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We all often hear companies and news reports tell of the miracles that technology apparently does for all sectors of society: the economy, ecological sustainability, social justice, democracy, and more. However, the current reality of technology is very different from this vision of technocratic utopia. Companies patent barely incremental or non-impactful changes such as rounded edges of phone screens and claim innovation. Blockchain consensus algorithms consume more energy than some countries. Machine learning continues to negatively impact women, the LGBTQ+ community, and people of color and advantage white European men. Content recommendation engines continue to push misinformation that diminishes trust in democratic systems and pushes people towards false strong-man saviors.

I believe that technology, when used in tandem with human action, has the capacity to be much better than this. I believe that we can create a just, democratic world, facilitated by technology. In order for this to happen, however, technology must first be democratized.

The technology industry would have you believe that tech is already democratic. Facebook would tell you that their platform gives a voice to those who did not have one in the past. Google would tell you that their search engine makes more opinions and content discoverable. LinkedIn would tell you that their platform helps people get jobs. On a superficial level, this is all true.

What these companies won't say in their press releases is that Facebook's machine learning recommends extreme, hateful, and harmful content to its users [1], that Google's search engine favors those who have the money to hire experts in Search Engine Optimization, and that LinkedIn stifles conversations around race and opportunities [2]. What they won't say is that democracy has no place in their companies, and that their technologies are incredibly opaque, leading to a lack of effective regulation. What they won't say is that they have no intention of supporting democracy beyond what aids them in increasing their profits.

While these issues may seem organizational, and therefore non-technical, this isn't wholly the case. Artifacts like technology have politics, and are imbued with political assumptions made by their creators. All of the technologies these companies rely on and create are built not to be transparent, decentrally controlled, and democratic, but rather to be opaque, centrally controlled, and hierarchical.

My research aims to address these issues from the technological perspective. I am interested in studying how we can rebuild cybersecurity and technology from the ground up, creating new methods that have democratic organization as their core assumption. This will allow organizations with more democratic structures to use technology to achieve their goals without falling victim to centralization and intense, lasting hierarchy. This will allow more transparency into organizations that attempt to keep out prying eyes. This will allow for more control by the people.

I believe democratic technology is a fundamental part of our future, and as a part of DCentral I will work towards building it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Gellman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

#### References:

[1] Lauer, D. (2021). [Facebook's ethical failures are not accidental; they are part of the business model](#). *AI and Ethics*, 1-9.

[2] The New York Times (October, 2021). [Black LinkedIn Is Thriving. Does LinkedIn Have a Problem With That?](#)