ANALYTIC ESSAY 2

“MARK ZUCKERBERG’S WAR ON FREE WILL”

- A chapter of the book “World Without Mind” by Franklin Foer
- A book about Silicon Valley and the impact of Big Tech on the modern world.

FRANKLIN FOER

- Journalist and essayist
- Editor of the New Republic from 2006 to 2010



THE NEW REPUBLIC

- The New Republic was founded in 1914 as a progressive magazine
- In the early 2000's it was looking for a new publisher (someone that would finance the magazine)
- Chris Hughes (co-founder of Facebook) bought it in 2012
- Foer was hired back as editor, then fired in 2014
- Ousted by Hughes
- Majority of journalists and editors resigned

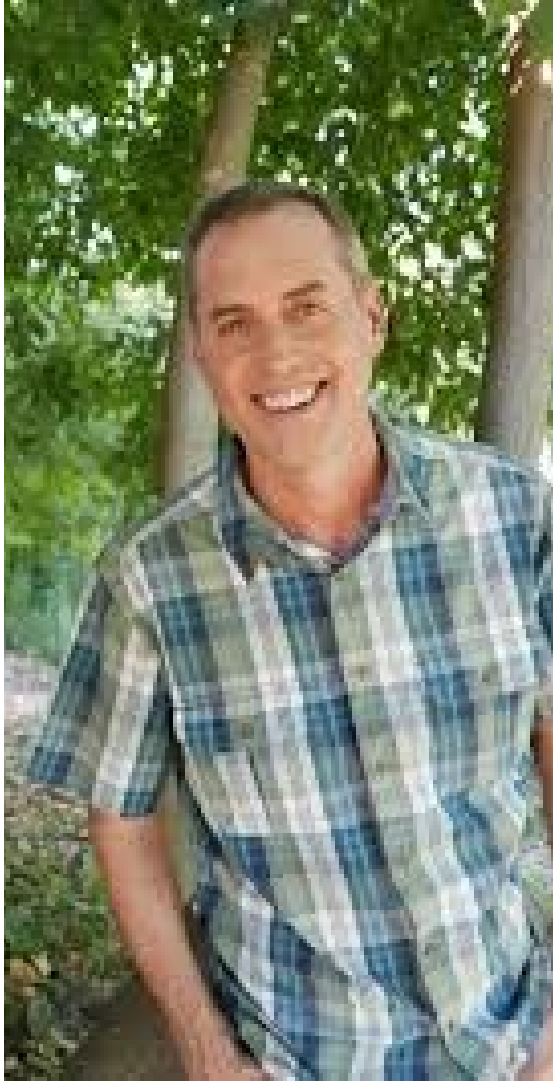
THE SOCIAL DILEMMA

- Netflix documentary (2020)
- Analysis and criticism of social media's impact on our society
- Tristan Harris's presentation at Google

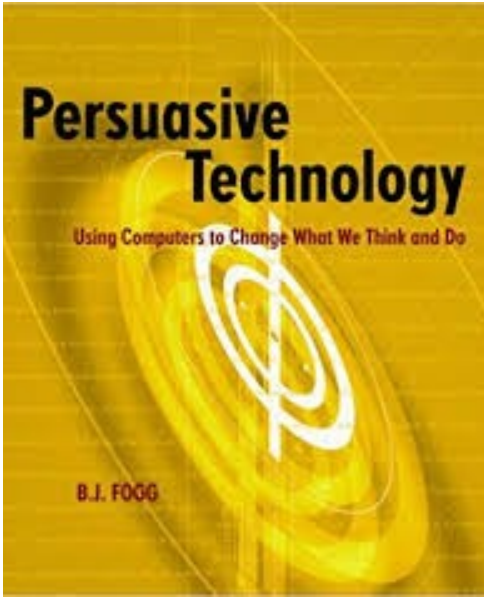


“PERSUASIVE TECHNOLOGY”

- Stanford course taught by Prof. BJ Fogg
- It was taken by many future tech engineers and entrepeneurs

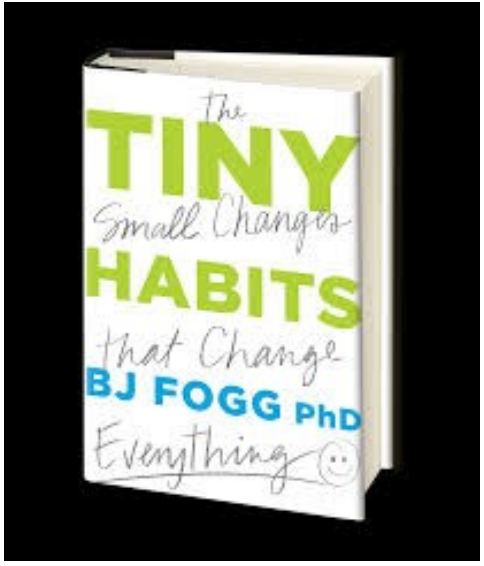


“PERSUASIVE TECHNOLOGY”



- Based on a book published in 2002

(“TINY HABITS”)



- Fogg had a change of heart and a change of focus
- ”Tiny Habits”
- Self-directed small behavioral modifications to improve your life
- Free webinars
- https://www.tinyhabits.com/expert-help-productivity-work

Plenty of companies have similarly appropriated hacker culture—hackers are the ur-disrupters—but none have gone as far as Facebook. Of course, that's not without risks. "Hacking" is a loaded term, and a potentially alienating one, at least to shareholders who crave sensible rule-abiding leadership. But by the time Zuckerberg began extolling the virtues of hacking, he'd stripped the name of most of its original meaning and distilled it into a managerial philosophy that contains barely a hint of rebelliousness. It might even be the opposite of rebelliousness. Hackers, he told one interviewer, were "just this group of computer scientists who were trying to quickly prototype and see what was possible. That's what I try to encourage our engineers to do here." To hack is to be a good worker, a responsible Facebook citizen—a microcosm of the way in which the company has taken the language of radical individualism and deployed it in the service of conformism.

Though Facebook will occasionally talk about the transparency of
governments and corporations, what it really wants to advance is the
transparency of individuals—or what it has called, at various moments, “radical transparency” or “ultimate transparency.” The theory holds that the sunshine of sharing our intimate details will disinfect the moral mess of our lives. Even if we don’t intend for our secrets to become public knowledge, their exposure will improve society. With the looming threat that our embarrassing information will
be broadcast, we’ll behave better. And perhaps the ubiquity of incriminating photos and damning revelations will prod us to become more tolerant of one another’s sins. Besides, there’s virtue in living our lives truthfully. “The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly,” Zuckerberg has said. “Having two identities for

PROMPT
Tolentino and Ho talk about how modernity is changing our lives, in the pursuit of either a perfect lifestyle or a perfect career. But what are the tools of this transformation?
Foer shows how the “automation of reason” brought on by increasingly sophisticated algorithms (originally a characteristic of machines) is affecting our lives more and more as algorithms increasingly define the boundaries in which our free will operates. As we let machines regulate our lives, we may be tempted to adopt a similar mindset. At the same time, an even more sinister suspicion may take hold: that the algorithmic automation has been already pre-programmed and that we may be nothing more than the data points fed into it.
How does this new wave of “automation” in general and “automation of reason” in particular enable us on the one side to optimize our lives and careers (as described by Tolentino and Ho), and how does it, on the other side, prevent us from escaping such optimization?