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Intro to Composition

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### Linux and Me

The age of technology dawned upon me before I was able to walk. Before I became the person I am today, my developing body was enticed by technology. From the original PlayStation to the PlayStation 4, the rise and fall of Myspace, from the original iPod to the newest generation of the iPod touch; I've seen technology change and evolve with new features, gimmicks, addons, etc. Those pieces of technology became a part of my life and I fell in love with it. The feeling and sensation I got from getting the newest Apple or Sony product was like a dopamine rush to my entire body and so I followed the latest trends of the tech scene.

Eventually, that same love and dopamine rush eventually led me to choose my major as a Computer Engineer and influenced me in learning how to program. On the surface, it appears as if I was a young boy with a passion for technology, but when digging deeper, you start to see a chump who knew no better about what he was using or how it was harming him. I never had much money to buy all the things I wanted considering that most pieces of tech costed a pretty penny. It disheartened me that I had so little money to buy what I wanted. The money that I did have however, saved up from chores, birthday gifts, and the like went to picking up the coolest new thing I randomly stumbled upon in an ad because of the ad's ability to make even the most uninteresting things become larger than life such as "running 275,000 apps just for the iPad", despite most of them being generic or simple game apps, or seeing Siri showing off its ability to

answer multiple questions, despite it being horrible at answering more complicated questions, especially if it was a follow up question. I never looked too deeply into these problems or asked myself simple questions such as “What was I going to get out of this later on in the future?” However, most importantly, my biggest problem, was that I thought it just made me a cool person. It was fun showing off the newest pieces of tech to my friends but years later, when that same tech became obsolete, who am I supposed to impress with such “old junk”? I soon realized that as a person who loved technology, despite living in the technological age for over a decade, I didn’t understand the tech scene around me. However, my ideals and views would change the moment I encountered the question: What is Linux?

That fateful event of encountering that question was almost impossible to prevent happening. It began when I bought Windows 8; an operating system (software that communicates with hardware and allows other computer programs to run) that changed the look and feel of what its predecessor had established (Windows 7) to target both tablet and desktop users. The interface was in a grid-like setup with no start menu button on the bottom-left such as before, and ran applications on full screen, making it harder to switch between them. Along with other changes, Microsoft had not provided in-depth instructions as to how to use Windows 8. So, despite it being more secure and performing better than Windows 7, the radical change was disorienting for a casual user, and just like many other critics and reviewers who paid full price for it, began to become more critical of new tech. They then pushed an update called Windows 8.1, in an attempt to return the feel of the previous Windows 7, but the damage was already done, and Windows was no longer the same to me. It only got worse with Windows 10; their newest operating system. Despite the radical change from Windows 7 to 8, I eventually dealt with it and learned as best as I can to use it. New problems would arise when Microsoft began to force

updates to Windows 10 on consumer desktops. I was one of them. Despite setting my computer to not update, it was thrust upon me as if I was suddenly forced to do a pile of homework before bed after finishing another pile of homework. After the struggle I had to learn how to use Windows 8, only to deal with another operating system, without my consent, enraged me to no end. Words could not describe how I was feeling on that day. Just like before, I braved the storm, and within a few weeks became comfortable with it. The straw that broke the camel's back came only months later when I stumbled upon what Microsoft tracks on Windows 10. Credit card information, purchases, mic input, with many others could be collected your computer. Your location, passwords, contacts, relationships, etc., could also be stored, even when modifying your privacy settings, Microsoft was more than willing to send my data 5500 times a day to third party companies. In addition, my new Windows 10 was tagged with a unique advertising ID, so Microsoft could make sure to send me advertisements corresponding to my tastes and browsing history by other third parties. At that moment, instead of becoming even more enraged than I ever was before, I started to think. Instead of catering to the consumer and those who loved the Windows brand, Microsoft preferred to cater towards third parties who could stalk me on the internet and take all my information. It wasn't just Microsoft. Other companies have been on record doing similar things, disrespecting the privacy of their users so long as they could be sold to other people such as Google tracking your history, even in incognito mode or Apple tracking your calls and emails to "prevent fraud". Privacy be damned because this is the tech scene of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and privacy is what you must sacrifice to be a part of it. To this day I hold nothing but contempt to the companies that shared my data against my wishes or without my consent. That same contempt was what became my determination to fight against this. I searched for days as to how to obtain digital privacy as if my life depended on it. I refused to give those companies

any leverage. At that moment, my life was changed forever when I was searching for other operating systems with one of them that made me wonder: “What is Linux?”

When first coming across this question, I was very interested in a piece of tech that while being typically associated with other operating systems I have never heard of Linux in my life. Linux refers to the Linux kernel which is the lowest part and the core of the operating system which handles the CPU, memory, and peripheral devices. The other functions which create an interactive desktop environment such as web browsing or even searching for files, are by other projects made by other people. Linux is open source; meaning people can view the computer code of the product, edit, and contribute to the operating system. Due to many contributions, the operating system created multiple versions of it called distributions. Not only were these distributions free but they specialized in different parts of the computer experience such as web browsing, gaming, and privacy, and thus making it more customizable than other operating systems such as Windows. I was immediately intrigued by this new discovery. As I did more research, I concluded that it was important and essential for me to be familiar with the Linux kernel and the Linux environment. From the installation process, to navigating files, everything was a new experience. To install Linux, I had to watch videos and tutorials because if installed improperly, my device could obtain multiple bugs and glitches at best or my device becoming unable to activate at worst. I picked the Linux Mint distribution and to install it required me to use Linux installation software to store Linux on a USB and play with the power button on my laptop until I reached the boot menu and took about an hour to find the controls to delete Windows and install Linux because I never had to be so involved with my computer before. It was an uphill battle from there. I was introduced to a terminal (an interface to execute computer commands) where it contained its own “programming language” as to how I could receive files,

extract downloaded software, or even find where they are located. Downloading software itself was a chore because Linux does not have as much software available as Windows or Apple since not as many people use Linux, so I either had to find replacement software, or work without some at all. Along with that in mind, from the age of one, I have been using Windows operating systems and I was trying to get comfortable again with another one but was even more distant to what I was used to because Linux allowed the user to be more involved with what goes on in the computer and if I didn't try to learn how to use these features, it would have all been for naught. It was at this point where I spent about 30 hours per week watching videos and reading articles as to how to navigate the system. If I ran across a software problem, I played around with the settings of the application or went online and searched for the solution and tried it. Sometimes, it worked, other times I made a bigger mess, and had to start from scratch. I continued to practice the commands and keywords used by the Linux terminal to find files or get an update. Even now, I still try my best to learn as much as I can. As I was doing my best to understand an unfamiliar thing, I noticed how much I began to change during that fateful day.

Ever since I started to learn how to use Linux, I no longer see myself as a chump of the tech scene anymore. I have become more aware of the issue of privacy in the internet age and decided to take steps such as avoiding software that is not open source; because if the computer code cannot be seen, then people cannot be sure of what is in the software or if it's tracking them. Software such as uBlock Origin and Cookie Autodelete to name a few, I installed to block ads and trackers. No longer are the days where I only cared about getting the newest piece of tech. As said by Thomas Jefferson, "The natural cause of the human mind is certainly from credulity to skepticism." I began to ask questions about the technology around me. When I see a new piece of tech, I ask myself: What features are on it that I can't get anywhere else? How

useful will it be in a few years? Is it worth the price? Does it look like it can track me? Typically, the newest iPhone or the newest Windows product drops in favorability for me. Not to mention, I have become less materialistic. My phone for example, is a phone from 2016 but has a removable battery meaning the phone can last much longer than those without a removable battery, which is not a feature seen in flagship phones anymore. I now desired the things that I could customize, things that were of good quality, and things that could be a good investment in my life. Plus, I started to become more hardworking as I learned Linux. I turned my frustration into persistence and knowledge for the future and I realized how important practice was in learning new things and the strategies you use to learn more efficiently.

To me and other people like me, change can be sudden. At first it may seem as if this change was somewhat sudden when I found out how much data was being collected on me and why I started to use Linux. However, it could go as far back as when I was using Windows 8 because I no longer felt in a comfortable situation. Things began to look foreign to me. Things in life can go against what you are used to and at times you can struggle through it or it requires you to act. It's at these times where people can change in character or their view of something can change drastically. To me, both took place because learning Linux became a turning point in my life. I always thought that back then, I was just a boy who loved technology and its effect on the world around me. Now, I see that part of me as someone who never considered what he was doing to himself until it hurt him, and after months of watching videos, practicing for hours on end, learning new things even now, I see myself as a tech savvy person who wants to understand the tech scene but doesn't need to be hip to do it.