Week 5

I'm Being Followed: How Google—and 104 Other Companies—Are Tracking Me on the Web

In this 2012 article, Alexis Madrigal describes the underworkings of the internet advertisement industry. I found this article pretty interesting. It's true that people usually aren't aware of the inner workings of online advertisement. I thought I was pretty tech-savvy, but I didn't recognize most of the companies in the logo mosaic. The author points out that we pay for our time online with our information and our eyeballs. As the maxim goes: if you aren't paying, then you are the product. I wonder if there is a way to quantify the value a user gets from visiting a website and the value the website gets from collecting our data and serving us ads. I guess this is much harder to calculate than traditional ad platforms such as newspapers or television. Notably, in contrast to a newspaper ad, where the page is paid by the advertiser, the user pays for the ads they get on the internet through their bandwidth. Currently, there are projects that aim to make this transaction of value more transparent. For example, the Basic Attention Token is a crypto-based system wherein the advertizer, in addition to paying websites to serve ads, pays the viewer to see ads.

Databuse: Digital Privacy and the Mosaic

I definitely agree with Benjamin Wittes that privacy is an outmoded way of describing our concerns about information sharing in the digital age. It reminds me that most of our laws are based on very old systems. For example, from what I understand, streaming movies online from 123movies is legal, but serving the movies is illegal. This is because the files are never stored on your computer when you stream.
Wittes points out the problem that even if we know we don't have an expectation of privacy in public spaces (and the internet is a public space), we feel violated when we realize the enormity of the data collected about us.
The author abandons the hope that we can prevent our data from being collected, and says all we can fight for, is for our data to not be used in a tangible, harmful way. I don't know if I agree with this sentiment. Maybe we should require more transparency from websites. For example, since Europe declared that active consent was needed for website to track us with cookies, people have had the choice to accept cookies or not. Even if they accept them all anyways, I think they've become more informed about their digital footprint.