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

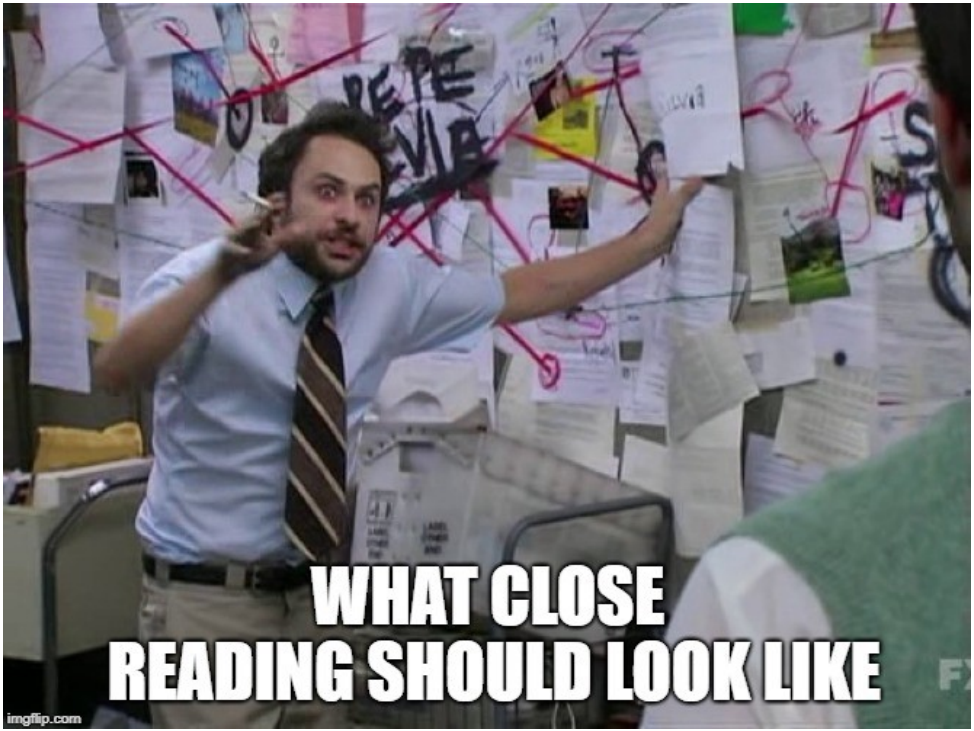
DISCUSSION

- The title of Foer's book is “World Without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech”. One key word in that title is "existential," which can simply imply that big tech represents a threat to our "existence." But the word "existential" carries with it richer connotations. A major school of modem philosophy is known as existentialism, which espouses the idea that humans have no reason to exist except for the ones they make for themselves. Existentialist philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre rejected the idea that a god created us with a particular mission or task. Instead, the existentialists believe that we are ethically obligated to take full responsibility for the people we become and the world we have made. Pretending that we aren't responsible is what Sartre described as "bad faith"- intellectual dishonesty. Taking these ideas as your starting point, explain how and why "Big Tech" might be viewed as an existential threat. In what ways does it appear to free us from the work of creating ourselves? Does Big Tech encourage "bad faith"?

CLOSE READING

- ”Close reading” is explicitly mentioned in the grading criteria.

	THESIS	WORK WITH ASSIGNED TEXTS	STRUCTURAL COHERENCE
A	▪ Articulates original, complex, and specific thesis in essay's opening ▪ Confidently acknowledges and incorporates essay's broader stakes and implications ▪ May embrace and incorporate questions that complicate or challenge thesis to refine overarching claim	▪ Confidently close-reads textual evidence to arrive at original interpretive insights ▪ Clear sense that essay contributes to ongoing intellectual conversation ▪ May employ unanticipated interpretive contexts to make textual connections	▪ Compelling progressive development of thesis throughout paragraphs ▪ Transitions confidently communicate relations between essay's multiple parts ▪ Deliberate and effective use of topic sentences and other structural "signposts"
B+	▪ Articulates original, independent thesis in essay's opening ▪ Advances conceptually complex interpretive position ▪ Begins to acknowledge essay's broader stakes and implications	▪ Engages a variety of textual evidence with confidence and authority ▪ Cites texts to both support and complicate or refine thesis ▪ Exhibits willingness to take interpretive risks when close-reading and making connections	▪ Consistent progressive development of thesis throughout paragraphs ▪ Effective use of topic sentences and transitions ▪ May begin to incorporate explicit structural "signposts"
B	▪ Articulates thesis in essay's opening ▪ Advances clear interpretive position ▪ Thesis may be conceptually limited or developed in a repetitive way	▪ Engages a variety of textual evidence ▪ Cites texts to provide support for thesis ▪ Takes some interpretive risks when close-reading and making connections	▪ Progressive development of thesis throughout paragraphs ▪ Structure of essay is deliberate and logical ▪ Clear effort to use topic sentences and transitions throughout
C+	▪ Evidence of emerging independent thesis, but not clearly articulated in essay's opening ▪ Takes interpretive position at least once, and begins to sustain that position throughout essay ▪ Thesis may be implicit or underdeveloped	▪ Includes several moments of close-reading and uses adequate textual evidence ▪ Begins to engage more complicated ideas in texts ▪ Connections made within a text or between texts may be implicit or underdeveloped	▪ Accurate sense of purpose and conventions of a paragraph ▪ Begins to exhibit progressive development of thesis throughout paragraphs ▪ Topic sentences and transitions begin to emerge, but may be underdeveloped or inconsistently employed
C	▪ Takes interpretive position at least once ▪ Thesis may be imprecise or general ▪ Thesis may emerge at end of essay following discussion of textual evidence	▪ Makes effort to close-read at least once ▪ Accurate reading comprehension and appropriate use of textual evidence ▪ Begins to make valid connections within a text or between texts	▪ Basic sense of purpose and conventions of a paragraph ▪ Progressive development between paragraphs may be implicit or unclear ▪ Some paragraphs may begin to exhibit emerging topic sentences
NP	▪ No thesis in evidence ▪ Emerging thesis may be overwhelmed by summary, paraphrase, or generalization ▪ Lacks meaningful connection between texts and emerging thesis ▪ Demonstrates insufficient revision from rough draft to final draft	▪ Little or no evidence of close-reading ▪ Miscomprehends or misinterprets texts ▪ Overgeneralizes about texts ▪ Privileges writer's opinions, anecdotes, or extraneous material	▪ Inaccurate or unclear sense of purpose and conventions of a paragraph ▪ Minimal or no progressive development between paragraphs ▪ Employs few or no topic sentences ▪ May rely on "five-paragraph essay" model


WHAT CLOSE
READING SHOULD LOOK LIKE
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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?