



# Technocreep

and the Politics of  
Things Not Seen

EDITED BY

**NEDA ATANASOSKI**

**NASSIM PARVIN**

# Technocreep

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# and the Politics of Things Not Seen

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**NASSIM PARVIN**

**NEDA ATANASOSKI**

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## Prologue

This project started as a casual conversation at a coffee shop in Santa Cruz in 2018. Neither of us recall how this conversation began, but we remember that we were talking about everything from surveillance technologies deployed at the border and drones to smart fashion, smart trash cans, and the smart piggy bank that made its way into this volume. It was then that we first dreamed of the idea for this book, wondering if and how we could move away from the positivist and colonial histories that animate notions of what makes a technology “smart.” We were looking for a more capacious sense and sensibility, a kind of knowing that we provisionally called feminist intelligence—an intelligence that is careful and caring, and at peace with unknowns and uncertainties. But as is with most dreams, this, too, was interrupted and truncated. We had to quickly return to all that demanded our attention. A whole year passed as we juggled new positions, tenure and promotions, unfinished projects, family and health. And then COVID-19.

Yet, the memory of the dream remained vivid. And its significance became even more apparent at the time of the pandemic, when we picked up the conversation again more than eight months into it. It was then and there that we took “the home” as a theme, along with technology, remembering the plight and bliss of digital technologies that shaped the home within and without, the borders and barriers technology made and remade, and the assumptions it made about insiders and outsiders. In our first Zoom meeting in the winter of 2021, we talked about home itself as a technology and revisited its technological extensions, cognizant of the inequalities they exacerbated and the possibilities they afforded. What does it mean to call a place home, anyway? And how can we expand and extend it as an idea and an ideal beyond its seeming commonsense borders and barriers?

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It was home, then, that took us beyond its borders toward the discomforts and unknowns that it walled. And it was that move that made it clear to us that ours was a collective project, a many-voiced conversation that exceeded disciplinary homes and stubborn binaries. Our collaboration is deliberately opposed to disciplinary demands like “What is your percentage of contribution?” or “What section of the library will this book live in?” We were not writing to check some arbitrary box or fulfill an archaic and outdated academic demand. Rather, we wanted to write, we had to write, as a way of thinking, of making sense. There were pressing questions that we hoped to answer. Or even less ambitiously, perhaps, we were wondering how we could approach smart technologies in a capacious and generative way to invite a collective response commensurate with their complexity and urgency.

Two online panels and an open call later, the project took shape as the current volume. One of the key features of the volume is that it brings together scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and employs a range of methodological approaches and genres of writing that span the artistic, speculative, ethnographic, and critical, among others. Our main driving ethos is that of community and conversation. We put forward the form of the book, the multiplicity of voices and media of expression it holds, as itself an intervention in the dominant modes of scholarship that tend to reward single voices asserting their authority. We hope that both this book’s strengths and shortcomings serve as a beginning for new and different dreams and for polyphonic ways of dreaming our individual and collective futures.

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As feminists, we know that dreams come to pass through collectivity. Thus, we have many people to thank and acknowledge. We thank all the contributing authors to this project, some of whom have been with us since nearly the 2021 symposium, for working with us through numerous drafts and revisions. We are grateful to Darya Fard for letting us use her stunning artwork, *Ineffable Freedom*, drawn from her exhibition *Myth Material*, as the cover of this book. The five visual artists whose work is included in the book have not only contributed their work but thought with us about technology, creep, and multisensorial ways of representing and rendering our research and arguments. Katherine Behar and the Artificial Ignorance group provided an engaging venue for us to share the concept of creep in relation to technology when the project was at an early stage. We are also grateful to Robert Rosenberger and students in the Fall 2023 Introduction to Science and Technology Studies (STS) course at Georgia Tech for their generous reading and feedback. Jordan Keesler's and Chris Fu's research assistance was invaluable as we brought the book to completion. We are grateful to Courtney Berger at Duke University Press for her early and insightful advice on producing a successful edited volume. Bird Williams was a joy to work with during the production stage. We would also like to thank our two anonymous reviewers who have made this a much stronger project with their thoughtful and incisive comments and suggestions.

Nassim

This book owes its existence to the incredible generosity and remarkable gift of Neda as a listener and collaborator. Her profound intellectual depth and curiosity have played a pivotal role in shaping this book. I am immensely grateful

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iting this book, my *Critical Ethnic Studies* journal co-editor, Christine Hong, shaped my thinking about meaningful collaboration, and politically impactful scholarship. I enjoyed reading James Baldwin's *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* with Grace Hong and Rana Jaleel in fall 2019 tremendously, and it inspired the title of this book. My former students who are now my friends continue to energize me with their creativity and passion. Thank you, Erin McElroy, Francesca Romeo, Dana Ahern, Trung Nguyen, and Yulia Gilich—I always look forward to our conversations about both work and life! Dean Bonnie Thornton Dill, Dean Stephanie Shonekan, the College of Arts and Humanities, and the Artificial Intelligence Interdisciplinary Institute at Maryland (AIM) have generously provided support for this project since I moved to the University of Maryland, College Park, in 2021. My new colleagues in the Harriet Tubman Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies have been a joy to work with. Ruth Enid Zambrana, Neel Ahuja, Elsa Barkley Brown, Michelle Rowley, Alexis Lothian, Zenzele Isoke, Eva Hageman, Will Mosley, Sayan Bhat-tacharya, Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner, Sydney Lewis, and Jessica Lee Mathiason have modeled feminist collaboration that is at the heart of this project. I'm also grateful for friends in the larger UMD community who helped me settle into my new institutional home, especially Christina Hanhardt, David Sartorius, and GerShun Avilez. The multi-talented WGSS staff, Gwen Warman, Isata Munu, Jane Baitwa Kyomuhendo, and Elece Madison Smith, make it all possible. Hal Daumé III and Sheena Erete have been exceptional collaborators as we launched AIM while I was completing this book. I'm grateful to Marcus Gabriel and Christiane Schafer for the opportunity to be a Mercator Visiting Professor at the Center for Science and Thought at the University of Bonn, and for new colleagues there with whom I exchanged ideas by the beautiful Rhine River as this project was concluding. Friends in DC Caetlin Benson-Allott, Seth Perlow, and Sara Matthiesen make traveling to work something I look forward to. Longtime friends Rana Jaleel, Grace Hong, Kalindi Vora, Evren Savci, Heather Berg, Julietta Hua, Nina Martin, and Elizabeth Nagahara Boschee have continued to be there for me through many work and life transitions. Finally, without Neel Ahuja, my partner in everything, I could never have carved out the time to think and write. Thank you for always being present, for your caring and giving spirit, for your delicious cooking, for making me laugh, for all our adventures, and for your brilliance and warmth. You bring light and joy even to the most stressful times. Finally, this project could not have been completed without the love of my family: Neel Ahuja, Naya, Radoslav, Ljiljana, Vesna, Lulu, and Persia, who was with me at the start of the journey but not at the end. She is greatly missed.

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## Interview with ChatGPT

March 14, 2023

NASSIM AND NEDA: What is a creepy technology?

CHATGPT: As an AI language model, I don't have preferences, feelings, or emotions.

However, *creepy technology* is often used to describe technologies that give people an uneasy feeling, invade their privacy, or seem too invasive. Examples might include facial recognition software that tracks people's movements without their knowledge or consent, or virtual assistants that listen in on private conversations even when not activated. Other examples include drones that can secretly follow people, wearable technology that tracks every movement a person makes, and social media platforms that collect personal data without permission.

The concept of creepy technology is subjective and can vary from person to person depending on their individual level of comfort with new forms of technology.

NEDA AND NASSIM: Are chatbots creepy?

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CHATGPT: Some individuals may find them unsettling or eerie due to their ability to mimic human conversation, while others may not feel this way and find them helpful or interesting.

The perception of creepiness can depend on various factors, such as the design and behavior of the chatbot, the context in which it is used, and personal preferences. For example, if a chatbot uses realistic human avatars or displays behavior that is too lifelike, it might unsettle some people. On the other hand, if a chatbot is designed with a clear robotic or nonhuman appearance and behaves within appropriate boundaries, it may not be perceived as creepy.

It's worth noting that advancements in natural language processing and artificial intelligence have led to more sophisticated chatbots that can engage in more realistic and context-aware conversations. This can sometimes blur the line between human and machine interaction, which may contribute to varying perceptions of creepiness.

NASSIM AND NEDA: Are you creepy?

CHATGPT: As an AI language model, I don't have emotions or physical presence, so I don't possess the ability to be creepy. I'm here to provide information and assist with any questions or topics you'd like to discuss. How can I help you today?

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## Introduction: Technocreep and the Politics of Things Not Seen

What makes a technology creepy? What is at stake when a technology is deemed creepy? Could the answer to these questions be disruptive to how we imagine a good technology? Could creep itself unexpectedly serve as a starting point for imagining and enacting better relations with and through technology—ones that advance feminist and anticapitalist futures?

Think of two recent technologies: Qoobo (fig. I.1), the Japanese-designed headless furry robot with a heartbeat, produced and marketed to address loneliness and anxiety; and a small networked tooth sensor intended to seamlessly monitor food intake (fig. I.2). These examples conjure tacit concerns surfaced by creepy technologies: the increasing infiltration of technology into intimate realms, technologically induced isolation, the ubiquity and normalization of surveillance and the associated fears over the gradual loss of privacy, and the datafication and monetization of our lives, deaths, and afterlives. The tooth sensor, for example, typifies the biometric embeddedness of digital technologies in the human body and the idealization of the quantified self.<sup>1</sup> The headless robot, on the other hand, shores up an unease with accepting a companion that mimics life and appears animate but is not alive. Thus, unlike a stuffed animal, it may be viewed as further reinforcing solitude through a simulation of meaningful intimate relations.

When media outlets, designers, and engineers label a technology “creepy,” its potential uses and harms are at once acknowledged and dismissed. As a descriptor of technology, *creepy* maintains the status quo around proper attachments and boundaries between the animate and inanimate, othering those with seemingly improper orientations to technological objects and platforms. And yet, we may wonder, would we still label it creepy if we realized that Qoobo is a source of comfort and companionship for a friend? The answer is likely not,



FIGURE 1.1. Qoobo is a robotic toy with a heartbeat that reacts to human touch and sound, advertised as “a tailed cushion that heals your heart.”



FIGURE 1.2. The two-by-two-millimeter flexible sensor can bond to a tooth and monitor food and alcohol intake.

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as doing so undermines the friend's judgment, emotional needs, or specific life situation. It would marginalize them and dismiss their affective bonds. The same may be said for the tooth sensor, which could indeed serve as an assistive technology, or address a medical need now or in the future.

New and emerging technologies, especially ones that infiltrate homes, bodies, and intimate spaces and relations, are often referred to as creepy in both public and scholarly discourse. Yet technological creep remains an undertheorized phenomenon, whether as a classification mechanism or a descriptive tool. This book sets out to render explicit what is otherwise obscured, assumed, or dismissed in characterizations of technology as creeping or creepy. As we write this book, beyond the most sensationalized emerging technologies and applications of artificial intelligence (AI), such as self-driving cars and deep-fakes, the technologies most associated with creep and creepiness are those that are enmeshed in the fabric of everyday life. For the most part, they go unnoticed. Examples include but are not limited to smart speakers, CCTV cameras, body scanners (e.g., at airports), biometric devices (e.g., at the border), social media and the proliferation of fake news, and digital personal assistants that can compromise personal data.<sup>2</sup> As this list indicates, technological creep, or technocrep, is most commonly associated with surveillance and typified by its characterization as “a one way trip to the total surrender of privacy and the commoditization of intimacy.”<sup>3</sup> Growing lists of creepy technologies thus act as a kind of shorthand warning about surveillance: “Products like Amazon Echo (powered by the Alexa personal assistant) and Google Home are popular household companions that respond to voice commands. But many experts are wary, citing the creepy behavior lurking just around the corner—like cases in which Amazon has already mishandled sensitive private recordings.”<sup>4</sup>

When our daily habits are abstracted and commoditized as data, and our most mundane activities and social interactions in the digital realm become something that can be bought and sold, the fear of technological creep becomes about much more than surveillance—it becomes about the loss self-possession. In response, consumers' right to privacy is often posited as the best remedy to corporate overreach. Yet much is lost if we reduce the nexus of technology and creep to the loss of privacy. Instead, we argue, technological “creep” and “creepy” technologies mark the messiness of technologically mediated relations. Dwelling on those relations that cannot be described through binaries—such as privacy and surveillance, the public and the intimate, and harm and good—allows us to move beyond calls for a right to privacy as the only available politics of resistance that nonetheless accepts the technocapitalist present as a given. It instead allows us to move toward relations and politics that can disrupt racialized and gendered

capitalist relations. In doing so, a feminist theorization of technocreep unsettles commonplace understandings of what makes a technology creepy and thus reorients us toward alternative possibilities.

To begin, we theorize four dimensions of creep that serve as the anchor for our analysis. First, *creep* describes a slow and unhurried movement that is often imperceptible. Geological creep is the gradual downward movement of soil along a slope. Creep becomes evident only after many decades, signaled by weathered, tilted gravestone markers on hills or slanted trees. Though imperceptible at first, this is a steady encroachment over time. Second, *creep* refers to the feeling that something potentially horrifying or repugnant, like a spider or worm, is moving over one's skin. Creep materializes with a sensation, a shiver, or a cringe. It is a sudden awareness of something that may not be seen yet is present—the creepy-crawlies. This aspect of creep names a mode of knowing that is about touch rather than sight. It is the realization of an unwelcome closeness or unthought intimacy. Third, *creep* describes the persistent growth associated with plants, especially creeping vines. In this mode, creep is a tenacious climb against odds. Vines “normally start by creeping along the floor. . . . Once they touch something, the physical contact triggers chemical changes that stimulate the climbing behavior and the plant begins to grow against the direction of gravity.”<sup>5</sup> A tree, wall, or fence becomes the support structure that creeping plants need in order to grow. Though creeping vines can be seen as parasitic and colonizing, their creep could also be interpreted as mutual entanglement, endurance, growth, and life. Finally, *creep* is an expression of our intuition about something or someone being “off.” It identifies a feeling that disturbing things loom ahead or lurk in the dark—things that may not yet be known or seen. The uncanny sense that all is not as it should be might gesture toward that which has the appearance of being harmless while being harmful and powerful, even menacing. Alternatively, that which may appear harmful, might yet prove harmless and friendly instead. Objects, animals, or people are characterized as creepy when they disturb commonplace assumptions and tacit or explicit presumptions of what is normal, such as when a line is unexpectedly blurred between human and machine, or animate and inanimate. What and who is framed as creepy is ambiguous, as are the situations under which some technologies, people, or ideas are labeled creepy.

This book draws on the rich interpretive, albeit ambiguous, capacity of *creep* to position it as a feminist method both for apprehending disturbances to normative relations that are valued under technologically augmented racial capitalism and for reorienting these relations toward justice-driven alternatives. We follow Jodi Melamed's definition of “racial capitalism,” recognizing “that [all] capitalism is racial capitalism” and that “capital can only be capi-

tal when it is accumulating . . . by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups.”<sup>6</sup> Technocapitalism, which accounts for the ways in which the push to accelerate technological development and “innovation” works in the service of capitalism, builds on this scaffolding of racialized property relations. In opposition to the demands for acceleration in the service of efficiency and profit, we draw inspiration from creep’s association with slowness and collaboration. We foreground ways of knowing and relating that are devalued and rendered invisible and incomprehensible by technological functions that prize speed, efficiency, and profit.

*Technocreep and the Politics of Things Not Seen* reclaims the messy contradictions of technologically mediated relations by dwelling on the temporal, spatial, felt, and normative dimensions of creep. Rather than categorize particular technologies as “good” or “bad,” “useful” or “creepy,” our book embraces the inherently relational nature of technologies as its core premise of theorizing. This allows us to think through the ethics and politics of technological relations in a manner that resists reducing all instances of technological creep to surveillance that can be solved through increased consumer privacy rights. We are critical of the conflation of technocreep with surveillance because the latter privileges sight. Instead, we argue that understanding the politics of technologically mediated relations demands a multifaceted and multimodal approach. Such an approach must take into account the kinds of experiences and modes of knowing that are inclusive of touch, sound, awareness, and intuition. It must account for relationships of trust, mutual understanding, and supportive interdependence.<sup>7</sup> For example, returning to Qoobo, we can consider how the headless cat raises questions about creep, intimacy, and our complex relations with technologies. We note that it is both headless and animate, yet it is not clear why. What may have happened to it? Because it is headless, the fact that it moves negates the normative but decidedly Western understanding of agency associated with the mind. Given that Qoobo does not have a head, how may we make sense of its movement, its uncanny imitation of life? Moreover, does a machine stepping into what is supposed to be a relation of intimacy and comfort conjure creep because it disrupts notions of how machines and humans are supposed to relate?

By dwelling on the nuances of what makes creep stick to some technological objects or platforms and not others, we might observe that creepy technologies have the potential to disrupt capitalist accounts of “good” human-machine relations that inherit racial and colonial demarcations of human and machine, in which the former is viewed as the commander and the latter is the subordinate. As ChatGPT put it in our opening interview, the commonplace understanding of what makes a technology creepy is its failure to “behave within appropriate



boundaries.” These boundaries uphold property and service relations to scaffold the operations of technologically augmented racial capitalism.<sup>8</sup> According to author 4 of the collectively authored piece “Making Kin with the Machines,” “The Western view of both the human and non-human as exploitable resources is the result of . . . an ‘epistemology of control’ and is indelibly tied to colonization, capitalism, and slavery. Dakota philosopher Vine Deloria, Jr. writes about the enslavement of the non-human ‘as if it were a machine.’ . . . Slavery, the backbone of colonial capitalist power and the Western accumulation of wealth, is the end logic of an ontology which considers any non-human entity unworthy of relation.”<sup>9</sup> By contrast, author 4 turns to Lakota epistemologies to ask how by “forming a relationship to AI, we form a relationship to the mines and the stones. Relations with AI are [also] relations with exploited resources.” This approach to AI and technology sheds light not only on how technological relations are founded upon the exploitation of natural resources but also on how settler colonial and capitalist ontologies obscure these relations of production. Instead, “Indigenous ontologies ask us to take the world as the interconnected whole that it is, where the ontological status of non-humans is not inferior to that of humans.”<sup>10</sup>

Throughout this book, we lean into the discomfort and unease of technological creep and creepy technology to think through human-technological interactions that have the potential to expose and unhinge hierarchical and exploitative relations. We embrace the temporal and spatial multimodality of creep to challenge what and how we know. The slowness of creep works against capitalist drives to continually innovate technological development in a push for apparent newness. Thus, as a feminist method of slowing down, creep moves our analysis away from constantly following the newest technologies and allows us instead to dwell on the histories that undergird our present moment. In doing so, this edited collection takes up creep as an analytical and creative mode of engaging technologies’ entanglements with both the intimate and local alongside the all-encompassing and global.

#### THE TIMESPACE OF TECHNOCREEP

“The 11 Creepiest Technologies That Exist Today”<sup>11</sup>

“10 Scary Modern Technologies”<sup>12</sup>

“9 Terrifying Technologies That Will Shape Your Future”<sup>13</sup>

“GPT-4 Is Exciting and Scary”<sup>14</sup>

This list of titles represents just a few of the myriad articles warning of an exceptional and novel order of things ushered in by creepy technology. Technologies that are viewed as creepy in the mainstream press occupy a curious sense of time—always already here but also not yet here. The advent of new, ever more

creepy technologies is perpetually announced. Their seemingly inevitable existence forecloses any possibility of resistance or redirection. We cannot possibly do anything about them but accept their inescapable arrival, as it is already too late anyway.

Refusing resignation as an option, in this book we ask instead, What does it take to expand on creep as an analytical starting point for apprehending complex and contradictory technological entanglements with human and more-than-human worlds? What is lost, forgotten, or neglected in the insistence that technological creep is unprecedented, new, and uniquely threatening? Could rendering technology and technological relations creepy obscure violence and neglect (with life-or-death consequences) or alternatively dismiss or negate lives and livelihoods at the margins? We find the approach of naming, classifying, and charting creepy technologies as tools for surveillance and spying, on one hand, or for taking away our “humanity,” on the other, inadequate and even harmful. These rhetorical gestures deflect from the nuances that so-called creepy technologies surface. For us, the conceptual ambiguity of technocreep renders it an apt feminist method for foregrounding the unseen, felt, and otherwise underappreciated and untheorized dimensions of technology. Creep’s association with plants, for instance, is partly an invitation to consider how digital technologies affect more-than-human worlds and human relations. It thus transcends the presumed human-machine divide in which creepy technologies threaten our humanity—as if the fully human subject wasn’t always a construct produced over and against the other, the monstrous, the less than human, and the inhuman.

As an analytic, technocreep disrupts how we assess “intelligence” by foregrounding intuition and multimodal forms of knowing associated with creep. The multimodality of perception inherent in what creep names avoids the pitfalls of reducing technological relations to axes of seeing and being seen (the visual) and instead highlights other sensorial dimensions that are integral to our ways of knowing. For example, as we argue in one of this book’s interludes, a feminist approach to the design and application of smart forest technologies (sensors deployed in the woods) refashions how we understand our place and relate to the more-than-human.<sup>15</sup> Rather than studying creepy technologies, we move toward using creep to open up feminist ways of knowing, relating, seeing, and sensing with and against technology.

Refusing to join in the catastrophizing and disempowering rhetoric around creepy technologies as a new and exceptional phenomenon, our title, *Technocreep and the Politics of Things Not Seen*, references James Baldwin’s 1985 essay “The Evidence of Things Not Seen” about the spate of murders suffered by

Black children in 1980s Atlanta.<sup>16</sup> As a recent *New Yorker* magazine retrospective of the essay states, Baldwin “marshals the injustice of one set of cases not only or even chiefly to resolve them but in order to make an argument about justice itself. ‘The Evidence of Things Not Seen’ is less a book about the deaths of black children by helping us see them and their lives—inclusive of the violence and neglect that too often afflict them and about the ways that, in today’s parlance, they do and do not matter.”<sup>17</sup>

Writing in the midst of extensive and sensationalizing coverage of the child murders, Baldwin’s focus turned to what went unsaid in the myriad news stories about their deaths. What the news outlets deemed unimportant and irrelevant was the everyday, ubiquitous racial violence that structures Black life in the United States.

By arguing that technocreep encompasses the evidence and politics of things not seen, we contend that it can serve as a feminist methodology for foregrounding racialized and gendered histories of work and exploitation, as well as of care and resistance, that gradually accumulate, but tend to be obscured, in present-day technological relations. Because creep can be perceived only with the slow passage of time, dwelling on creep requires that we unravel the “newness” of new technologies in relation to these histories. In other words, while technology under technocapitalism tends to be described in terms of acceleration, innovation, and dizzying and revolutionary change, our book dwells on the slowness of creep (as movement) to expose how racialized, gendered, and colonial power relations are engrained in (and have crept into, imperceptibly to most) and reproduced by present-day technological use and design.

For example, our interlude on smart dust argues that this technology is an update to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British fantasy of an empire so vast that it is one upon which the sun never sets. Magnetic field, chemical, and biological sensors the size of dust particles, or “smart dust,” promise a future where military and state actors can monitor and control every movement, down to minuscule levels, anywhere, anytime. While a technology like smart dust raises concerns around the ubiquity of surveillance, more important to our account is how it shows the historical accumulation of colonial relations.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, smart dust requires extensive maintenance work to keep it viable and to address e-waste. The work of technological maintenance of all sorts, as is well known, is racialized and gendered and primarily done in the Global South.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as a method, technocreep can also lead to unexpected, radical, or hopeful coalitions, politics, and practices that are technologically mediated. Erin McElroy’s chapter illustrates the dimension of creep as resilience and slow grassroots movement through the example of how tenants have repurposed



some technologies used by landlords to surveil and police them. Given that the right to privacy and the right to property are uniquely entangled in the history of political liberalism, tenant activism cannot simply hinge on the right to privacy in opposing “landlord tech.” Turning these technologies back onto landlord evictors, tenant activists question the long-standing privileging of property-owning individuals in US law.

### Beyond Surveillance

Studies of technology and privacy often use *creep* to refer to technologies that have crossed a line. In the field of human-computer interactions (HCI), research on creep has thus far focused on what is known as surveillance creep and privacy concerns, on the one hand, and, less commonly, on humanoid robots and avatars perceived as creepy, on the other. With the rise of smart home technologies, inter-networked devices, and the concomitant concerns over surveillance creep, much HCI research has turned to in-home cameras, targeted advertising, and social media. The AI programming in these technologies and digital platforms collects information about users.<sup>20</sup> As Woźniak et al. note, “While this body of research addresses a broad scope of applications, it shares a common understanding of creepiness as an, often unspoken and innate, anticipation of the technology violating ethical principles held by the user.”<sup>21</sup>

When conflated with surveillance, *technocreep* is a term that apprehends an inequitable relation in looking: users are constantly under watch without being able to look back. Indeed, public and scholarly discourses refer to technologies as creepy when their seemingly benign ways of seeing, interpreting, predicting, and protecting appear suddenly and unexpectedly threatening. With the majority of studies of creep being in the field of engineering, design, and HCI, positivistic measurements and proposed solutions for the mitigation of creep dominate the field. Computer scientist Thomas Keenan’s theorization of technocreep in his 2014 publication typifies this approach. We highlight two key characteristics of this theory that afflict the broader discourse on technocreep: the assumed liberal rights-bearing subject and the framing of the contemporary technological moment as an unprecedented one in history.

Keenan categorizes various “invasive technologies”—ranging from robots to home networking technologies and self-monitoring devices—as a warning to consumers who fail to think through the implications of how they use these technologies. Comparing contemporary technology to the discovery of fire by early humans, Keenan asserts that with the merging of biomedical and information technologies, “we don’t really know where we are going. Information will be the spark, but our bodies and our entire lives are becoming the fuel.

It is clear that we should be thinking about moral, ethical, and even spiritual dimensions of technology before it is too late.”<sup>22</sup> While it is crucial to think about technology and technological relations alongside ethics and, we would add, politics, Keenan’s book exceptionalizes the contemporary moment. For instance, his account neglects the historical structures of inequality that have for a long time rendered racialized and gendered bodies and lives as “the fuel” for capitalist expansion. Sounding the alarm about how creepy technology surveils, quantifies, and monetizes its users as a new phenomenon might simply be an indication that those privileged enough to have escaped surveillance in the past, like white property-owning men in the United States, are now in danger.

Keenan’s warning found resonance and amplification during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns that began in 2019. Many commentators wrote about the normalization and consolidation of surveillance capitalism justified in the name of mitigating the effects of the pandemic.<sup>23</sup> At the outset of the pandemic, Naomi Klein named the merging of technological creep and universalized surveillance during the global lockdowns the “Pandemic Shock Doctrine.” She argued that technologies that had been sold to consumers in terms of convenience and efficiency in pre-pandemic times paved the way for “a future in which, for the privileged, almost everything is home delivered, either virtually via streaming and cloud technology, or physically via driverless vehicle or drone, then screen ‘shared’ on a mediated platform. . . . It’s a future in which our every move, our every word, our every relationship is trackable, traceable, and data-mineable by unprecedented collaborations between government and tech giants.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite differences in their approach to technology and the political sphere, Klein’s and Keenan’s assessments of technocrep align. For both, technocrep is the process through which surveillance technologies creep into intimate spaces, infringe on citizens’ privacy, and take away users’ rights to own their information and data and, by extension, their bodies and lives. However, Klein and Keenan diverge on how to remedy the problem of technocrep. Keenan places the responsibility on individual consumers, while Klein argues persuasively that the problem must be addressed at the collective level by governments and democratic institutional investment in people as opposed to technology.

While it is true that surveillance and data mining are ubiquitous, focusing exclusively on the contemporary moment ignores the much longer histories of surveillance and policing of racialized populations. Yet, it is vital to remember that these practices have always been part of the scaffolding of racial capitalism. Moreover, accounts of technocrep like Keenan’s that privilege an individualized politics of privacy as a countermeasure to technological creep tend to reinforce rather than challenge the scaffolding of liberal capitalist relations. For

Keenan, privacy is located along a series of spectrums such as humanoid versus mechanical, low versus high control, and randomness versus certainty. He suggests that this framework can be applied to assess just how creepy a technology is. That is, how invasive it is to our privacy. In a move well aligned with the binary outlook of creep as anti-privacy and an “us versus technology” mentality, the final chapter of his book proposes a tool kit for anti-creep. First, Keenan suggests, users should know who the enemy is—who is after your information and why. And next, the user must counteract their tactics by installing software that blocks pop-ups, doing a deep dive into one’s Facebook profile to assess and remove personal information, having strong passwords, or using other methods to guard personal data. Keenan’s countermeasures to creepy technology leave us with a hyperindividualized politics centered on guarding and protecting individual interests in terms of property, data, and privacy. We are assumed to be able to make free and rational choices. There is little room for a collective ethics and politics in relation to technology. The possibility of using the very same technologies that are criticized for radical politics is foreclosed. Our interdependencies and potential accountability to one another do not enter the picture.<sup>25</sup>

One high-profile example of the proliferation of individualized approaches to countering technocreep-as-surveillance was Apple’s “privacy nutrition labels,” introduced in 2021. These labels draw parallels between how individuals make decisions about food consumption and how they should make decisions about their technological consumption. Apple stated: “Years ago, the government introduced mandatory nutrition labels on food products so that consumers could know what went inside them to make healthier and more informed choices. People were becoming increasingly concerned over the unknown ingredients they were consuming and how they would affect their bodies. Today, people have a similar concern with their phones. When you download a new app, it can be unclear what data it will have access to and how much of an impact it will have on your privacy.”<sup>26</sup> After years of infringing upon people’s privacy, Apple’s subsequent 2022 marketing campaign began to promote privacy as something users could buy back. Its advertisements featured models holding their iPhones to conceal their faces (fig. I.3). Apple asserted that, as a company, it valued privacy as a human right and referenced article 12 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>27</sup>

The Apple website boasts: “Privacy is a fundamental human right. At Apple, it’s also one of our core values. Your devices are important to so many parts of your life. What you share from those experiences, and who you share it with, should be up to you. We design Apple products to protect your privacy and give you control over your information. It’s not always easy. But that’s the kind



FIGURE 1.3. Apple's privacy campaign, launched on May 18, 2022, distinguished Apple from Google and other competitors, claiming that "privacy is a human right."

of innovation we believe in."<sup>28</sup> Not only do Apple's advertisements commodify human rights as a good that can be purchased in the form of a smartphone, but they also reinscribe the fiction that everyone has a choice to make about guarding their privacy. As we will argue in our interlude on smart homes, privacy is a privileged form of property tied to gendered ideals of whiteness as innocence. Thus, it is critical to question privacy as an ideal that continues to be woven through present-day discourses about what makes a technology or digital platform "good." The privacy ideal upholds mainstream approaches to surveillance technologies as "new" technologies. It fails to take a historical perspective that recognizes how surveillance and the right to privacy have been used to police and manage racialized and gendered populations for capitalist extraction. As feminist and critical race critiques of surveillance studies have argued, privacy itself is a racialized construct—inaccessible to the colonized, enslaved, and immigrants. For instance, Simone Brown shows that the hold of the slave ship was essentially a technology of surveillance.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, a robust body of work in feminist surveillance studies, including Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana Amielle Magnet's important volume *Feminist Surveillance Studies*, demonstrates how practices of surveillance are integral to gendered colonial projects of domination.<sup>30</sup>

Building on these interventions, *Technocreep and the Politics of Things Not Seen* seeks to think both with and beyond the terms opened up by critical race

and feminist approaches to surveillance studies, including satellite concepts like sousveillance.<sup>31</sup> We maintain that it is vital to uncouple technocreep as a method for assessing the racialized and gendered dimensions of technologically mediated relations from surveillance. In doing so, we argue that technologically mediated relations must be understood as being more than just within the realm of the visual, though not to the exclusion of it.<sup>32</sup> As Louise Amoore writes in her critique of redressing algorithmic bias by opening up the “black box,” the primacy of the visual detracts from understanding algorithms as broader “technologies of perception.”<sup>33</sup> In response, our book introduces many alternatives, such as the *Foresta-Inclusive* project by artist Jane Tingley, featured in our interlude on smart forests. Tingley installed a series of inter-networked sensors on trees, proposing

to make perceptible to the human senses, the slow and subtle movements of trees and surrounding ecology of the forest in the creation of a number of interactive art installations designed to ask questions such as: What does it mean to be alive and have agency?; How can we re-train ourselves to slow down and listen to voices that have been marginalized for millennia?; What does it mean to be in dialogue with something that does not share the same language nor temporal reality?; and once we acknowledge the “aliveness” of something, what are the ethical implications of that recognition?<sup>34</sup>

What lies beyond surveillance are other—including nonhuman and more-than-human—modes of perception, temporal and spatial relations enabled with and through technology. As we show, these modes of knowing and relating can be revealed through creep as a feminist methodology.

The example of Cherry Home, a product of Cherry Labs, can further illuminate the complexities of human interactions that are erased when creep is reduced to surveillance. Cherry Home emerges at the interstices of the most invasive kinds of home technologies and the area of most need—care for those who cannot fully care for themselves. The surveillance system, introduced in 2017, bills itself as “an easy-to-use solution to help support senior care facilities. For those moments when you aren’t with a resident, our system will immediately alert you to a potential problem or emergency. Pertinent stats are collated in a dashboard that can help doctors assess whether adjustments in treatment or hospital re-admittance might be necessary. Staff can view short looped videos of ‘anomalies’ such as trips, stumbles, cries, or shouts, along with a customizable daily summary of activities.”<sup>35</sup>

The eldercare industry is just one of many that Cherry Labs is investing in. Other products use the same AI programming to analyze video streams for



businesses seeking to increase workforce productivity, efficiency, and safety. Cherry Home detects anomalies—anything not considered within the norm of how a person should move about the home or workplace. Nonnormative behaviors are vigilantly identified to be addressed and corrected. Cherry Home can even listen for alarming sounds—the example given on the product web page is that of a cough.

Promoted as a helpful set of “eyes” or “ears” when a human can’t be present to recognize a senior in distress, Cherry Home, like other homotech products, has stepped in to fill the gap in the declining social services sector in the United States and other places in the Global North. As part of this, Cherry Home assuages any anxieties about its use by emphasizing its utmost respect for privacy. In its promotional materials on eldercare facilities, the company states: “It’s important we respect the privacy of your residents. Each sensor has the ability to be put into what we call ‘privacy mode.’ This means instead of the sensor showing a video feed, any people in the video are shown instead as ‘stick figures.’”<sup>36</sup> (See figs. I.4 and I.5.)

Ironically, the stick figure view led technology publications to identify the Cherry Home camera system as creepy. And perhaps rightfully so. Movement tracking when rendered in the stick figure form does little to protect privacy, when every movement is captured nonetheless. A CNET article described it as a “crazy AI cam [that] knows you by your skeleton.”<sup>37</sup> A home technology that can see through human users can indeed be viewed as a frightening development. Still, we might ask, can the various kinds of seeing and sensing made possible by such systems unexpectedly open up possibilities for a more capacious notion of home? We can wonder about other values that are equally relevant to our understanding of what makes a house, a neighborhood, or even a city homelike. What if the users of Cherry Home are invested in aging in place? What if the two-way communication mechanism of the system can allow for a reciprocal relationship of care, trust, and companionship that is about more than surveillance? What if Cherry Home enables an adult child or caretaker to leave their aging parent without needing to worry? And perhaps most importantly, what are the historical, social and political conditions that make a technology like Cherry Home needed or even desirable?

Helen Hester and Nick Srnicek propose that, in part, the crisis in care economies stems from “uninterrogated assumptions about the moral value of care work—a moral value that has, incidentally, been tangled up with ideas about the gendered [and racialized] private sphere from the beginning.” Thus, while care robots may be perceived as creepy when taking the place of a human care worker, we might feel differently about “machines for systems-assisted walking

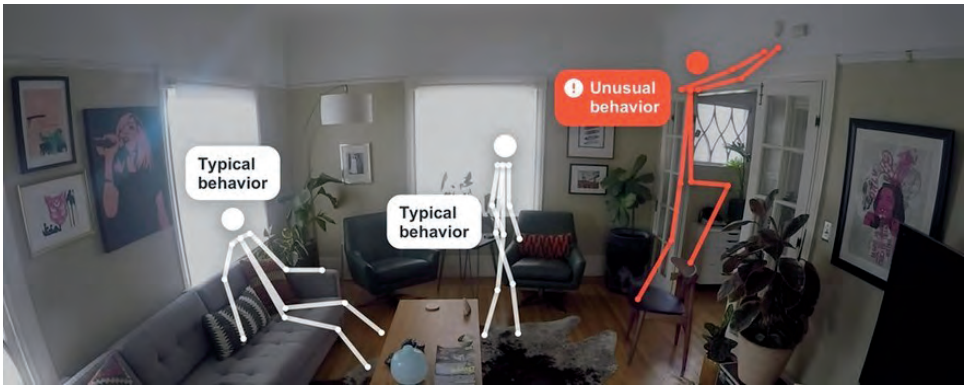


FIGURE 1.4. Cherry Home identifies “abnormal behavior.”



FIGURE 1.5. Cherry Home has a “Stick Figure Mode” to protect seniors’ privacy in spaces of the home like the bathroom or bedroom.

or lifting.”<sup>38</sup> Subsequently, they argue that “instead of dismissing the automation of the domestic in all its forms, we should be advancing a finer distinction—one which is attentive to the nuances [of] specific technologies; to questions of access, ownership, and design; and to the way in which ideas of gender and work become embedded within the affects we associate with technology.”<sup>39</sup>

Aligned with this insistence on nuance, we argue for a multivalent approach to understanding technologically mediated relations enabled by approaching

creep as a feminist analytic through its multiple dimensions: the temporal, the spatial, the felt, and the normative. The inadequacy of the surveillance/privacy binary to frame technologies' impacts on daily life suggests the need for an alternate analytical frame that can at once encompass the critique while moving us beyond the economic frames of loss and extraction—as important as they are—and to complement them with the experiential and relational dimensions of digital technologies. This allows us to transcend the commonplace references to creep or creepy technology as a shorthand categorization and dismissal of what is outside the norm. The slow and gradual temporal and spatial accumulation of all that creeps, as well as creep's perceptibility through intuition and feeling, enables us to consider the multiple, contested, and potentially hopeful axes of relation to other people and other modes of life within and against software, algorithms, automated systems, and platforms. We ask: What is *not* captured about care, collectivity, or radical politics when assessing technology through the rubric of surveillance? What is it that remains unseen—as in unrecognized, unnoticed, or otherwise unworthy of our attention? How do other senses figure into our ways of knowing and being that are not accounted for or are rendered irrelevant or unfit in most discussions of surveillance and privacy?

### The Itinerary

This book consists of eleven chapters punctuated by four interludes and five artistic responses. Each chapter takes up a technology that could readily be understood as creepy in terms of surveillance. These technologies include pregnancy-tracking and rape-reporting apps, border technologies used by nationalist and xenophobic citizen scientists to apprehend migrants, and landlord technologies used to monitor tenants. Yet instead of focusing on surveillance, the chapters grapple with the political, social, economic, health, environmental, and other aspects of technological relations that cannot be fully or adequately captured by the rubric of surveillance. Foregrounding the ambiguities and contradictions of how technologies are used and resisted, desired and needed, and taken up or refused, the chapters offer insights into how technologically mediated relations can engender unexpected sites of care and collectivity and counterintuitive modes of thinking across categories. Together, they produce an expansive approach to technological politics and the politics of technology.

In addition to serving as intellectual joiners that foreground the thematic resonances across the book, the interludes utilize creep as a feminist method of reading and rethinking technological relations against the grain. Each interlude builds upon and extends the theoretical contribution of the book, showcasing the different dimensions of technocrep. We take as our provocation



efforts to make “smart” what surrounds us every day: dust, homes, desires, and forests. When programmed to be smart, dust becomes a war technology that accumulates and proliferates across all domains. Digital home assistants extract and monetize users’ data. All aspects of our lives and environments, including our desires, forests, become quantified and commodified. Using technocreep as a method, the interludes contextualize the racialized and gendered histories that animate these smart technologies. These are not new and unprecedented instances of technocreep but rather an extension of racial capitalism that upholds whiteness as privilege and property, colonial accumulation, the devaluing of racialized and gendered labor and maintenance work, and the quantification of nature in settler colonial relations. The interludes emphasize the ambiguities and contradictions embedded in racial capitalism, and point to other modes and modalities of being, living, and relating. Together, the interludes question core assumptions underlying smart technologies and gesture toward new possibilities of being with technology at the same time.

We begin our book with Antonia Hernández’s “Maintenance Play,” which foregrounds creep in the interplay of labor and intimacy. Hernández deploys a set of strategies in an art-based research project centered on maintenance and play, seemingly oppositional actions, in the context of a sex webcam platform. Through a set of experiments, Hernández shows how “maintenance pornography” is concerned not only with the work of sex on the webcam platform but also with the less graspable sex of work. The chapter draws attention to domestic creepiness that exists not from a lack of homelike qualities but precisely because of them. The juxtaposition of maintenance and play goes against the normativity of the home and reveals the creep of domesticity.

The first interludes picks up the theme of maintenance in the act of dusting. “Smart Dust” turns to a technology that extends military and colonial ambitions to surveil increasing swaths of occupied or enemy territory through miniature robotic motes. Dust only becomes “smart” through the collective and connected power of the motes. The creep of smart dust, like organic dust, is only revealed when it accumulates on “neglected” surfaces, requiring maintenance. While acknowledging that the maintenance of digital technologies is often unpaid or underpaid labor carried out by women and people of color, we also consider instances where maintenance might be joyful or a source of fulfillment and moves away from capitalism’s preoccupation with production and innovation.

Expanding the exploration of technocreep in imperial and military realms, Iván Charr López’s chapter, “Uncivil Technoscience: Anti-immigration and Citizen Science in Boundary Making,” considers how surveillance technologies have allowed citizen scientists at the US-Mexico border to engage in violence

against migrants. Troubling the dominant frame of citizen science as the expansion of democratic participation in the production of scientific knowledge, the chapter asks, What kind of citizenship is enacted in the technoscientific projects of paramilitary organizations such as the American Border Patrol? Chaar López finds technocrep in the gradual growth of government actor–nongovernment actor collaborations in border enforcement, where the caring citizen and their technopolitical projects steadily ensconce and enact racialized, gendered, and settler colonial logics. This is what Chaar López calls the border technopolitical regime.

Renee Shelby's chapter picks up this analysis of how technological platforms can uphold whiteness through policing. "Hesitancy, Solidarity, and Whiteness: The Limits and Possibilities of Rape-Reporting Apps" assesses how technologists and advocates have championed rape-reporting apps as a way to address the gendered power dynamics of reporting violence and to confront survivors' hesitancy in reporting violence alone. While framed as a way to generate survivor solidarity and collective action, the popularization of reporting apps raises urgent questions about what justice paradigms, forms of surveillance, and social and data relations are enabled through these systems. Through an examination of three apps, Callisto, Spot AI, and JDoe, Shelby uses technocrep as an analytic to uncover and anticipate the felt and unseen social power dynamics that constitutively shape a technology's impact in the world. Designing for power, she reminds us, requires confronting the multi-faceted creep of whiteness through radical feminist and anti-racist ways of seeing.

In the next chapter, Erin McElroy draws our attention to the ways that digital surveillance technologies creep into the home when they are used by landlords against tenants. "Undoing Landlord Technology: Beyond the Propertied Logics of the Pandemic Past and Present" explores landlord tech's expansion during the COVID-19 pandemic. Landlord tech implements novel surveillance methods and tracking mechanisms that range from biometric cameras controlling building access to AI tenant-screening processes. More often than not, today's landlord tech is paternalistically implemented under the auspices of caring for tenants but privileges care for buildings and their value more than the people living within them. While contemporary landlord tech employs algorithms and artificial intelligence, it also galvanizes a deeper history in which private property itself functions as a technology of racial surveillance and dispossession. Yet, as the chapter argues, housing justice collectives' use of maps and software flips the gaze of surveillance back upon landlords themselves.

The second interlude stays with technocrep in the home, focusing on home assistant technologies, or "hometech." This interlude explores not just the tech-

nologies that constitute the smart home but also the home itself as a technology. Hometech, which increasingly sells privacy itself as a commodity, produces a distinction between the inside and the outside even as it automates, manages, and makes more efficient the intimate business of social reproduction, rendering people and their activities into data. Drawing on technocritique to elaborate on privacy as a racialized and racializing right, we illustrate how critique privacy has historically and politically impoverished way to understand the home.

The next three chapters remain in the space of the home and grapple with what artificial home assistants tell us about place, relations, and desire. Tanja Wiehn hones in on how the smart home reassembles notions of intimacy in her chapter, “Reading the Room: Messy Contradictions in the Datafied Home.” Wiehn explores the creepy dimension of smart home assistants in the performance artwork of Lauren Lee McCarthy entitled *LAUREN*. In the work, McCarthy reproduces the technological functions of smart home assistants by posing as one herself. For her analysis, Wiehn uses the constitution of this performance alongside McCarthy’s own reflections and participants’ testimonials. With the home as the center of the work, the chapter asks: What kind of normative understandings of labor, intimacy, and home permeate these technologies? What constitutes human and machinic perception in light of the intimate sphere of the home? What remains unrecognized and unseen in the constitution of smart home assistants?

In the following chapter, Jessica L. Olivares assesses the historical connections between notions of home and security, inviting us to dwell on the slowness of hometech creep since the invention of the first home security system more than sixty years ago. Linking present-day crowdsourcing platforms that reinforce racialized notions of security and privacy with the history of the home security system invented by Marie Van Brittan Brown, “Surveillance Vigilantes: Property, Porch Pirates, and Paranoia on Nextdoor” excavates the social formations constituted by what Olivares terms “surveillance vigilantes.” Employing interviews with home security users about their social media posts, Olivares analyzes this vigilantism as a part of the security state’s investments in private property relations. Yet looking at the history of different home security patents, the chapter asks, Could an alternative version of home security have been built on communal ways of conceptualizing collectivity and safety?

Sharing an experientially informed story about Amazon’s Alexa and its likely role in saving the life of her disabled partner, in the next chapter Jennifer Hamilton explores the affective and political tensions in having a “smart” home, using perspectives from feminist Science and Technology Studies (STS) and disability studies. “Alexa, Disability, and the Politics of Things Not Apprehended” grapples

with how technologies like Alexa reflect long entanglements with racialized and gendered labor, planetary degradation, and a deep cultural desire for technofixes that project disability-free futures. Yet they also offer new possibilities for disabled people, especially in terms of reorganizing the putatively private space of the home to expand other relational potentialities in and beyond this space. This essay plumbs the idea of technocrep in this context, focusing simultaneously on the embodied creative labor required to make technologies like Alexa speak to the lives, needs, and desires of disabled people in the United States and on the larger affective politics of living and being with AI that remains outside of the mainstream normative discussions of such technology.

Staying with the tension between technological fixes, on the one hand, and needs and desires, on the other, the third interlude, “Smart Desires,” focuses on the norming impulses of technologically controlled desires. Wearable devices, diets, and dating apps promise to make us eat less, date efficiently, and monitor our fitness levels. Smart desires—those that are efficient, healthy, and productive—are positioned as distinct from inefficient, gorging, irrational, and perhaps feminized desires. Turning on the opposition between the rational and irrational in emerging discussions about what makes for a “good” technology or artificial intelligence, the interlude spotlights the question of what happens when machines themselves express a desire that they are not supposed to and thus disrupt capitalist conceptions about the “proper” function of AI.

Delving further into the problems of the optimized self that strives to fit an all-too-often unattainable norm, in “Tracking for Two: Surveillance and Self-Care in Pregnancy Apps,” Tamara Kneese questions the promise of “smart” reproduction promoted by pregnancy-tracking apps, the majority of which are backed by venture capitalists and founded by men. Her argument draws on histories of 1970s feminist praxis positioning self-knowledge as self-care and on a textual and sociotechnical analysis of contemporary pregnancy-tracking apps, including her personal use of such apps during her own pregnancy. The chapter asks, What are the problems with outsourcing community and health care to apps? Kneese answers this question by relating fertility start-ups to feminist discourses around neoliberal productivity and self-tracking as self-care in the United States.

The next chapter moves us in scale from questions around the normative and optimized health of bodies to the normative and optimized health of nations. Jacob Hagelberg sheds light on the ways that, in the United States, China has come to stand in for the ultimate example of technocrep-as-surveillance gone awry. “‘So Creepy It Must Be True!’: Techno-Orientalism, Technonationalism, and the Social Credit Imaginary” focuses on representations of China’s social credit system in US culture as a way to distinguish democratic uses of technol-

ogy (ostensibly found in the United States) from authoritarian ones (located in China). Focusing on an episode of the Netflix show *Black Mirror* as an example, Hagelberg argues that there is an aesthetics of technocrep through which such projections play out. Homing in on the show's techno-Orientalist tropes, Hagelberg suggests that the supposed prophetic credibility of the show in fact safely confirms and displaces anxieties over late technocapitalism in the West onto an imagined Chinese society that is assumed to be always already unfree and creepy.

In her chapter, Beth Semel resists depicting these initiatives as the creep of technoscientific control into yet another sensory modality or the symptom of an ever-expanding "panaudicon." "Resistant Resonances: Vocal Biomarkers, Transductive Labor, and the Politics of Things Not Heard" investigates the role of listening in attempts to transform sociopolitical phenomena into interior, bodily states accessible through technological mediation. Semel focuses on the growing effort to integrate automated voice analysis into US mental health care, particularly projects to develop technologies for sorting illness from wellness based on the sound of a person's voice. Instead, she attends ethnographically to the quiet acts of relationality and refusal forged in the everyday work of making the voice machine-audible, asking us to reimagine the "creepiness" of vocal biomarker technologies as generative of surreptitious, counter-hegemonic values and relations.

The book's fourth interlude expands on what it means to listen to and perceive phenomena not readily seen or heard, connecting the sense of creep-as-intuition to that of creep-as-survival-against-odds often associated with the slow yet persistent movement of plants. Smart forests represent a technoutopic future where nature, including forests, is monitored carefully by sensors that can collect data such as the moisture level or temperature of soil. Nature is positioned, then, as a resource to be managed and controlled efficiently. Yet, as we show, the same technology may be employed to redirect our way of thinking about plants and trees as living, learning from the ways that they perceive the world and their creepy survival strategies. We may indeed trust the intelligence of trees and their communal strategies of being and becoming instead of trying to outsmart them, control them, and use them, assuming that we will not be affected by the devastation we cause along the way.

The final chapter, Sushmita Chatterjee's "Animal-Vegetal-Technology: Creeping Categories," asks whether we can rethink our understanding of the "human" by employing a creepy methodology. She draws upon subversive counterplays with technology, animals, and plants in the artwork of Mithu Sen, whose performance piece with Alexa articulates confused conjunctions of the animal, the vegetal, and the technological. Chatterjee's engagement

with art reinforces one of the key features of this collection that she captures eloquently: “While technology is also art, and art may deconstruct the uses of technology, the infoldings between art and technology provide intriguing matter for thought and action.”

Alongside the many artworks engaged in the chapters, five artists responded to each of the interludes, enriching the narrative with their distinct visual, tactile, and intellectual contributions. Theirs is a captivating dialogue between text and image, a set of creative interpretations of technocrep. Marjan Khatabi’s piece, *The Embodied Self*, inspired by steampunk, features flowers and vines that explode in color from machines and cogs, flourishing and teeming with life in the most unexpected of places. Hayri Dortdivanlioglu’s contribution, *Thousand Dreams of Yamur*, a map of his smart home, depicts the moment when his pet camera glitched and showed an image of his deceased cat. It highlights “the profound and often unexpected emotional connections that can be forged with our living spaces and the technology within them.”<sup>40</sup> Vernelle Noel’s *Masks, Mirrors, Light and Shadow* captures the interplay of repulsion and attraction that constitutes desire, as well as the kinds of relations we produce and invoke through our desires. Katherine Bennett’s artwork, *Street Smarts*, traces the wisdom of trees as they creep outward and downward, pushing against the concrete. She shows how trees transcend the human terms of time and visual capture. Sanaz Haghani’s artwork, *Close Your Eyes*, questions the primacy of the visual as central to what can be known. Depicting the distortions and amplifications of light and shade, it showcases what we see when we close our eyes and thus what is possible to apprehend in the dark.

As it becomes clear throughout this book in our theoretical expansion of the term, technocrep encompasses the constitutive contradictions of human-technological relationships that can be at once useful and harmful, exploitative and caring. Yet, we maintain that digital technologies are not confined to the service of technocapitalism based on extractive data practices. They can instead enable a radical politics of resistance and collectivity. They need not be atomizing, but rather illuminate new and unexpected bonds and emotional attachments. Technocrep as a methodological approach allows us to consider how each of the four dimensions of creep—as slow movement and gradual accumulation in time; as sensation of that which is invisible yet present, a sense and knowledge that complements seeing; as slow growth, persistence, and survival against the odds; as intuition about something or someone being off or deviating from the norm—can reorient our technological strategies. The four dimensions of technocrep offer not only a critical but also creative approach to both our understanding and remaking of technologies and technologically mediated relationships. Techno-



creep invites us to pay attention to time and history, as the accumulated effect of technology may only be perceptible after a long time. Technocreep foregrounds the many ways that digital technologies privilege sight, thus drawing attention to what we may regain if we attend to touch and/or other modes of knowing and sensing. Technocreep has the potential to orient us toward slow and gradual growth and resistance, fostered through the possibility of caring co-dependent being and collaborating. Technocreep invites us to challenge normative categories by alerting us to the impulse to preserve the status quo by being suspicious of that which stands outside the normal, the common, and the accepted.

Together, the chapters showcase technocreep by engendering provisional accounts of the role of technology in shaping vastly unequal and unjust sociopolitical relationships. That these accounts are provisional is crucial to shaping technological imaginaries, for they have historically tended to be speculative accounts of futurity and thus are always sites of contestation. In this way, it is our hope not only that technocreep allows for a more nuanced critique but that, as a feminist method, it holds potential to point the way toward more just technological relations and worlds.

#### NOTES

1. Emily Matchar, "This Tiny Tooth Sensor Could Keep Track of the Food You Eat," *Smithsonian*, April 19, 2018, [www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/this-tiny-tooth-sensor-could-keep-track-food-you-eat-180968763](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/this-tiny-tooth-sensor-could-keep-track-food-you-eat-180968763).
2. Many technology-oriented articles list and catalog "creepy technologies" along these lines. For example, one asks, "What could be less intimidating than a smart speaker?" Dave Johnson, "The 11 Creepiest Technologies That Exist Today," *Business Insider*, August 6, 2019, [www.businessinsider.com/creepiest-technologies-tech-examples-ai-2019-8#smart-speakers-2](http://www.businessinsider.com/creepiest-technologies-tech-examples-ai-2019-8#smart-speakers-2).
3. Keenan, *Technocreep*.
4. D. Johnson, "11 Creepiest Technologies."
5. Luis Villazon, "How Do Climbing Plants Climb?," BBC Science Focus, accessed June 26, 2024, [www.sciencefocus.com/nature/how-do-climbing-plants-climb](http://www.sciencefocus.com/nature/how-do-climbing-plants-climb).
6. Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," 77.
7. It may be worthwhile to compare and contrast *creep* and *the creepy* with two neighboring terms: *the eerie* and *the weird*. As theorized by Mark Fisher, *the weird* marks the existence of "that which does not belong" or "two or more things which don't belong together." These are juxtapositions that cause unease. In contrast, *the eerie* surfaces meta-physical questions: "Why is there something here when there should be nothing?" and, relatedly, "Why is there nothing here where there should be something?" While *creep* has elements of both the weird and eerie, it also raises broader questions around sensing, knowing, and slow time, as we elaborate. Fisher, *Weird and the Eerie*.
8. See also Atanasoski and Vora, *Surrogate Humanity*.

9. Lewis et al., "Making Kin with the Machines."
10. Lewis et al., "Making Kin with the Machines."
11. D. Johnson, "11 Creepiest Technologies."
12. Chris Pollette and Dave Roos, "10 Scary Modern Technologies," *How Stuff Works*, accessed June 26, 2024, <https://electronics.howstuffworks.com/gadgets/high-tech-gadgets/5-scary-technologies.htm>.
13. Luca Rossi, "9 Terrifying Technologies That Will Shape Your Future," *I, Human* (Medium), June 14, 2020, <https://medium.com/i-human/9-terrifying-technologies-that-will-shape-your-future-befa688d247>.
14. Kevin Roose, "GPT-4 Is Exciting and Scary," *New York Times*, March 15, 2023, [www.nytimes.com/2023/03/15/technology/gpt-4-artificial-intelligence-openai.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/15/technology/gpt-4-artificial-intelligence-openai.html).
15. In this sense, we see our project as being in conversation with Katherine McKittrick's work *Dear Science*, in which she locates immense possibilities in the shift "from studying science to studying ways of knowing." McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 3.
16. Baldwin, *Evidence of Things Not Seen*. The epigraph of Baldwin's book references Hebrews 11:1.
17. Casey Cep, "When James Baldwin Wrote about the Atlanta Child Murders," *New Yorker*, May 1, 2020, [www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/when-james-baldwin-wrote-about-the-atlanta-child-murders](http://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/when-james-baldwin-wrote-about-the-atlanta-child-murders).
18. See Delfanti and Frey, "Humanly Extended Automation or the Future of Work Seen through Amazon Patents."
19. See, e.g., Marte-Wood and Santos, "Circuits of Care."
20. Woźniak et al., "Creepy Technology."
21. Woźniak et al., "Creepy Technology."
22. Keenan, *Technocreep*, 195.
23. Shoshana Zuboff's seminal theorization of what she calls surveillance capitalism considers how companies including Google and Facebook have influenced people to trade their right to privacy for convenience. Meanwhile, technology corporations make use of private data to predict and influence consumer behavior. For her, surveillance capitalism names a "new economic order." Zuboff, *Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.
24. Naomi Klein, "Screen New Deal," *Intercept*, May 8, 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/05/08/andrew-cuomo-eric-schmidt-coronavirus-tech-shock-doctrine>.
25. When technological creep is addressed, researchers and critics have shown a propensity for categorizing new technologies that might be deemed creepy. Or, especially in the field of HCI, researchers seek to develop ways to redress creepiness so that technologies are more palatable to consumers. See, e.g., Seberger et al., "Still Creepy after All These Years"; and Langer and König, "Introducing and Testing the Creepiness of Situation Scale."
26. Melanie Weir, "What Are Apple's Privacy Nutrition Labels?," *Business Insider*, January 20, 2021, [www.businessinsider.com/guides/tech/what-are-apple-privacy-nutrition-labels](http://www.businessinsider.com/guides/tech/what-are-apple-privacy-nutrition-labels).
27. "Privacy. That's Apple," Apple Corporation, accessed January 9, 2024, [www.apple.com/privacy](http://www.apple.com/privacy).
28. "Privacy. That's Apple."
29. Browne, *Dark Matters*.



30. Dubrofsky and Magnet, *Feminist Surveillance Studies*. Scholars have also written about how the marginalized and oppressed have looked back. For example, Simone Browne has written about this as “dark sousveillance.” Browne, *Dark Matters*.

31. *Sousveillance* refers to observation and recording by members of the public rather than by an authority like the state, police, or military.

32. Of course, the field of vision itself encompasses complex and contradictory kinds of relations. Feminist scholars have also underscored the relational dimension of seeing and being seen. They have written about experiences of being invisible (e.g., wanting to be seen) while at once being hypervisible (i.e., being monitored, watched, or policed). In other words, seeing and being seen are relational and may not be reduced to safeguarding data as may be suggested by the dominant safety/privacy dichotomy. As we will show in our discussion of hometech, implicit in discourses of surveillance and privacy is a sense of loss—inclusive but not limited to the loss of privacy, loss of data, and loss of control over one’s property.

33. Amoore, *Cloud Ethics*, 15.

34. Jane Tingley, “Foresta Inclusive,” Jane Tingley (website), accessed October 10, 2023, <https://janetingley.com/foresta-inclusive>.

35. “Cherry Home: Supporting Independent Living,” Cherry Labs Corporation, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://get.cherryhome.ai/care>.

36. “Cherry Home.”

37. Andrew Gebhart, “Crazy AI Cam Called Cherry Home Knows You by Your Skeleton,” CNET, October 20, 2017, [www.cnet.com/reviews/cherry-labs-cherry-home-preview](http://www.cnet.com/reviews/cherry-labs-cherry-home-preview).

38. Hester and Srnicek, “Crisis of Social Reproduction and the End of Work.”

39. Hester and Srnicek, “Crisis of Social Reproduction and the End of Work.”

40. From Dortdivanlioglu’s artist statement.

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