Part A

A picture containing text, whiteboard

Description automatically generated

Part B

Since my actor network is focused on my use of common social media applications, search engines, and mobile services, the entire network is essentially part of an ordering due to the interconnected nature of digital technology and how deeply engrained it is into society. The tensions between convenience and privacy are unearthed when certain orderings and actors are depunctualized. It is most often the case that, in order for certain actors to provide affordances, requests and demands must be made by the actors that must overcome resistances set by those who receive their services. The tension between convenience and privacy is a tension between the requests/demands of technology and the resistances of the users. I will discuss three relationships in my network that help illustrate these tensions.

Google combined with all the services it provides is a huge ordering in itself, but I first examine my relationship with Google Photos. Google Photos is an online photo sharing and storage service provided by Google. As someone who is involved in photography and greatly values photos as a way of collecting memories with family and friends, Google Photos has many convenient features that I frequently use, such as the organization of photos based on time and the content of the photo (if it’s related to sports, a concert, etc.). It also offers facial recognition and can organize photos based on the people found in it. While Google affords me these conveniences, in order to provide them, it demands my personal photos and the names of people in them. This demand conflicts with my resistance of wanting privacy. My family and friends also provide resistance to this demand, since it is their privacy being given up as well – they are in my pictures and their names are being used to identify them. Google Photos also provides the convenience of organizing photos based on the location they were taken, which leads to the next relationship I wish to discuss.

Location services such as Google Maps, Snapchat Maps, etc. offers lots of conveniences that we as a society use every day. This extensive list includes (but is definitely not limited to) navigation purposes, locating where friends and family are, and local recommendations/suggestions. These location services are simply embedded into our lives and afford me numerous conveniences I use without thinking twice. In return, they demand my location, and the resistance that is overcome is the privacy of my current location. In combination with Google Photos, this once again affects the location privacy of my friends and family as well. In these examples with Google Photos and location services, the relationships have been fairly simple to analyze – the requests, demands, and resistances are all fairly obvious and we are all aware of them. But as Zuboff discussed in the documentary, even though we feel as though we know what data we are giving up and we are in control of our privacy, that is almost never the case. While I am fully aware that I am giving away my photos, its association with the names of the people in my life, and my location, the data that companies collect goes much deeper than this.

The advertisements I see online, the search suggestions I receive, the posts I’m exposed to on social media pages – it’s always seemed uncanny how quickly and accurately they reflect things happening in my real and personal life. They afford me the convenience of viewing things I’m interested in without having to spend effort searching for them, but in the process of identifying the tension by identifying the requests, demands, and resistances, interesting differences from the previous two examples arises. Firstly, the entities that provide these conveniences do not advertise their role as such – I do not expect them to provide me with real-time tailored ads because they do not explicitly tell me they will. Second, these ads and search suggestions are very difficult to depunctualize because they truly are like a “black box” to us, the users. We are not aware of what they’re demanding in order to provide these conveniences and therefore we’re not sure what resistance to put up; we are simply uncomfortable with the fact that they somehow have enough information about us to provide us with the conveniences they do. In other words, there is no tension because there is no resistance, and there is no resistance because we lack awareness of what is being demanded from us in the first place. As Zuboff said, “they have been engineered to be undetectable”. It is only the realization of this unobtrusiveness that materializes the tension between convenience and privacy. In the words of Carlo van de Weijer (from the documentary), “you are paying with your privacy without you knowing”, where he provides an analogy that the conveniences that we use every day are the Trojan Horse companies use to collect our data.

Part C

I believe, without a doubt, that it’s been a privilege to have been raised in the 21st century. With the advancements of all fields of science and technology, quality of life is objectively better than it was during any other time in history. In particular, this age of digitalization has made information and learning incredibly accessible. But while there are many benefits this privilege brings me, this privilege also renders me powerless in this actor network.

Being brought up in a world of digitalization, it’s essentially become part of the way I view this world – it has become “mythic”, like nature, using Postman’s conception of technology. Like Postman and Nightingale discussed, the ubiquitous nature of digitalization is dangerous because it makes it unsusceptible to change and hides the inner workings of the technology. This lack of awareness reduces my power and companies use this ignorance to their advantage. In this actor network, the big tech companies are the ones with the power because, like Zuboff suggests, they are not the ones providing me with products and services, *I* am the product; *my data* is the product that I provide to them for free and they sell to other businesses who use it to make money. Behind the privilege of being raised during the Information Age lies the ignorance of a society in the grips of a regime of digitalization, and it is this ignorance that makes us powerless. In the words of the Amish people from Zuboff’s documentary, we think we are the ones using technology, but in reality, technology is using us.