2 essays: ‘An anarchist created a centralized system’ and ‘On the responsibility of computer scientists, and democracy’.

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Short essays on large topics, indistinguishably technical, political.
Anarchism, this other dominant ideology of technology circles.

‘Petit bourgeois anarchism’ wrote Marx of Proudhon – and he would have written today about self-fashioned ‘anarchists’ at Google or Twitter and any number of likewise companies.

[Jack Dorsey, CEO and co-founder of Twitter, lobbied against help for the homeless in San Francisco – a city ravaged by the gentrification brought on by these same technology companies and their staff... Engineers, but only of devastation more often than not.]

At sea, freedom – but this freedom is only the luxury to forget about the world left behind.
On the responsibility of computer scientists, and democracy.

“What grand buildings, but they forgot to create the grand people to put inside.”

We are too often reminded of this sentence – all senses of the word.

One day historians may refer to this first period of computer science as a ‘naive’ beginning.

All sciences have them, go through them, and only with much difficulties – discussions and inner fightings – are their scientists able to extract themselves from it.

Not least due to impetuses from the outside; but only so until the outside becomes the inside...

Computer scientists have a responsibility. We cannot pretend any longer this to not be the case.

They have a real, real, heavy responsibility in fact. Soon, no doubt, they will be held to account – when focus shifts from “Big Tech” to them.

“What have you given us?”, “Why did you not use your time more wisely?”, “Explain to us!” – many questions and more they will receive.

We argue here that one responsibility they have is to communicate their science, their findings to the public – but in such ways they may understand it.1

This is a democratic imperative:

How else would the public be able to decide? And, how our politicians?

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They should weigh whether whatever (often misplaced) ideals they have of their science, and even more so (always narrow-minded) academic career priorities they might entertain, outweigh the public benefit.

And, if they do not do it for these grand ideals, they should do it for their families, friends, children... Their future.

And, if despite all of this, they still have qualms, they should of course feel free to mention that this is separate from their scientific activities, views, explicitly and formally.

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1In fulfilling this, they may go about their duties in various ways. We have already proposed one exercise they may submit themselves to, one we have formalized as such: A standard text in which they would explain how they are able to preserve their freedom (this includes privacy, of course) while using computer technology, in the style of “How I do my computing”.

3
References

— Goldman, Emma. Essays...
“Dear Sir. Yesterday I received a letter in which you demand from me a detailed judgment of Proudhon...”
— Stallman, Richard. “How I do my computing”.