an account of visibilities to that of transparency under an altered configuration. Previously, this transparency was a one-way visibility, with the masters gazing out from the towers of power, “eyes that must see without being seen” (Foucault, 1995: 171).

Following Badiou further, we can detect in his work two different senses of identity: static and active. “All identity is the dialectical play of a movement of creation (active) and a movement of purification (static)” (Badiou, 2008: 66). Static, or inert, identity is the form of self relating to self (Badiou, 2006a: 148–52). Static identity is that brush with difference where a self determines how
it is “different from the rest” (Badiou, 2008: 64). The transcendental indexing includes this measure of self-relating for each object from which the world is composed. “Static,” here, is not an isolation in time, since “the phenomenon integrates into its phenomenality the variations that constitute it over time” (Badiou, 2009: 359). Working from all that is known about a given world, the transcendental indexing functions as the static identity of the associated world.

Any given world will undergo modifications. In an active identity mode, a plurality of differences are embraced, “an expansion of identity” (Badiou, 2008: 65). In any process of identity expansion, an active identity is operative. Active identity expansions are explorations of further development of the various stalks that compose the bundle constituting an identity. This active identity expansion can lead in two directions. In the process of the expansion of a given world, it could expand in complexity and variation, yet all the while retain its identity. Under this condition the transcendental remains the unaltered. When the modifications remain isomorphic to the original state, the transcendental can account fully for the change. Is FLOSS yet another development to be subsumed by the existing world, an active identity expansion that leaves the static identity of the corporate software development world under the smooth operation of the status quo? Alternatively, an active identity expansion could disturb the structure of the transcendental indexing, the global identity. In this case there is no inverse mapping, no subsumption, leaving the new state in a non-isomorphic transformation. Something has happened. With FLOSS, is there an identity expansion that brings an in-existent to the surface and exposes another order?

TRANSPARENCY IN FLOSS DEVELOPMENT

The revolution that this analysis describes has its inception at the site of Richard Stallman’s Gnu Public License (GPL), which was designed to invert the normal intent of copyright (to restrict access), instead protecting the right of a license holder to refrain from restricting access (McGowan, 2005: 363). “The terms free and ‘libre’ (free in the sense of liberated in French and Spanish) are employed to signal a second of the important features of this innovation, the covenants guarding software from commercial expropriation. The intention of these covenants is to create a ‘liberated zone’ of software available for inspection and

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* a Following group theory, a group maintains its identity when for every transformation there is a corresponding inverse mapping (Badiou, 2006a: 148–52).
modification subject to the requirement that it will remain open in any sub-
sequent distribution” (Dalle, David, den Bensten, and Steinmueller, 2008: 301, n. 1). Already we recognize an alteration in the previous lines of sight through inspection of source code that property rights obscure when they block access to source code.

Inseparable from the GPL in the fLOSS revolution is the intent of Linus
Torvalds in making, over the Internet, a redoubled universal appeal for assistance with his fledging Linux operating system licensed under the GPL. The unrestricted access to source code, additionally reflected in the low cost or free access to the products, warrants the signifier “open” that this movement goes by. “Open source code development is defined in large part by its transparent process of collaborative development and the intellectual property regime and license that underpins it” (Cornford, Shaikh, and Ciborra, 2010: 811). Rather than dwelling on the GPL’s significance in structuring this movement through guaranteed transparent access to the software, we will instead investigate the transparency at the core of the fLOSS software development processes, which we posit as one of the maximally appearing structural supports of the fLOSS configuration.

In the pioneering days of open source, Eric Raymond coined a mantra of the movement, “Given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow,” which he declared as “Linus’s Law” (Mateos-Garcia and Steinmueller, 2008: 334). Research has tried to validate whether fLOSS outperforms proprietary software when visibility of the source code produces a larger audience that in turn improves the testing and maintenance cycle of software development (Crowston, Wei, Howison, and Wiggins, 2012: 24). While identifying the improved reliability of code with Linus’s Law is significant in explaining the unique nature of fLOSS, it overlooks the full impact of the microphysics of transparency.

There exists a technological dimension to the transparency encountered through the tools employed, the way they are employed, and the culture of practice behind this alternative development of software. Without the Internet and the overcoming of constraints of time and distance, the possibilities for a voluntary, highly distributed development effort don’t exist. Software’s humanly readable form of source code is not typically distributed when the software is purchased from proprietary software development firms; in fLOSS communities, however, the software code is freely accessible and with, for example, a GPL license it remains exposed in the public domain in perpetuity. This is a sympathetic relation of unconstrained access to the finished product held in harmony
with the transparency the contributors operate with in the development process of this altered mode of production.

Specifically, the technological tools that the fLOSS community deploys for promoting the climate of transparency in their development process include chats, online project documentation, wikis, repository logs, issue/bug tracking, newsgroups, mailing lists, and version-control systems that provide access to the source code (Gutwin, Penner, and Schneider, 2004: 73–74, 78; Cornford, Shaikh, and Ciborra, 2010: 812). At the level where fLOSS is a community of open-source communities, there are repositories such as SourceForge, Savannah, and Freshmeat, which host a vast collection of projects with open access to the software and project artifacts. Inscribed in these tools, along with the GPL license and access to source code, is alignment with a culture of transparency. The constitution of a fLOSS community is inseparable from the built-in practice of exposing information. “In particular, there is a strong culture of ‘making it public’ where developers are willing to answer questions, discuss their plans, report on their actions, and argue design details, all on the mailing list” (Gutwin, Penner, and Schneider, 2004: 73).

Mailing lists play a critical part in the discussion of design decisions for source code development. fLOSS communities spend more time arguing the pros and cons of design and coding strategies than is traditionally spent in firms (Mateos-Garcia and Steinmueller, 2008: 335–36). “Almost all communication is done via the mailing lists. In the words of one of our developers . . . , ‘If it doesn’t happen on list, it doesn’t happen”’ (Gutwin, Penner, and Schneider, 2004: 76). The mailing lists, stored in searchable archives, maintain a complete historical record—a memory preserved in digital code. Strictly speaking, these tools could be configured to restrict access, but the experiment of fLOSS is to leave access open for the community and the general public. “They [the email and chat messages] are public, and so allow all the developers on the list to become peripheral participants in each others’ conversations” (72). What identifies fLOSS maximally is that the default and enforced position is open. In-camera is anathema to this community practice. It is abnormal for one to encounter insufficient read permissions. This is not to say that there aren’t boundaries to graduated access, since we acknowledge the existence of hierarchies within fLOSS practices, but the visibility of the communication exchanges or project artifacts remains unobscured across all boundaries.

Software development in this community construction, not unlike the case with proprietary software, is managed using a version control system (VCS).
Software stored in a VCS contains metadata that keeps track of every contribution submitted to the repository. Typically the commit logs of these contributions, which include the name of the person submitting the change, short comments about the change, and the content of the change, are automatically sent to mailing lists. The content of each change is preserved in the repository along with a record of code deletions. The VCS metadata makes it possible to compare differences in code content between any two points in time. It also makes it possible to reconstruct all the steps in the progress of the code contributions between these points in time (Cornford, Shaikh, and Ciborra, 2010: 812). Anyone not familiar with software development may recognize this concept of historical change recording in the track-change capability of word processors or as mirrored in the “revert to previous version” capability of wikis. Previously, a copy of the open-sourced code could be picked up from a repository; now the community approach is to permit read access to the VCS so that the entire sequenced history of the development of the code is recorded, visible, and replayable. Foucault had analyzed how the birth of the clinic brought with it the gaze of master and pupil, physician and student, focused on the surface effects of the disease (Foucault, 1994: 107–111). Here the gaze, even if without the feedback from interrogation, is focused both on the surface and on the effects below the surface to fully expose the complete inner workings of the FLOSS body of work.

This particular openness to the world creates a view from anywhere. A progression into a FLOSS community would typically begin with a prospective community member becoming acquainted with some aspect of a FLOSS project. This could begin with freely accessing the code and test-driving it, reading project documentation to comprehend project intent, reviewing bug-tracking to overcome a difficulty, or searching the mailing list discussions to understand the future direction of the project. “Interested parties may lurk and pick up information without being very visible” (Gutwin, Penner, and Schneider, 2004: 76). At this stage, legitimacy of membership in the community begins even if one is lurking in the shadows. The embryonic phase of identity construction absorbs through a gaze all the exposed body parts and organs of the FLOSS community. Participation begins from the periphery or the margins. From here contributors looking to participate in a project are free to self-select where to direct their efforts based on an affinity with a community where there is maximum exposure to the group’s identity. Identity formation coincides with each level of access promotion across concentric boundaries, advancing toward core developer status or falling back through reduced interest in the project.
At a second stage of identity construction, participants can progress by asking questions on mailing lists, “reporting bugs, collecting feature requests, offering patches, or providing usage feedback” (Fang and Neufeld, 2009: 15). In the Debian community one particular promotion is the granting of Non-Maintainer Upload (NMU) status, which grants broader permission for uploading critical bug fixes that recognized maintainers may not get to (Coleman, 2005: 10). “As one developer on IRC told me half-jokingly, an NMU reveals ‘our laundry for public inspection’” (11). Even when confronted with the risk of unprofessional participation, the default setting to “open” remains a trait of this alternative order. These values have been sewn right into the fabric of Debian’s Social Contract as part of the governing directives:

3. We will not hide problems: We will keep our entire bug report database open for public view at all times. Reports that people file online will promptly become visible to others. (Debian, 2004)

What are the effects when transparency is maximized? The general effect of the inverted direction of the gaze is heightened group awareness (Gutwin, Penner, and Schneider, 2004). How do individual identities in communities of practice form under such conditions of community awareness? We can examine how this transparency contributes to identity formation for individuals who begin the participation process from the outside peering in and progress, on their own accord, to increased involvement. In the course of this examination we are uncovering the group or collective identity of fLOSS and, simultaneously, how transparency assists individual identity development.

Fang and Neufeld’s research directed at explaining sustained participation using legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) theory confirms this behaviour of fLOSS communities (Fang and Neufeld, 2009). Combining participation and situated learning, fLOSS, as a community of practice, provides the conditions for individual identity construction. Identity construction in this model is a process of identity-work and identity-regulation. “Identity-work refers to identity changes perceived by the focal individual as a result of access to understanding of the community artifacts” (22). Transparency comes into play through providing a maximum exposure to community artifacts against which a participant can build identity-work. “Identity-regulation refers to identity changes regulated in the local social context and is enacted as access to control in the OSS community” (22). Visibility of the participant’s engagement in the community permits maximum exposure across code contributions, design suggestions, and
troubleshooting support that lead to access or promotion. Transparency opens entry to these communities through the tools that can permit unrestricted access to the digitally preserved historical record, thus maximizing the ability to fully contextualize one’s participation. LPP explains the identity-work that this participation generates, as participants initiate and then manage their participation. Full exposure of this participation contributes to the community’s identification of the competence of participants and their subsequent progression through increasing access to community artifacts. The inverted play in the direction of gaze leading to transparency contributes to the newly formed group identity of fLOSS. The founding of a new dimension of visibility in turn produces an altered mode of production, with an appeal to enhanced means of active individual identity expansion.

Independent of participants’ motivation, as they step out of the shadows and demonstrate they’ve been observing, they in turn have their identities recognized. In the original theoretical development of legitimate peripheral participation, the transition into a community was accompanied by a mentor. In the fLOSS model, technology contributes a persistent helping hand. “The novice is ‘guided’ by what is embedded in the code, mailing lists and forum postings that the novice reads, adapts and contributes rather than being guided by an individual serving in the mentor role, a role ordinarily thought to require human interaction” (Mateos-Garcia and Steinmueller, 2008: 335). Those on the periphery are legitimated. The legitimacy is possible because of what can be gleaned from external visibilities. Progressing forward, contributors can align their participation, building from an unobstructed view of the project’s knowledge base. The increased recognition by the community contributes to the LPP notion of identity-regulation. fLOSS is a radicalization of a community of practice where the unique dimension is unbarred transparency, and where one of the things under observation is individual identity construction.

CONCLUSION

The identified examples of active identity expansion from within the fLOSS movement demonstrate that modifications have occurred. If the expansion is premised on the deployment of an inverted direction of visibility, previously seen as nonviable, the change driven by this event has the potential to be transformative. The world that fLOSS departs from operates under micro-physical layers of visibilities that support the dominant power positions. In this
traditional, hierarchical context, authority’s field of vision always surpasses any reciprocal visibility. With the fLOSS movement, there is still the pervasive effect of visibilities. Now, however, the gaze is willfully inverted and directed at those exercising the most authority or holding the most power in the community. Visibilities are not curtailed, but rather expand to a maximum degree. The gaze being willingly inverted from those holding the most power to those choosing to forego a power hierarchy was previously unimaginable; it remains the in-existent, within the logic of visibilities under its normative functioning within the world of software development.

A derivative effect is that fLOSS becomes more than a straight reversal between the viewer class and those subjected to the panoptical gaze. A presence on the Internet combined with a commitment to open access means there is no restriction on who can now peer in and choose whether or not to participate. Transparency and accessibility are multipliers of change effects over the previous world of visibilities, though initiated with an inversion merely in one relation. When the in-existent element is made an operative and indeed determining principle, then a recalibration of all relations has to be worked into the new transcendental of this fresh order. The beginnings of an unanticipated collective identity can be detected.

Having borrowed devices from Badiou for thinking structural identity and change, we contend, contra Badiou, that a change in relation has precipitated the altered mapping between objects. From Figure 4.2, there has been a reversing of direction for the internal relation between objects in the fLOSS frame. A change in relation results in the need for a recalibrated transcendental index. Badiou resists attributing to relations the power to transform a transcendental and the identity of a world order (Badiou, 2009: 310–12). We have shown that exposure to visibility can be treated as an element of an object, but it is a change in relations that has produced the change in the charge of the element. We hold that the inversion in the direction of the gaze is an alteration in relations, and one self-selected by the principal agents behind fLOSS projects. We argue that relations, arrows and morphisms in category theory terms, can also take on the form of an object when viewed from the level of the identity of a world.5

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b Where accounts previously described the inversion of the panopticon as the synopticon (Stefanick 2011, 127-128), the fLOSS account may differ because the context is a mode of production where the principal agents self-select the positioning of the gaze on themselves.
Badiou has been critiqued for not paying attention to the underlying relation between capitalists and workers that structures the capital-parliamentarian order (Sotiris, 2011: 37–43). With the inversion of gaze that fLOSS produces, we have a new component to account for, one that also threatens to undermine one of the defining relations of the capital order itself. This altered relation shows all the signs of producing a new identity. Either way, this is an in-existent component rising up to maximally appear in a reconfigured order.

It is immaterial in theory if the ones being gazed at take form as a corporate entity. However, can a commercial software development company sustain an inverted gaze that leaves no bastion of authority exempt from exposure of all its goings-on? There would be no more “taking things internal,” if that meant out of sight, in the face of a difficulty. Transparency in a proprietary world would have to progress past the carefully managed screening and redaction of what is released to the public to reach the level of transparency found in the fLOSS world, where there is visibility through to all aspects of the production process, with no regressing from this practice. These would be testable points where any regression that was confirmed would cancel out the claims of an altered identity, leaving the entities from the previous state returned to their isomorphic beginning. We speculate that this previously in-existent, altered relation functions as an impediment in the former regime’s logic. We could then support that fLOSS is an evental disruption introducing fundamental change capable of producing high-quality software and demonstrating an alternative world with a reordered transcendental.

Technological advancements have created the conditions for furthering the pervasive panopticon effect. The transparency of fLOSS remains an instance of this effect. fLOSS operates with the logic of panopticon, but reverses the positions of observer and observed. The one-way mirror has been installed backwards. The blind spot in Foucault’s analysis was the possibility that visibility could be inverted to a transparency turned on those in power, even while they are complicit in invoking this reversed effect. This reversal of the direction of transparency is not unlike the GPLv reversing the effects of the normal operations of copyright. The panopticon enacted an effect:

Because, in these conditions, its strength is that it never intervenes, it is exercised spontaneously and without noise, it constitutes a mechanism whose effects follow from one another. Because, without any physical instrument other than architecture and geometry, it acts directly on individuals; it gives “power of mind over mind.” (Foucault, 1995: 206)
The agency derived through structured visibility now acts upon those leading. Those on the periphery are granted full disclosure, in addition to the community benefitting from transparency operating along all sightlines. Power is infused throughout the community. Just as anyone can step in behind the glass in the panopticon tower and put the discipline effect into operation, equally so can anyone in the fLOSS architecture of transparency. The new possibilities created with the technologies deployed in managing the source and communications in fLOSS communities, when combined with willingness to invert the gaze, have made a difference.

With the event of Free/Libre Open Source Software structured as it is on at least two prominent pillars—the GPL and transparency-openness—an altered collective identity appears on the scene. If the fLOSS movement has proven to possess an alternative identity, then the capital-parliamentarian order might be considered its path of etiological descent. The event begins materially situated within an existing world order. From this existing order, with its operation of visibilities, we have confirmed a disruption of evental proportion. The ensuing result is the exposure of a new group identity, with the full impact of its structural agency yet to be determined.

Badiou doesn’t leave us much to work with if the goal is to explain the agency that brought about this event. Disappointingly, he attributes the arrival of an event more to chance than any agency (Badiou, 2011: 110–11). The possibility of this account of evental reshaping leaves technological determinism still in play. However, Badiou does reintroduce the theory of subject as the agency involved in the struggle, exploring through enquiries to fully develop the identity of this new world order brought on by an encounter with an event. Nietzsche’s warning about the void staring back has been ignored, and instead the benefits to be gained from increased exposure to the void’s gaze are welcomed. The truth behind fLOSS supports the truth behind Badiou’s conception of the event. The void, in the form of the open, a lurking participant in every situation, can peer into a situation and become manifest.

NOTES

1 Badiou’s phenomenological studies, considered here, include Logics of Worlds (2009), Briefings on Existence (2006a), and Second Manifesto for Philosophy (2011).

2 This account is not far removed from the thought of quantum field theorists. “You can regard properties as having an existence, independently of objects that
possess them. Properties may be what philosophers call “particulars”—concrete, individual entities. What we commonly call a thing may be just a bundle of properties: color, shape, consistency, and so on . . . Out there in the world, things are nothing but bundles of properties” (Kuhlman, 2013: 47).


4 Debian is one of the genuine fLOSS communities that produces a distribution of Linux. A distribution contains the Linux operating system packaged with additional software and supporting developments packages to enhance the computing environment.

5 Quantum field theorists also propose that the fundamental ontology appears to actually be relations. “In other words, objects do not have intrinsic properties, only properties that come from their relations with other objects . . . The only interesting and new position would be that everything emerges purely on the basis of relations” (Kuhlmann, 2013: 46).

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