Technology and Leadership: Global Innovation and Your Time as a Resource
(Pronounced with tongue firmly planted in cheek)

  I had to take a class once called *Technology and Leadership.* Two semesters of it, parts one and two. In this class, "technology" was Google Slides, and "leadership" was having the bigger résumé. Once, we were told that for the past 3 years volunteer labor was on a decline (this was early 2022), and were given 15 minutes to come up with a solution with a group and present it to the class. The teachers applauded solutions of reward programs[1] [2], outreach, and better allocation of available resources. Nobody mentioned that the 7% drop in formal volunteering from 2019 to 2021 coincided with a steady state of informal volunteering (mentioned in the same article the teachers likely read[3]), a 4.38% spike in unemployment, 3 million more people living in poverty, 4 million more people living just above the poverty line, and the starts of a recession.

Oh, and not to mention the largest global pandemic in the last century claiming 1.1 million American lives. I'm sure that had nothing to do with it.

But that's OK. Because in this class this was a problem for us to solve, and not a symptom of broader socioeconomic trends due to systematic failures at the highest levels of government and society. Because we're computer scientists. Because we, and only we, are the future and can fix anything. Printers, WiFi, and the mystery of people not giving up what little free time they have when they can hardly survive on the time they get paid for. This class perfectly captured two massive problems with computer science culture and education that I want to talk about a little here.

Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair[4]

  I'm horrible with writing and trying to make things all poetic and nice so I'm just going to cut the shit and get right to it: technology won't save us. No amount of sensors will divert global warming. No amount of data can be fed through neural networks to solve the massive incarceration rates of the US. No algorithm will stop poverty, and no NFT will stop racism. Web3 web apps, augmented reality heads up displays, text and image generating AIs, delivery robots, metaverse worlds, 3D printing, and big data will do nothing to stop the fact that humanity is slaughtering itself at horrifyingly alarming rates. No matter how good our technology is, until every person on Earth can be recognized with basic humanity, we are fucked. We have been fucked, we are fucked now, and we will continue to be fucked later[5].

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1 This was very confusing, since a reward program is just payment with more steps. And 2 of the 3 presentations suggested NFTs with a straight face.

2 I love a good footnote and will not be apologizing for filling this paper with them. If you read them all, I love you and you're my kind of person.

3 I vaguely remember the teachers mentioning *The Hill*, which is where 7% comes from. All else come from the US Census.

4 As much as I'd love to say I used this title because I'm a well read poet and love *Ozymandias* by Percy Bysshe Shelley, but in all honesty I just read *Watchmen*. Sorry Natalie, but your poetry talent didn't rub off on me.

5 If my mom is reading this, sorry for the language. For everyone else, no word other than *fucked* shows the severity of the situation. Swearing is as an important part of language as anything else, and can capture emotions and meanings in ways no other combination of words can. Not to mention the classist and discriminatory origins of the concept of swearing. *Fucked* is as acceptable an English word as *coffee*, *president*, and *floccinaucinihilipilification* is, and it perfectly descries the state of the world in 2023. We. Are. Fucked. (And I tend to be an optimist)

There's this notion in computer science that since everything is wrapped in technology, computer science can solve any problem. This is a fallacy built upon fallacies. Not everything is wrapped in technology, and if it is, its not by our choice. Nobody asked for RFID readers in our coffee makers, constant tracking cookies on the websites we visit, our data being bought and sold between advertising and insurance agencies, and I'll be in the cold, hard ground before I let my refrigerator know my location[6]. The best screen is the one I don't have to look at.

Take AR for example[7]. I've seen so many startups try to push AR and HUD technology. It seems great, getting text messages and weather updates diverted right into my line of sight. But take a look how AR has been represented in media, in games like the *Watchdogs* series or *Mirror's Edge: Catalyst*, or shows like *Upload*, or any other dystopian or sci-fi movie or book. All it means is tracking, and invasions of privacy, pop-ups, spam, and having to be constantly contacted by your boss. To the "techy people", AR is the future! To the rest of the world, its more work, more aggravation, and its the last thing we need right now.

And even if every last facet of humanity is covered in wires and signals, and we could perfectly track and analyze data at faster-than-quantum speeds, we, as computer scientists, still know sweet sweet FA about the vast majority of humanity. And its not because we're socially awkward or overly analytical or any of the other stereotypes, its because no one does! You can't quantify conciseness, art, emotion, or desire. You can't possibly be a master of CS, medicine, English, chemistry, physics, forestry, economics, dentistry, and every other discipline out there. We are limited beings. And for some reason, computer science rages against this idea. Tech is everywhere, therefore we are everywhere. We are the future and the solution and no one else can be. But this is wrong. We need to embrace the fact we don't understand everything, because the more people who work a problem, more experts, more eyes and opinions we have, that's how we make real change. Real change that preserves the humanity of it all. Our lack of universal expertise needs to be embraced. Real solutions require teams.

All, for nothing at all

The second thing this class embodied was the strange way computer science obsesses over corporate success. This is more true in the lower years of college than it is later on, but there's this notion that's taught that research is over and your only success will me measured in how many hands you shake and startups you make. Take a look at the computer science side of LinkedIn on any given day. You'll see endless guides on how to manage your time to do the most work, how to be the most efficient and better version of yourself (a practice with **deep** roots in eugenics), how to make more connections, the top people to know, the top people to listen to, the top people to follow, and on and on and on with ways to most efficiently turn your own time into a corporate resource. Creation for the sake of creation is dead. There is no research, there is no art, no creativity, no humanity, just your next interview. Its Ayn Rand's dream and its the most depressing and dehumanizing concept out there[8].

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6   This was the first thing my refrigerator asked for when I tried using the app. Keep my milk cold and stay off my WiFi, you metal monster.

7   I have a bone to pick with AR. No one wants AR except the people trying to make money off of AR. I have have to hear one for pitch where someone says "We use AR. You know, like Pokemon Go!" I will run off into the woods and live in a cabin eating nothing but rabbits and berries.

8   For the record, I understand these two statements are redundant. If you don't know what her book *Atlas Shrugged* is about, its basically her winning an argument with herself on why the bad guys in *Bioshock: Infinite* were actually the good guys. If you don't know what *Bioshock Infinite* is, then I'm terribly sorry but I'm horrible with references and you'll just have to trust me on this one.

Time is precious. See all of history for people trying to get more of it[9]. But time is not a commodity to be sold $11 an hour[10]. Time is the unit in which we measure our experience and our lives. We should not be trying to optimize the efficiency at which our lives we can be sold to the highest bidder. And I get that we live in a capitalistic society and the economy and all that. I have a job and I like buying food[11]. I'm not saying money is evil and we should destroy all jobs and burn every corporation down. Money and jobs are a thing. What I am saying, however, is that we should not fetishize the idea that our time is nothing more than an asset to auction off and capitalize on. Live a little. Enjoy life. Be a human every now and then. Spend some time on yourself. Create. Love. You are more than a corporate asset.

Although this is becoming more common today with the growing "grindset[12]" ideology, it seems especially prevalent in computer science, so much as to seep into education and establish itself as a core tenet of the field[13]. Coming back from summer for my junior year of college someone (who wasn't quite a friend, but I've seen them around and we make small talk) asked me what I did that Summer. I gardened, and read a lot, studied up on some botany and pharmacology (two things I don't study at uni but love to learn on my own), published my first game, learned how to screen print t-shirts, started making art to sell on RedBubble, started design on another game, took an online calculus 2 course, and got a poem into and art showcase. As if I didn't just name a monumental list of things I did, created, and am deeply passionate about, they looked at me confused and said "Oh, but where did you intern?" If how deeply depressing and devoid of humanity that statement is doesn't imminently hit you, than I am terribly sorry but you are too far gone.

I want a good job. I want to support myself, and maybe one day a family. I want to do something I'm proud of and enjoy doing. I will *not* sell my humanity to get it.

Alright. Wrap it up, you bitter little twenty-something

Again, I'm primarily a computer scientist and can't write for the life of me, so I'll stop rambling and wrap this up. The field of computer science is flooded with this holier-than-thou, know all, fix all, climb the corporate ladder attitude, and a complete lack of basic human nature. I'm not sure if any of the people who need to read this will, given the fact they'll likely close the tab as soon as they realize the title tricked them into reading something the exact opposite of that they wanted. But its worth a shot, because these things need to be said.

In case my rambling is incoherent, or you just scrolled all the way down to see how long this is, here's 6 points that I want you to take away from this:

1. Technology won't save us. No amount of bits and bytes can fix an issue at the core of society.
2. You a human, not a resource. Live your life and don't sell your soul.
3. You don't know everything. You're not a professional in everything. You can't fix everything. Do what you can, and we can make the world a better place for all, not just the programmers. Computer scientists can make every choice.
4. Humans aren't numbers, stats, or resources to be optimized. If you can put a human into an equation, you're doing something wrong.

9   My personal is the amount of alchemy done with the goal of immortality, often done with toxic chemicals or human urine, ironically leading to a very early death. Nice one, Basil.
10   https://www.statista.com/statistics/216259/monthly-real-average-hourly-earnings-for-all-employees-in-the-us/
11   Maintaining homeostasis is one of my top ten things to do.
12   This is a stupid word and I hate it and I hate the idea of it, but it would make a great indie band name with a weed grinder as their logo. Or a coffee company name. Someone please use it, trademark it, then sue every Instagram wannabe influencer using the term (or shove your thumbs in their eyes I really don't care).
13   Don't even get me started on business majors.

5. 99.5% of life has nothing to do with computer science. Embrace it, don't try to integrate everything. Some things are better off of a screen.
6. And finally, in general, don't be a prick.

And this doesn't even touch on the flaws in how actual computer science is taught (its like trying to learn about cinema by studying celluloid), but this was written at 2:30 A.M. and I'm tired and have class tomorrow, so that'll have to be another paper. Goodnight, go be human.