

Chapter 12

Epilogue

Just to confirm the old saying that there is nothing new under the sun, I offer the following epilogue.

As stated in Chapter 1, there was a flurry of creative activity in the mid to late 1970's that resulted in the internetwork architecture, and in particular Pup [9] and IP [86, 87]. These two protocols, however, do not in my mind adequately reflect the depth of understanding that the early internet architects had of routing and addressing.

Specifically, one RFC and three IENs (Internet Engineering Notes) [85, 25, 22, 18] document some of the debate that took place during the year from mid-1977 to mid-1978 and that led to the IP protocol. (Of course, I discovered these documents well after I had done the basic work on Pip :-). These four documents show that 1) one of the central ideas of Pip, namely that of putting the fields of the address in individual header fields, had been proposed by Jon Postel [85], and that 2) most of what the internet community is currently “discovering” about routing and addressing was already thought of by Postel, Sunshine, Cohen, Clark, Cerf, and perhaps others who did not bother putting out IENs (or whose IENs or other publications I have not bothered to read).

In what follows, the aspects of that debate that relate to the findings of this thesis are summarized.

The opening paragraph in Postel's May 1977 RFC730, “Extensible Field Addressing”, says:

This memo discusses the need for and advantages of the expression of addresses in a network environment as a set of fields. The suggestion is that as the network grows the address can be extended by three techniques: adding fields on the left, adding fields on the right, and increasing the size of individual fields. Carl Sunshine has described this type of addressing in a paper on source routing [102].

This, in a nutshell, is Pip's (or SPip's) route sequence, which allow adding fields (RSEs) on the left, the right, and in the middle (which Postel's can do too, though he does not mention it above).

Later in the RFC, Postel says:

The prospect of interconnections of networks to form a complex multinet system poses additional addressing problems. The new Host-IMP interface specification has reserved fields in the header to carry network addresses. There is experimental work in progress on interconnecting networks. We should be prepared for these extensions to the address space.

Talk about understatement!

And later still:

A problem with simple field addressing is the desire to specify only the fields that are necessary given the local context. A program interpreting the address is then unsure what the first field represents. Some clues are needed in the address specification for correct parsing to be possible. Dave Crocker has described a syntax for a similar problem in network access of data.

Trying to do this (only including the fields of the address relevant to local context in the header) with SPip turned out to be problematic. Still, the “clue” that Postel refers to is useful for efficient processing of the header, as the router only needs to parse the relevant fields. This “clue” is SPip’s Active RSE field.

Postel gets to the meat of the thing in the following excerpt:

Specifically I suggest that we adopt a field based extensible address scheme where each field is separated from its neighbors by a delimiter character and each field has a name. When an address is specified the name of the most general field must also be indicated.

Definitions:

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 $\langle \text{address} \rangle ::= \langle \text{field-name} \rangle ":" \langle \text{fields} \rangle$ 
 $\langle \text{field-name} \rangle ::= \text{"NET"} — \text{"IMP"} — \text{"HOST"} — \text{"MESSAGE-ID"}$ 
 $\langle \text{fields} \rangle ::= \langle \text{field} \rangle — \langle \text{field} \rangle "/" \langle \text{fields} \rangle$ 
 $\langle \text{field} \rangle ::= \text{a decimal number}$ 
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SPip has a few differences from this, but the basic idea is there. Something to give the context of the field to be parsed (SPip’s Active RSE = Postel’s field-name), and a series of fields (SPip’s are binary not decimal, but had Postel’s found their way into a packet, I’m sure they would have been binary).

In April of 1978, Danny Cohen shed more light on the nature of addresses in his IEN31, “On Names, Addresses and Routings (II)” [25]:

I HATE TO ADMIT IT, BUT ...

At the beginning of this note, and in an earlier note, I used a great line telling that “names tell what the processes are, and addresses tell where they are.” It continues by “routings tell how to get there.”

I hate to admit that by now I have some reservations about this definition. My name is “Danny.” My address is “ISI.” When I was at Tech, my name was the same, but the address was different. This supports the definition. How about the addresses in a broadcasting media network? When a host changes its position (location) on the same Ethernet, its address does not change. Well, maybe these addresses are not real addresses, according to the definition. Admittedly, this is an uncomfortable thought.

I believe that there is a better explanation. I suggest that an address is “the canonic routing from the root of the addressing-tree.” It sounds recursive, does not it?

To be more precise, an addressing scheme is a hierarchical organization of elements, with code assignment such that each element has a unique set of codes, corresponding to its position in the hierarchy.

The notion that the address tells how-to-get-there from the root of the tree is very similar to the notion that absolute coordinates are really relative, with respect to the origin.

Since we know (by default) how to get from the source to the UA root, and since the address tells how to get to the destination from the root, the address tells how to get from the source to the destination.

Hence, by definition, addresses are routings.

This last conclusion, that addresses are routes, is a key “finding” of the taxonomy section (Section 2.2) of this thesis, and is the basis of SPip’s route sequence.

Later on in the IEN, Cohen makes a proposal:

Our proposal for addressing and routing is as follows:

- Establish a UA (Universal Address) scheme, of variable level structure.
- Disseminate as much knowledge to each participating node as deemed practical.
- Allow the option of routing to be included in the headers of the messages.
- Refuse delivery of messages to a destination with unknown routing.
- Establish internet-directory-assistance service.

This last point is crucial. “Internet-directory-assistance” (now known as DNS) must advertise the “route” from the root of the hierarchy to the leaves. In particular, if the packet format is a string of fields (or addresses, as in SIPP), then DNS should advertise that string.

So, at this point in the discourse (April 1978), Postel has provided the address format, and Cohen the architectural underpinning from which to understand that address. So, what happened? Why

did we end up with IP and not something more like SPip?

We find a clue to the answer from IEN46, written by Clark and Cohen in June of 1978 called “A Proposal for Addressing and Routing in the Internet” [22]. After discussing several problems with routing and addressing, they make the following statement:

The solution which has been proposed in the past to cope with this is to replace the address in the packet with a route, called a source route since it is provided by the source of the packet. The disadvantage of having a route in a packet instead of an address is that the concept of an address is very useful one. For example, for accounting purposes it may be necessary to note the source and destination of a packet as it passes through a transit net. Clearly, it is desirable that the source and destination be uniquely identified for this purpose, something not easily done if the source and destination are specified only by a route. Thus, we propose that the address continue to be the primary piece of information in the packet, but that it be possible to include, in addition, an optional source route.

So, here they recognize the need for a compact, simple, fixed length *something* to identify the source and destination of a packet. But, this is nothing more than the EID of SPip. So, the need for both an identifier and an “address” (still at that time arguable to be a route) was clearly recognized. However, they added the source route to handle the routing bit, and kept the address as the primary piece of information.

I think this would have been fine (indeed, this is SIPP’s approach) except for the crucial thing mentioned by Cohen in IEN31:

- Establish internet-directory-assistance service.

Well, DNS was of course established, but it did not contain the source route, just the address. So, the “routing” information in the packet was effectively limited to a single 32 bit field.

I was interested to find the following in the Clark/Cohen paper:

5. Migration

What is the relationship between the scheme proposed here and the current internet header with a fixed size address field? Happily, adoption of the addressing strategy involving regions together with the optional internet source route implies no immediate upheaval to packet formats or gateway code. Currently, every network is a region, and every gateway thus contains code for doing inter-region routing. Eventually, gateways will want to be modified as follows. When a region finally is defined which contains more than one network, then gateways inside that region will need to understand an additional component of the internet address. Thus, unless gateway code is rewritten

for different regions, it will be necessary to write code which can deal, eventually, with a variable size component of the address. The address itself, however, can reasonably be a fixed size, since it is merely an address and not a route. In fact, it seems that the field as specified for the current internet header is sufficient in size, although perhaps marginally so.

Well, something happened here. An argument was put forth that 32 bits is enough because the address does not have to do routing—the source route can handle the rest. Clearly it was recognized that a variable length *something* was needed, but the source route was deemed sufficient for that, and the 32-bit address won out in the end. So, perhaps what killed IP is not that the address is too short (though probably it is), but that the ability for DNS to hand a host a source route (which it could then put in the header so that the right thing could happen in the network) was not created.

So, indeed SPip's routing sequence is a combination of Postel's Extensible Field Addressing (EFA) and Clark and Cohen's “address”, though with SPip the “routing” part of the “address” has been largely moved over to the EFA (route sequence in SPip), and the “address” (EID in SPip) is left with the identification function.

An IEN from Cerf the following month (July 1978) seems to meld with Clark/Cohen (IEN48, “The Catenet Model for Internetworking” [18]). It generally confirms the Clark/Cohen proposal. It, however, makes some additional interesting statements:

In order to limit the overhead of address fields in the header, it was decided to restrict the maximum length of the host portion of the internet address to 24 bits. The possibility of true, variable-length addressing was seriously considered. At one point, it appeared that addresses might be as long as 120 bits each for source and destination. The overhead in the higher level protocols for maintaining tables capable of dealing with the maximum possible address sizes was considered excessive.

Not only is it interesting that a longer address (120 bits, almost as long as an NSAP), was seriously considered, but the reason for not going with it (memory overhead to “upper layer protocols”) really shows how times have changed.

Finally, Cerf's IEN seems to delegate source routing to its current, and very limited, role:

One of the major arguments in favor of variable length “addressing” is to support what is called “source-routing.” The structure of the information in the “address” really identifies a route (e.g., through a particular sequence of networks and gateways). Such a capability could support ad hoc network interconnections in which a host on two nets could serve as a private gateway. Though it would not participate in catenet routing or flow control procedures, any host which knows of this private gateway could send “source-routed” internet datagrams to that host.

It is interesting that the original ideas of Postel and Cohen (very SPip-like) evolved into the source route, which was then limited to a “special service” role (i.e., routing a packet through a private host on two nets).

To conclude, I must say that when I read these four documents, I found it fascinating and delightful to discover that my work, with the considerable aid of hindsight, was able to confirm, and put in a modern context, the early thinking of the internet architects.

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