



Technocreep: The Surrender of Privacy and the Capitalization of Intimacy

Thomas P. Keenan

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“Technology is rapidly moving into our bodies,” writes cyber expert Tom Keenan, “and this book gives a chilling look ahead into where that road may lead us.” Here is the definitive dissection of privacyeroding and lifeinvading technologies, coming at you from governments, corporations, and the person next door.

Take, for example, the furor over “Girls Around Me,” a Russianmade iPhone app that allowed anyone to scan the immediate vicinity for girls and women who checked in on Foursquare and had poorly secured Facebook profiles. Going to a Disney theme park? Your creepy new “MagicBand” will alert Minnie Mouse so she’ll know your kid’s name when you approach her. Thinking about sending your DNA to Ancestry.com for some “genetic genealogy”? Careful: your genetic information could be used against you.

Technocreep: The Surrender of Privacy and the Capitalization of Intimacy Details

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Author : Thomas P. Keenan

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Ben Babcock says

The feedback cycle that exists between technology and society is an interesting one. I took a Philosophy of Science course in university, and one of our two textbooks discussed the “evolution” of technology and whether it is accurate to say that certain technological innovations are inevitable consequences of previous ones. While I agreed with the book’s author when he dismisses technological development as deterministic, it is so interesting to see how a society’s response to technology drives further development of related technologies. This is a key idea in *Technocreep*, where Thomas P. Keenan looks at how the fact that digital technology is getting exponentially faster, smaller, and cheaper influences the ways in which we use it.

First off, I love that Keenan is Canadian and that he references a lot of Canadian examples in this book. Although I am accustomed to wading through examples of how something affects the United States, it is refreshing to see the names of Canadian politicians or public servants show up in a book like this. (Don’t worry, Americans, he also mentions the US a couple of times, so you won’t feel too left out!) Keenan himself seems like a good figure to write a book like this: he has extensive computer science experience since back in the 1970s when smaller computers were making the rounds on university campuses. This makes for more “savvy” approach than someone who is more of a journalist and less of a programmer or computer expert might take.

Despite these expert credentials, however, Keenan keeps the book quite accessible. This is the kind of technology book that anyone can read. He doesn’t use many buzzwords, and those he does use, he defines. There are some beefy endnotes too (though no index, sadly), so readers who like further reading will be able to track down all the contemporary references and happenings that he mentions.

To summarize the topics Keenan covers here: he’s basically outlining how advances in hardware and software allow organizations to observe, track, and store data about people more efficiently and cost-effectively. This has many consequences for individuals and for businesses. For us, it means that we have less control over what corporations and governments know about us (this is a dimension of, though not the entirety of, *privacy*). For businesses, it means there is an economic incentive to collect and act on this data, because if they don’t, they might fall behind. Personalized *everything* is the logical endpoint of an individualist technocratic capitalism.

Keenan is not serving us up pipe dreams or science fiction, however. He *does* cite futurists like Kurzweil on occasion (but with an adequate degree of skepticism, I would submit). For the most part, though, each chapter focuses on what organizations can do *right now* with technology, and what that means they might be able to do in the near future. He delves into the consequences, and points us in the direction of the right questions to ask. For example, if companies like Facebook and Google are developing better and better facial recognition, what does this mean for our privacy? Keenan reminds us that even if these companies promise not to misuse the data (hah), governments could still compel them to turn it over. In the chapter “Phisble Creep”, Keenan asks us to consider how 3D printing of illicit objects, such as guns, might alter our society. People have already 3D printed guns—the plans can be found online—and while such items aren’t yet commonplace, 3D printers themselves are more common. Since this book was published, my local library has one! (I suspect they won’t let me print a firearm, thankfully.)

Perhaps my key takeaway from *Technocreep* is this: the rise of digital makes technology increasingly

inscrutable to newcomers and laypeople. In his preface, Keenan mentions the IBM 1620 computer that set him on this journey into computer science. Back in those days, programming and hacking on such devices could be excruciating and unforgivable (or so I understand, never having done it), but the barrier to entry was also fairly low. These days, the “stack” just seems so darn intimidating. Personally, my desire to program and code for the web has never been lower. I’m really disheartened by all the hoops we’re supposed to jump through these days. And now I look at children and teens who might be interested in taking up coding, and I wonder what they will see.

Digital makes our technology opaque to us. If your machine wasn’t working, you used to be able to take it apart. You might be able to fix it yourself, or maybe you knew someone who could fix it on the cheap. These days, DRM means that your car or your tractor can often only be fixed by the manufacturer. If they go out of business? Too bad, guess you need to buy a new vehicle.... The same goes for many of the technologies we use. The nature of software-based innovation means that obsolescence and obscurity are now far more prominent in the devices we use. I’m all for digital technology, of course. But I want to use it while acknowledging the problems and pitfalls it brings.

One word of warning: *Technocreep* is short, yet it took me way too long to read it. Partly this was the result of a busy week, but it’s also because these short chapters are remarkably involved. And you don’t want to read a lot of them in one sitting. If you do, it feels repetitive, perhaps even soporific. This isn’t so much a problem on Keenan’s end as it is the nature of the book format and the short chapter length. So don’t be deceived by its slim form factor, and set aside the appropriate amount of time to digest this.

Despite being two years old already, *Technocreep* holds up remarkably well. There are a few contentions or predictions that I find dubious (he describes personalized medicine at a Woodstock of 2019 that I doubt we’ll have by then), but by and large, Keenan discusses issues that remain relevant in 2016, if not more so. It’s hard to believe that Snowden’s leak was already three years ago. Sadly, I don’t think we’ve had the conversation that people like Keenan were hoping we would have in the wake of the revelations from those documents. Maybe reading this book will provoke a few more people to think more deeply about the ways in which digital technology provokes and accelerates change in our society. That change can be good or bad, but it’s up to us to drive that direction.

Victoria says

Privacy is dead. Technology, with or without your consent, is collecting and storing incredible amounts of information about you in the most interesting and ingenious ways. They use this to monitor and manipulate. An easy but educational read that shows you cannot opt-out. It’s creepy.

Godo Stoyke says

Prof. Keenan covers everything from government invasion of our privacy, commercial accumulation of data records on everyone who uses the internet (or customer cards, or ...), to how we contribute to our own data files through social media. Of particular interest is also the chapter on the proliferation of video cameras and the increasing ability of software to recognize your face, and what you can do about it. Would have been nice

to have an index to keywords at the back of the book. I liked the continuous references, rather than broken up into chapters and renumbered separately as found in most books, as this makes it much easier to find the reference you are looking for. Keenan recommends software you can use to track the trackers. While I was aware that my website usage is being logged by commercial entities, it was still amazing to see (and identify by name) 89 companies that were logging my internet use within 10 minutes after visiting only four websites. Apart from discussing how we as a society can deal with privacy issues, the chapter on "Anti-Creep" is probably one of the most important if you want to reduce your vulnerabilities. Thomas P. Keenan

Gavin says

It's a 20 page article padded out to a full size book

Stan says

This book is rather depressing to read. The first two thirds of the book is a listing of the various ways technology and the surveillance state are creeping into different aspects of peoples' lives. While most of these processes will be something most readers will have some level of awareness of, having them served up one after another makes for a dark and challenging read. The last third is suggestions of things you can do about it. Again, a number of suggestions will be things readers have heard of before, but it is still interesting. If anything, this last section sends out the ideas really fast and furious. I would have given the book more stars, but like any technology book, it is already starting to show its age. Still it would recommend it to people interested in technology, the surveillance state, and/or cyber-security.

Ruthiella says

The book gives the reader a brief overview of what certain computer based technologies can do now, which might surprise some readers, and what such technologies might be developed to do in the future, for better or worse. So for some this book might be a gentle wakeup call but for others, it might be more of a blaring siren. In some ways the title is a little bit of a bait and switch: Keenan definitely mentions both the positive and negative aspects and/or potential of computer technology and its applications. The focus is not 100% on the creep factor and some of the "creep" is already fairly well known and therefore not particularly shocking, to me at least. At the end of the book there are suggestions for the reader to take in order to reduce a user's risk which I found helpful, but these tips may already known to more experienced users. Read for the 2015 Book Menage at www.citizenreader.com.

Nick Leeson says

The Internet of Things (IoT) refers to the growing electronic system where everyday objects are connected to a wireless internet network, communicating with other objects in order to transmit information – i.e. "smart" technologies. While we derive ample benefits from this system in which everyone and everything is connected, Professor Keenan shows us that there are real dangers should we proceed without building-in and legislating robust privacy safeguards.

With the rarest of exception, we give up some part of ourselves when we interact with such technology; information on us is constantly being pulled together and shared without either our knowledge or consent. This book details in an interesting and focused way how it is that our digital trail is constantly being tracked, monetized and traded in the IoT world we live in. In an age where data storage is trending toward zero, in the marketplace, a new breed of "data scientists" are taking Big Data to a whole new level where long trail personalization and sophisticated suggestion algorithms prevail and, in our government, tracking our every movement is becoming an increasingly real fear.

Most of us may see rich data tracking as a benefit, for instance helping us find new ways to prove a crime has been committed - <http://www.660news.com/2013/12/03/acc...> - but it may be more than a small inconvenience when the intrusion has an impact on our rights where we've committed no crime - <http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2011/....> We need to debunk the idea that if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to worry about and this book is a great starting point. Good read.

Natasha says

Nice summary of technologies enabling more targeted customer experiences and new business models, but which also pose a threat to privacy. Quick read.

Izabella says

Quick read and a very unsettling one. But well researched, written and documented. Although there are tips at the end for how to protect yourself, you pretty quickly realize that if you haven't been using them from the get-go, you're already doomed.

Fernando del Alamo says

Los peligros que tenemos hoy día debido a la información que los demás, sobre todo las empresas y los gobiernos, son el tema central de este libro. El problema es que gran parte de esta información la damos nosotros mismos en facebook o twitter. Conocen nuestros gustos, nuestras opiniones, nuestras manías y nuestros movimientos; y utilizan toda esta información para lo que les conviene. La información que damos de forma inocente muchas veces puede volverse en contra de nosotros de un modo tan inesperado que no lo poemos ni imaginar.

Pequeño gran libro apto para todos los públicos.

Dawn Culver says

A quick read, finished in two days. Although it's pretty basic, it did keep my interest and I learned a few things along the way. I'd recommend mostly for techno-novices.

Julie says

It was a quick, interesting read. After reading it, though, I felt a bit like Dale Gribble: I wanted to start wearing an aluminum lining in my toque, and in my nightcap.

The thing is, I know everything he says is true; is real. It provided, if not exactly a wake up call, at least a reason not to hit the snooze button, much as you would want to. It's easy to get lulled to sleep while Big Brother hums a lullaby, assuring you everything will be all right. But not even Big Brother can guarantee, anymore, that the bough won't break, because he isn't exactly in charge anymore.

I recommend it to everyone who has anything, even remotely, (pun not intended) to do with technology. If you've even "seen" a smartphone, you're in for a pound. Must read!

Lauren says

A very readable book! Tackles thoughts provoking issues in a funny yet educational way.

Dna says

I kind of skimmed through this in anticipation of another book I'm waiting to read called Terms of Service: Social Media & the Price of Constant Connection by Jacob Silverman, and just so I'd know what newish books are out on data mining and social media. Another book I have waiting to be read is Dataclysm by Christian Rudder. I would give this 3.5 stars if Goodreads star-rating system wasn't from 1995.

Mark Monsma says

"Most technology is not what it seems. It is more than that, with wheels turning within wheels and systems interlocking in ways that most people don't even know exist."

-Thomas P. Keenan

This book is a warning to the reader. It is also a call to action. "Technocreep" is a phenomenal book, written to educate the reader on the Internet. Maybe there shoukd be a course everyone has to pass in order to use the Web. What you write, what you send/receive, what you click on.... every tiny interaction you have with the computer is tracked and sold. One innocent photo can be used to impersonate you. Or it can be sold and used in a company's advertising. Every wonder why you're looking at the hockey scores and an ad pops up about treadmills for sale? You looked at treadmills in the store last week, and it's already on the Web. Everything is connected.

The author educates the reader on privacy, cybersecurity, safe web surfing, safe email, etc. The author also

suggests many valuable websites, apps, & books to check out, plus ways to prevent your identity from being stolen and how to properly maintain your privacy.

I will read this book again. If I loan this book to a friend, I will chase them down to return it. Read it. It is life changing.

The author, Thomas P. Keenan, wrote the following phrase and placed it on the last line of the book. I will continue this tradition by leaving it as the last line of my review.

"You have been warned."
