Democratic Algorithms for the Proletarian Mind

What principles must guide the democratic social media platform in our future ?

Ben Seattle -- June 2020 -- 630.742.am

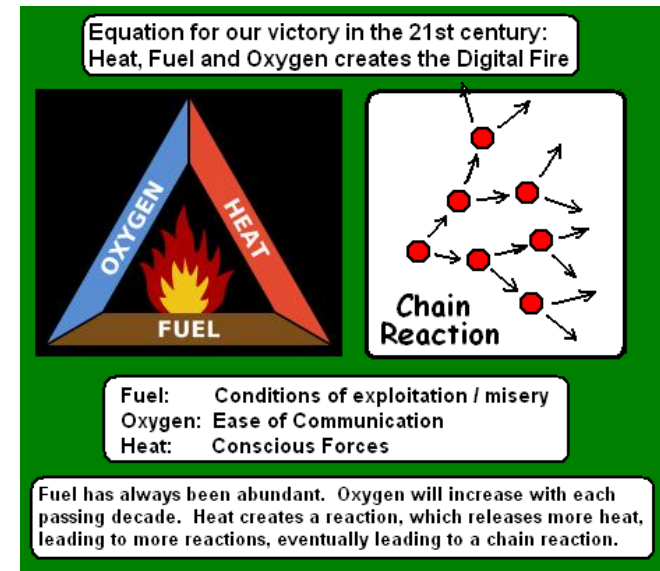This essay is hosted at: http://communism.org/node/4002

Hi Winston,

As a keen student of both the **information revolution** and the **hard core left** for nearly 5 decades, it has become clear to me that these two worlds are going to become increasingly important to one another.

I have come to the conclusion that, by the middle of this century, a **democratic social media platform** will emerge--and that it will add **vast and ever-increasing amounts of oxygen** to every burning fire of struggle against every kind of oppression.

I am, of course, using an analogy here. If oppression is like **fuel**, and the flow of information about this oppression is like **oxygen**, then consciousness is like **heat**. The fire equation holds that fuel plus oxygen plus a heat source, like a spark, creates fire--which produces additional heat, in a **chain reaction** that continues as long as fuel and oxygen are abundant--or until the fire is extinguished.

Analogies aside, the **need** for a **democratic social media platform** exists today. The technology has matured to the point where it is now practical for small teams of activists and tech workers to create (with modest amounts of labor and minimal money) **prototypes** (ie: small scale projects that can experiment with design principles) that will be able to demonstrate the **extreme power** and **usefulness** of **democratic** (ie: public and easy-for-anyone-to-change) **algorithms**.

Equation for our victory in the 21st century:
Heat, Fuel and Oxygen creates the Digital Fire

OXYGEN HEAT FUEL

Chain Reaction

Fuel: Conditions of exploitation / misery
Oxygen: Ease of Communication
Heat: Conscious Forces

Fuel has always been abundant. Oxygen will increase with each passing decade. Heat creates a reaction, which releases more heat, leading to more reactions, eventually leading to a chain reaction.
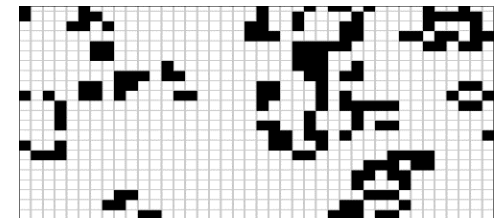
Democratic platform can be built from simple building blocks called "nodes"

My intent, with this letter, is to **begin to outline my views** on certain basic algorithms and data structures which I believe will be important.

It is my intent to keep these algorithms and structures as **extremely simple** as is humanly possible. The power and flexibility of these simple algorithms and structures will come from the way they can be **combined** and recombined together--just as amino acids can be chained together to form a protein of any shape that can perform any function.

One inspiration for this simplicity is the work of mathematician John Conway, who started with a creation by John von Neumann and simplified it until he created his famous "game of life" -- where absurdly simple rules led to mathematical entities that moved and reproduced on a flat surface.

Another inspiration from mathematics is the fractal Mandlebrot set--where a simple iterative formula generates beautiful creations that reflect one another in infinite ways. Or, we can take inspiration from the universe itself, where (as far as is known) four fundamental forces and a small family of particles has created everything we know--including ourselves. **Simplicity rules!**

In any event, I would like to outline how **a relatively simple structure I call a "node"** (that can contain text, graphics, links, tables, and other nodes) and very **simple algorithms** may act as **building blocks** fundamental to the creation of the best prototypes--and the development of the **universal platform** that is bound to emerge as the various competing prototypes eventually combine.

Your mission -- to be a reader and thinker

In order to write--I need someone to write to--someone to bounce ideas off of--who knows how to think--and who is in possession of enough **humility** to avoid the **know-it-all disease** that saturates the left and blinds activists to the world around them.
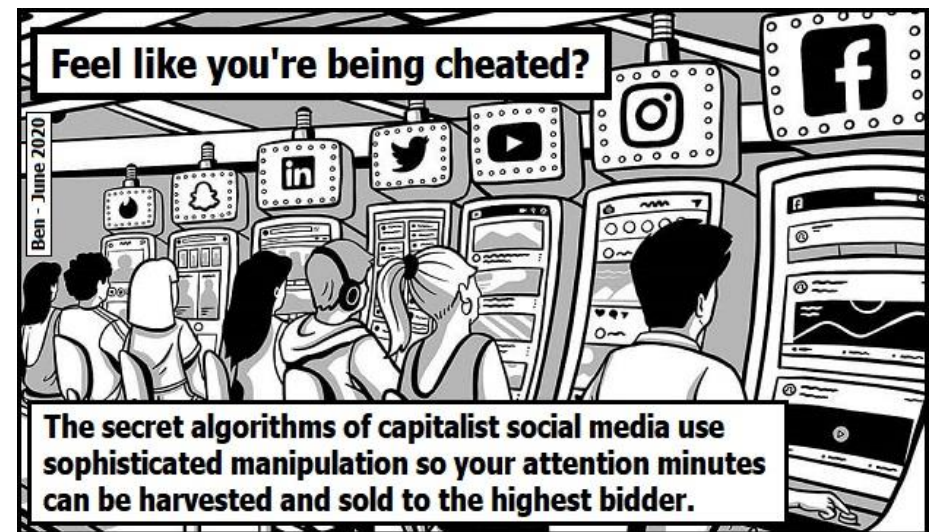
I have political "comrades" (if I may use that term carelessly) that I can talk to--but they tend to be indifferent to everything other than what they can use to "create something now" that will impress people and capture attention--even if this means not having time to remember **fundamental life-or-death principles**.

You work in information technology. You understand what **algorithms** and data structures are. And you have political thoughts-- as I learned when talking to you about George Orwell's most famous book, from which I have adopted your pseudonym. In short--you qualify as a **sentient carbon-based lifeform** with the ability to **think about** what I write and to make an **occasional comment** or to ask a **thoughtful question**.

That is what I am asking you to do. What do you say?

Will you accept this mission?

The secret algorithms of capitalist social media use sophisticated manipulation so your attention minutes can be harvested and sold to the highest bidder.

We need something more

There have been countless criticisms of the practices of the biggest social media platforms, such as facebook and twitter. Many of these

criticisms are related to fake news, hate speech and/or the tons of personal information which are being sold to advertisers. But the bigger issue in the background is the nature of the manipulative (and secret) algorithms which determine what you see in your "news feed".

Some have called for **government regulation**. Some have called for the development of a government-owned social media platform that would function like a **public utility**. Depending on the details, such things may be useful.

But we need something more.

We need organized information

The current George Floyd protests help us understand the ability of information technology to collect, organize, focus and transmit revolutionary energy. The size, scale and intensity of these protests reflects the **widespread use of hardware and software** that makes it possible for a video of a police murder to

er	City	Stat	Tweet URL	Filename	YouTube	Doucette Text
1	Houston	TX	https://twitte	TZUloTdG	https://yo	trampling a peaceful protestor with a horse
2	NYC	NY	https://twitte	Eads5ku1	https://yo	Shoving an unarmed woman to the curb, prompting a seizure that put her in the emergency room
2.1	New York City	NY	https://twitte	#2 and #1	png	Updates on 2 and 48 above, both out of New York City, NY.: "NYPD suspends 2 officers seen in widely disseminated protest videos: On 5/29, an officer is seen pushing a woman to the ground & on 5/30, an officer is seen pulling down an individual face mask and spraying pepper spray at him."
3	NYC	NY	https://twitte	HfAdr19F	https://yo	doing an intentional hit-and-run with a car door to an unarmed protestor standing in the non-vehicular bike lane
4	NYC	NY	https://twitte	4a2eX3rk	https://yo	NYPD were just beating a variety of people earlier tonight because they could
5	Las Vegas	NV	https://twitte	-759IMLp	https://yo	beating a variety of unarmed protestors for sport
6	Fort Wayne	IN	https://twitte	A1Prr732	https://yo	pepper-spraying a variety of unarmed protestors for sport
7	Minneapolis	MN	https://twitte	i8IWyddK	https://yo	Minneapolis PD officer in an SUV indiscriminately sprays random citizens with pepper spray from his car window
8	Minneapolis	MN	https://twitte	71_73356	https://yo	detonating flashbang grenades in a docile crowd of unarmed protestors for sport
9	Minneapolis	MN	https://twitte	72_82894	https://yo	shooting a random protestor in the neck with a rubber bullet, then detonating more flash-bangs
10	Minneapolis	MN	https://twitte	Q.jpeg	----NA----	Police arresting CNN reportes on air
11	Denver	CO	https://twitte	b9xX0Alb	----NA----	police in Denver CO are shooting reporters with paintballs for sport
12	Louisville	KY	https://twitte	tM0IiPH5c	https://yo	police in Louisville KY – who just watched police in Minneapolis MN arrest a CNN reporter live on-air – say "hold my whiskey" and deliberately shoot a reporter and her cameraman
13	Denver	CO	https://twitte	2G7rbT5H	https://yo	intentionally pepper-spraying anyone recording police brutality, outside the state's capitol grounds

(above) screenshot from spreadsheet of 428 videos of police violence against peaceful protesters

reach millions of people almost instantly--and for people to connect with one another and organize **mass actions**.

But this is **only the first step**. After a week of nationwide protests, a mathematician noticed twitter threads that carried a growing list of hundreds of videos of police brutality against peaceful protesters. The mathematician recognized that such a lengthy list would be more useful if it was better organized--so he put the list on a **spreadsheet** on google docs--and posted the link to twitter. Now activists everywhere had a **useful tool**--and could easily find and sort these videos by city, date, or other information.

More than this--when so many videos from so many cities were indexed and easily accessible--**patterns became readily apparent**. It became clear, for example, that police abuse was not accidental, was not the result of occasional random incidents, was not because individual police departments had problems--but

was **part of the same deliberate tactic aimed everywhere at the violent, brutal suppression of peaceful protest**.

The important conclusion we can draw from the above--is that just as **organized resistance** will be far more powerful than uncoordinated individual resistance--so too is **organized information** far more powerful than random, disorganized information.

Organized information is the basis for all action

The **ability to organize and act on information** is the distinguishing feature of the **central nervous system** of animals. Sensory input from **millions**

of receptors is (1) collected, (2) refined, (3) abstracted and (4) translated into the systematic, organized and coordinated responses of **billions** of cells that are **the difference between life and death**-- between being predator or prey.

We must have the right to organize information on a mass scale

Over the centuries, the oppressed have fought for the right of free speech because they recognized that the right to share our thoughts is essential to our ability to think.

Patterns became readily apparent

In this century, we must recognize that it is not enough to have the right to speak--**we must have the right to organize information on a mass scale**.

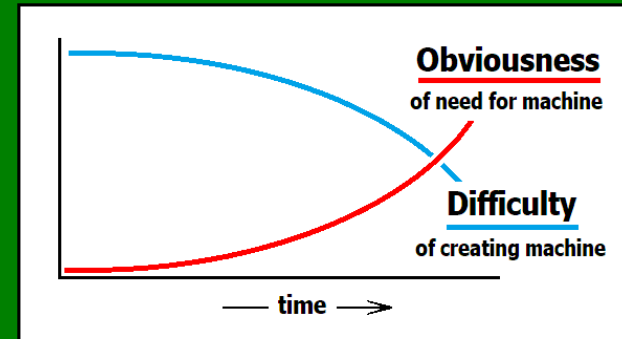## A central nervous system of our own

We will only be able to exercise this right--to organize information on a mass scale--and to **understand what actions are necessary** to free ourselves from the rule of capital--when we have **a central nervous system of our own**--that serves *us* and not our oppressors--in the form of **our own democratic information platform** and **our own democratic algorithms**--free from censorship, control, manipulation or abuse from the corporations, institutions and governments that serve our class enemy.

Democratic information machine is inevitable

In the middle of this century, humanity will reach the crossover point where the demand for a public and democratic information machine will become irresistable

Obviousness of need for machine

Difficulty of creating machine

— time —

Ben 2017-1020

With each decade of advance in the revolution in digital communications, and the widespread in-your-face nature of information war, it will become more obvious that the proletariat and oppressed need their own information machine that is independent of the corrosive and corrupting forces of commodity production and the skilled, manipulative, lying and treacherous human representatives of capital.

At the same time, with each decade it will become easier and less difficult to create such a machine that will be the foundation of an independent and democratic news service and social media channel.

We need our own democratic platform

The working class and oppressed **need** a social media platform that is organized in a democratic way--and that is **beyond the control** of *any* corporation or government.

The need for such a platform will show itself, in particular, as political motion translates into the formation of **numerous independent groups** which will carry out **journalistic work** and make heavy use of social media to spread their message and organize. The need for a **common democratic platform** to help **aggregate** and **organize** a **growing body of articles** and **discussion threads** from all of these independent groups and activists will **make itself felt** in many ways.

4

A universal platform is inevitable

1. Prototypes will emerge

The **need** for such a platform is great (and **steadily growing**). The **difficulty** of creating such a platform is not that great (and is **steadily getting smaller**). Eventually, as the need grows, and the difficulty shrinks, teams will create prototypes.

2. Prototypes will fail

Many prototypes will **fail**. Some prototypes may fall into the traps of either **commodity production** or **"empire building"**. Some prototypes may **stagnate**. Some prototypes may be **insufficiently cautious** in **expropriation of commodity information**. Others may **grow too quickly**--and **collapse** as they **attempt to scale**. If there is a way to fail--some **"get rich quick"** project will certainly find it.

3. Prototype experience will accumulate

But all of the prototypes (both failures and successes) will allow activists (and tech workers) to learn. And, as this happens--**the forces** that brought these projects into existence--will continue to **intensify**:

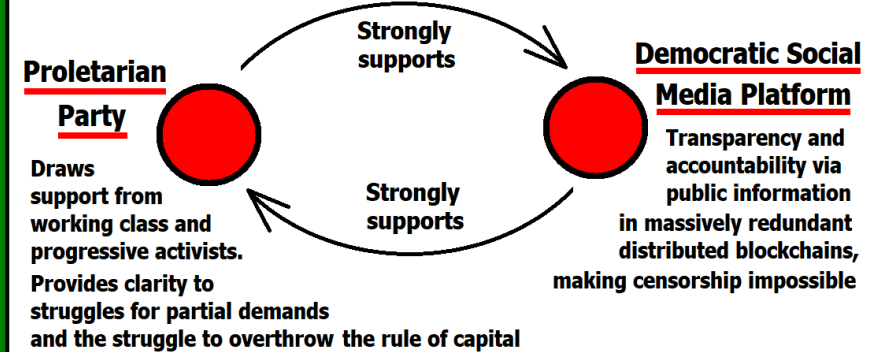### 4. Prototypes will merge into universal platform

The **need** for a **universal** and **democratic social media platform** that serves the working class and oppressed (and that is beyond the control of our class enemy) **will continue to grow**--and the **difficulty** of creating such a platform **will continue to shrink**. These **same forces** will **eventually compel** the successful competing prototypes to **merge**.

Platform or party?

The proletarian political party will coalesce out of the work to create a democratic social media platform
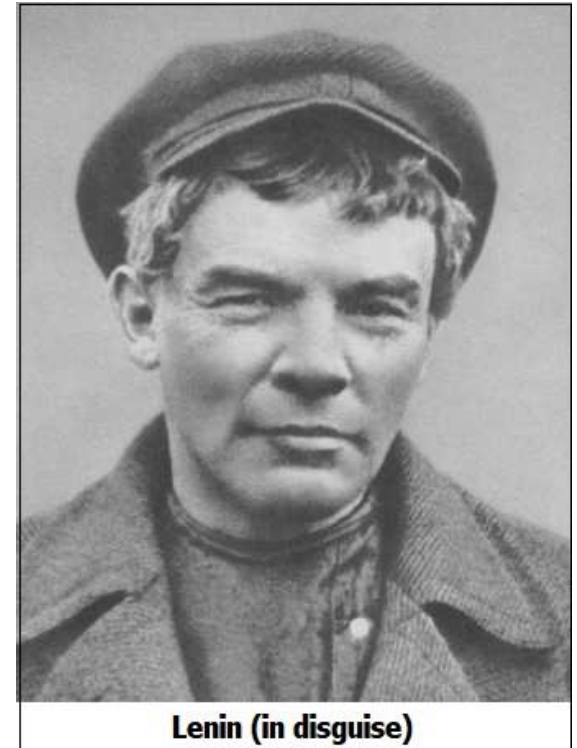
Many of the denizens of the hard core left are profoundly uncomfortable with my assertion that **the clear and certain path forward for humanity** will be the creation of a democratic social media platform that will **bring light and consciousness to the proletariat** and knowledge of its **historic mission** and destiny.

The Platform and the Party

Ben -- June 2020

Proletarian Party — Strongly supports → **Democratic Social Media Platform** / Strongly supports ←

Draws support from working class and progressive activists.
Provides clarity to struggles for partial demands and the struggle to overthrow the rule of capital

Transparency and accountability via public information in massively redundant distributed blockchains, making censorship impossible

Traditionally, it has been the **proletarian political party** which did this. What would Lenin think of my assertion? I started reading Lenin seriously in 1975. My conclusion is that Lenin would back the work to create a democratic platform--**to the hilt**.

Humanity has entered **a century of information war**. A democratic platform is **how we will win**.

Lenin (in disguise)

Those who (supposedly) defend the idea of a proletarian political party are able to provide **no clue** as to how this party will be created.

The reformist wing of these denizens claim that the path to such a party is to become part of the **food chain of bourgeois politics**.

The sectarian wing of these denizens claim that the path is to create a **cargo cult**. Some try to do both. And when these dead-end paths (inevitably) lead nowhere--they claim that conditions are not right.

The simple truth is that the political party with the ability to lead the working class will **coalesce out of the work** to create a democratic social media platform--and the democratic social media platform will evolve to become the **information backbone** of the proletarian political party--and (eventually) the entire working class.

A democratic social media platform, based on democratic algorithms, will do a lot to encourage the **healthy criticism, public discussion and debate**, and the **open communities** which are necessary to help combat the tendency towards **reformist or sectarian degeneration** which have **crippled** essentially every effort to create independent working class parties over the last century.

The Food Chain

"Socialism" is at the bottom.
At the top is Wall Street.

Trump and the Clintons

Hillary and Bernie

They are cogs in a machine that wages war on the working class

Bernie and Kshama

We need politics, and organization, that is genuinely independent, genuinely democratic, genuinely open and genuinely politically transparent

Beyond imagination

Because of the historic moment in which we find ourselves--this is a **good time to give thought** to what **principles** must **guide** the independent and democratic platform that the working class will use to (1) make itself **conscious**, (2) **organize** its efforts, (3) **overthrow** the rule of capital and (4) **create an economy** which is not based on commodity production.

I would like to describe something which has never existed--which **has never before been possible**--and which I believe will become important and powerful **beyond imagination**.

(above) "gadget" at the Trinity test site (right) Oppenheimer and General Leslie Groves inspect remains of test tower

"We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed... A few people cried... Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture the Bhagavad Gita; Vishnu is trying to persuade the prince that he should do his duty, and to impress him takes on his multi-armed form, and says, 'Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.' I suppose we all thought that, one way or another."

-- Robert Oppenheimer, scientific director of the Manhattan project

How powerful? More powerful than the source of that **terrible light**, brighter than a thousand suns, that **lit the New Mexico mountains** on that July dawn in **1945**. I do not expect to live long enough to see what I am describing gain the support it needs. But there should be little doubt that this will eventually become more important than the Manhattan Project.

Our ruling classes have their weapons, based on a chain reaction. We will have ours.

-- Part 2 --
Democratic Algorithms

A democratic information machine

For lack of a better term, we can call this democratic platform a "**democratic information machine**". It will be **endlessly flexible**-- and able to function as a **social media platform**, **news service**, **general purpose information manager**, and **universal index** to everything important.

Once this thing exists and is functioning--its usefulness and value will be apparent. Until then, it is difficult to describe except as a combination of reddit/twitter/facebook/wordpress/wikipedia--that will **not be controlled by anyone**--and will be based on what I call "**democratic algorithms**".

Democratic algorithms

Democratic algorithms can be considered public algorithms that **actively support and encourage self-organization for cooperation** (or competition) in conditions where everyone has (more or less) equal rights and responsibilities. Also important is the idea that the users who create the content for the platform will have the right to modify the existing algorithms or create their own.
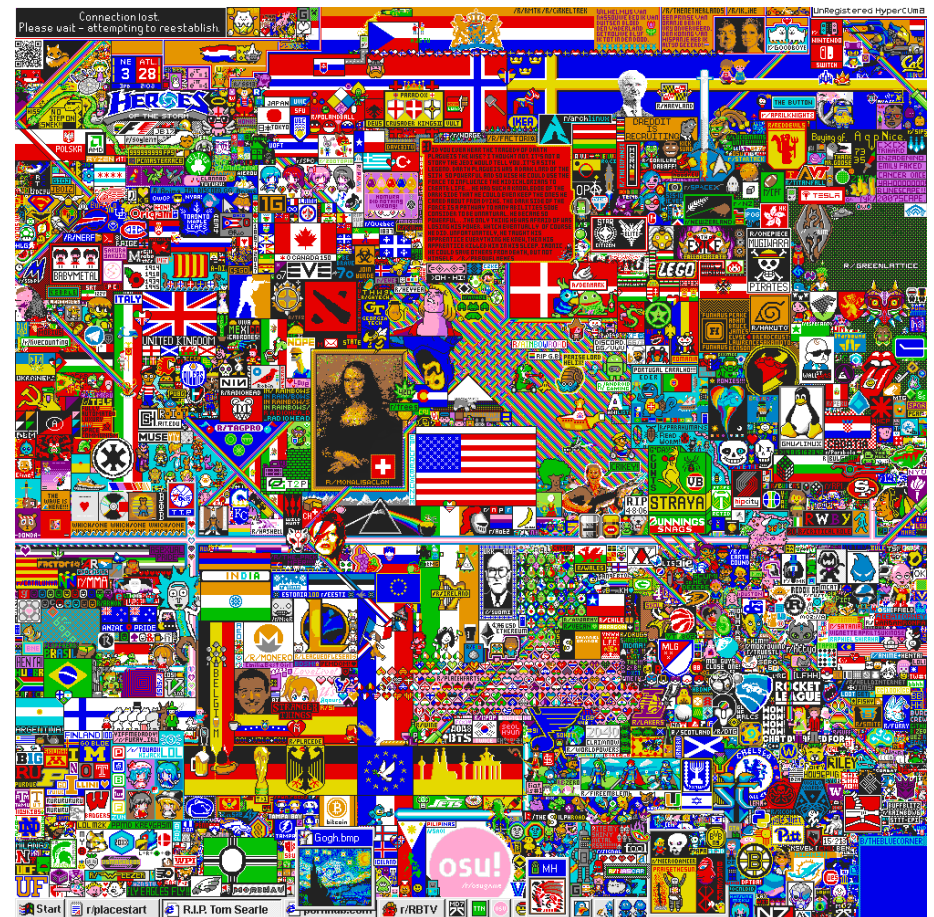
I am trying to popularize the phrase "democratic algorithm", and explain that these will be weapons in the class struggle and (in particular) in the online war of ideas and the struggle for political transparency and accountability.

The best way to explain what a democratic algorithm is--may be to give a few examples--such as **r/place** (ie: reddit's place) or **wikipedia**.

Reddit's **place** probably provides the best known example of a democratic algorithm.

You start with a simple **mathematical structure**: a table with 1000 rows and 1000 columns. Each of the million cells in this table can display one of 16 colors. Together--this creates an image that is 1000 pixels on each side. That is simple enough.

(above) Reddit's "place" -- an image that is 1000x1000 pixels

Where it gets interesting-- is the simple rule that makes this image a **democratic battlefield**-- and an arena of war, peace, negotiation and alliances. As a registered Reddit user--you had the right to, once every 5 minutes, to select one of the million cells, and change its color. That is a simple rule--but in 2017 it unleashed a 72 hour frenzy among more than a million Reddit users.

A political section of r/place

It turns out, of course, that the only ways to create messages or art (in words or pictures) was by means of cooperation (and coordinated activity) with many other users.

Groups of Reddit users negotiated with one another, waged battles (in which they overwrote one another's changes) and conducted diplomacy--all over a simple mathematical object--displayed as an image.

Also of note is that there was **no neo-nazi shit or racist messages** in the final image. Since the overwhelming majority of reddit users hate this shit, anytime it appeared it would have been quickly overwritten.

▶ Wikipedia:
Cooperation of (more-or-less) equals

Everyone has used wikipedia. The idea of something like wikipedia seems **obvious in retrospect**: It is so **extremely useful**. It gives everyone relatively reliable information about many topics. It gives many an opportunity to contribute to important (and not-so-important) human knowledge.

Wikipedia is **relatively democratic** (especially compared to most platforms created to commodify and monetize the minutes of human attention they capture).

Wikipedia has its own problems and restrictions (which are not worth getting into) and I consider it only "semi-democratic".

But wikipedia helps to demonstrate the extreme usefulness of organizing information by means of **the will of a community** rather than from the need to make a pile of money from **commoditizing** (ie: capturing and selling) the **attention-minutes** that are stolen from manipulated users.

▶ Democratic nodes:
Self-organized schools of thought compete for attention

A third example of a democratic algorithm is taken from "Spartacus Ex Machina" (see https://warforquadranttwo.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/sex_machina.pdf) where (section B.13) I describe how a node can be used to illustrate the **different schools of thought** on a question--and the corresponding popularity of each school. Space on these nodes would be valuable-- like **real estate**--(not valuable in terms of money--but valuable in terms of attention)--and **worth fighting over**.
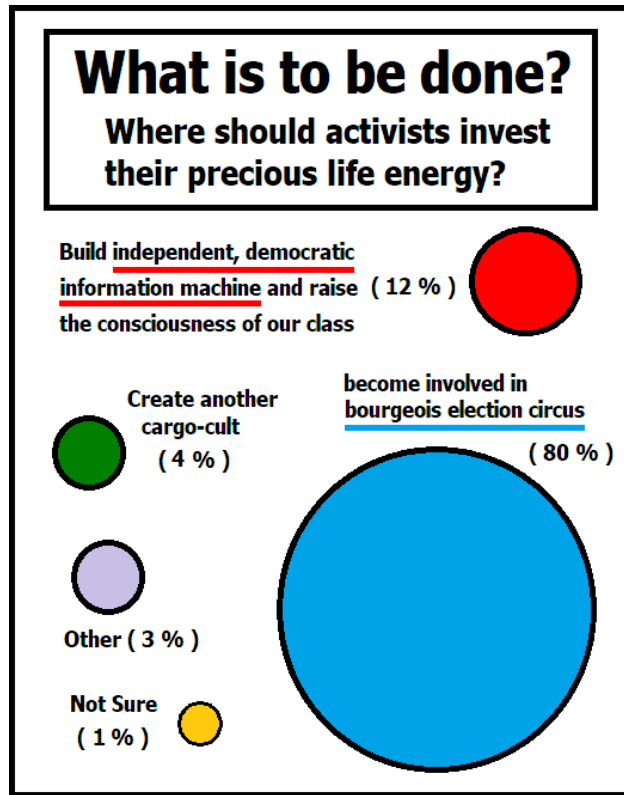
In the graphic, I give an example to show how what I call a "democratic node" can be used as a sort of poll wherever there are **disputes** on any question. This **example node** asks a question (that is much in dispute) concerning where activists should invest their energy.

In a **democratic node**, anyone would have the right to **add their own answer** to such a question--or to **vote** for (ie: "like") the answer they like the most. Then the answers would be displayed, with **each answer being represented by a "bubble"** that is **proportional in size** to the number of **likes** it received.

The **bubble** representing each answer would itself **be a link** to another node--which could have **more information** on the topic--and/or **another democratic node** which might **further break down** and illustrate differences of opinion within a school of thought.

Such an arrangement would be **dynamic**--with **users changing their opinions (and votes)** as new information becomes available, as **discussion** and **debate** deepen, and as **real-world events** and the **class struggle** reveal what is real and what is not.

What is to be done?
Where should activists invest their precious life energy?

Build independent, democratic information machine and raise (12 %) the consciousness of our class

Create another cargo-cult (4 %)

become involved in bourgeois election circus (80 %)

Other (3 %)

Not Sure (1 %)

I have described something which (for people with a background in mathematics and algorithms) should be fun to think about and (for activists) will be important (I believe) in the struggle for the liberation of humanity.

All of this is well and good. But the key question concerns what can be done--today--to help:

    (1) **popularize this idea** and
    (2) **experiment with form factors** that can collect, organize and display useful information.

I have been writing about this topic since **1993**, when I wrote an article with the title "**The Digital Infrastructure of the Proletarian Revolution**" for submittal to "The Workers' Advocate Supplement" (the theoretical journal of the Marxist-Leninist Party). Nothing I have written has reached an audience of any kind. I do, however, believe that my writing, and the depth of my insight, has improved. I am in this world to fight for my adopted class. If I can create a **single essay** is that is **deserving of the attention of other far-sighted activists**-- then my life is a success. It is as simple as that.

My letters to you are part of this effort.

As far as experimentation with form factors, I have done a bit of that.

I created an interactive web site connected to an online database called "Media Abstract Discussion" I hosted at: **http://pix.org/mad** . It took me a year of hard work. It cost me my relationship with the most important person in the world to me. It was a total failure. I never regretted it.

The database became non-functional due to **external factors**. The database software I was using required updates which I did not have time to do. Later the entire **pix.org web domain was hijacked by means of identity theft** (something I lacked the time and money to pursue). I don't care. The simple truth is that **everything precious** to us is **built out of pain**--and we need our share if we are serious about making a contribution. We learn what works by what doesn't.

I made the site at **communism.org**/.com interactive and gathered hundreds (or thousands) of public comments and poll responses. I even developed scripts that **automatically bounced posts by neo-nazis** (on the basis of identifying the key phrases they most often used).

But the site was finally **overwhelmed** when (another external factor) **spambots** began to crawl the web, shoving spamlinks into every live and open automatic form that lacked a captcha. I only noticed my pages had filled with spamlinks after more than a year--and I barely had time to figure out how to shut down the interactive features with **a promise to readers** to once again make the site interactive for the general public.

I still hope to make good on that promise.

The communism**.com** domain was also hijacked by identity theft. Maybe that will put a fire under my fanny to do something with communism**.org**--which the hijackers neglected to steal from me.

I have done a few other things. I showed you the "**nodes inside nodes**" software I wrote that in retrospect may seem like an extremely obvious idea--but which I have never seen done anywhere else.

So I have some experience with creating software. But most of that was when I was a younger man.

Now I am old. My strength, my stamina, the depth of my focus, are all beginning to fade. The demands of life, from paying my rent to all the other things needed to keep myself alive, are slowly becoming more ravenous. I feel beaten. I don't care. A man who has been beaten is worth two who have not. Do you know who said that? Lenin.

Some practical ideas

I want to create functional software (scripts, functional code) on communism.org that can demonstrate both:

(1) the usefulness of **democratic algorithms**, and
(2) the value of organized **discussion** and **debate** on the most important questions and principles in a **common public arena**

I have definite ideas about how to do these things in a way that would be practical, useful and not overly difficult. And I will start to sketch them out in my next letter.

All the best,
Ben Seattle -- June 2020

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This letter to you will be hosted at http://communism.org/node/4002. If you reply, then (for example) your reply could posted at node 4003. Node 4002 could then display node 4003 (in reduced but readable form) as well as link to it, etc.