Book Review

Review of Taylor, Emmeline, and Tonya Rooney (eds). 2017. *Surveillance Futures: Social and ethical implications of new technologies for children and young people*. London/New York: Routledge. 202pp. Hardback. £95.00. ISBN: 978-1-4724-5563-5.

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What does it mean to grow up as a child in a surveillance society? According to this timely book, edited by Emmeline Taylor and Tonya Rooney, modern childhood is characterized by pervasive and intensifying surveillance. From family life to school life to social life, children constantly find themselves situated in surveillance networks in which they are watched, quantified, tracked or sorted for purposes of control, care or profit. Focusing on social and ethical implications, *Surveillance Futures* examines technological surveillance of children through mobile phones, CCTV, RFID, GPS, tracking technologies and government databases. It is the first anthology with this focus. It is highly interdisciplinary, empirically interesting, and a welcome contribution to the growing field of studies on surveillance and childhood.

The main message of the anthology is this: although surveillance may have positive effects, the examined technological practices are predominantly damaging to children. Based on the assertion that privacy is paramount to children's growth it is argued, for example, that parental control blurs the boundaries between the family sphere and social sphere and may lead to tethered children without autonomy or self-esteem. School surveillance may stultify creativity, and quantification and monitoring of children's fitness may result in weight stigma. Yet, the book avoids framing children as passive and dominated subjects. Instead, several chapters draw upon empirical research to give voice to children and highlight their awareness of power/visibility as well as their ability to create private spaces that are outside or at the fringes of the world of adults. In this otherwise dark collection, these chapters are uplifting. Most importantly, they remind us of the agency of those under surveillance and the richness of the lived experience of surveillance, both of which are too often neglected in our field.

The media serves as an important backdrop to the people and technologies, which take centre stage in the book. Media discourses, it is argued, are pivotal to the spread of surveillance in childhood because they portray children as either dangerous or vulnerable and thus in need of surveillance. As such, parents and schools are encouraged to be 'good guardians' who are able to protect the children from others and themselves by knowing where the children are and what they are doing at all times.

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No new theoretical concepts are developed in the book. Nevertheless, it is theoretically interesting. As has become commonplace in Surveillance Studies, the book's authors withdraw from Michel Foucault's (1977) once dominant ideas of power and discipline embedded in the 'panopticon', and gravitate instead towards Gilles Deleuze's (1992) 'assemblages' and Ulrich Beck's (1992) 'risk society'. Deborah Lupton's (e.g., 2016) writings on 'the quantified self' and Bruno Latour's (1992, 2005) concepts of 'scripts', 'delegation' and 'oligoptica' also play noteworthy roles in the book. However, lurking underneath these sociological heavy-weights, the book contains many interesting references from psychology, media studies, ethics, anthropology and criminology. It is far beyond this review to mention all of them, but I would personally like to highlight Tonya Rooney's chapter, 'Spy kids too'. Rooney draws upon—among others—Paul Ricoeur (1979) in order to examine how children imagine and experiment with power, exposure and secrecy through play. The affective experiences of hiding, seeking, finding and being found (or not) that are illuminated from this perspective are very different from what I have encountered so far in Surveillance Studies and to me this suggests a fruitful way forward for further studies of how people experience and learn about surveillance.

The book consists of an introduction and thirteen chapters, which are organised around three overlapping spheres of childhood: schooling, the self and social life.

The first part, *Schooling and education*, examines elements of institutional surveillance in school with a focus on CCTV, RFID and tracking technologies. An underlying premise of this part is that schools are more than sites of surveillance. Schools, rather, function as society's laboratories for new surveillance technologies and are key cultural institutions, which normalise surveillance to children. Here, practices and devices which are still unthinkable in most parts of society are tested. Particularly disturbing are Emmeline Taylor's descriptions of how surveillance cameras are installed in children's bathroom areas (chapter 2) and how RFID chips are used to track the children on and off campus (chapter 5). Although, perhaps we should be even more alarmed by the subtler and increasingly common dataveillance tendencies in which children's bodies and learning are quantified, digitised and subjected to algorithmic control as described by Michael Gard and Deborah Lupton (chapter 3) and Ben Williamson (chapter 4).

The second part of the book, *Self, body and movement*, focuses on the ways children's bodies and movements are made readable and are regulated in the domestic and intimate sphere. This part of the book most clearly portrays the agency of children to resist and obfuscate unwanted surveillance. In the first three chapters by Murray Lee and Thomas Crofts (chapter 6), Jacqueline Ryan Vickery (chapter 7) and Carol Barron (chapter 8), we are introduced to children from Australia, USA and Ireland who—through their mobile phones—are subjected to parental control of their private and social lives. These studies demonstrate the increasingly common understanding among parents that they have the right to access their children's phones and computers in order to check what their children are doing and with whom. In defiance of this, children are shown in the chapters to be apt negotiators of their privacy. In order to protect their privacy, they tell lies, create false and secret social media accounts, delete their texting and browsing histories, and text in an obscurely compressed language, which parents can scarcely read. The last two chapters concern ethics and the harms of technological control. Jessica Nihlén Fahlquist (chapter 9) argues against parental uses of GPS to track children. Based on research in psychology she argues that GPS tracking can potentially undermine children's growth in terms of autonomy and self-esteem. Finally, Emma Rich (chapter 10) problematises uses of mHealth technologies on children due to issues with weight stigma and other embodied experiences stemming from the reduction of bodies to data.

The third and final part of the book, *Social lives and virtual worlds*, turns to the surveillance of children's online lives by corporations and governments. In her already praised chapter, Rooney (chapter 11) defends the existence of spaces where young children are free to experiment with visibilities and power. Children, it is argued, need these spaces which lie outside the perimeter of the adult gaze in order to build up an understanding of the complex social and ethical dimensions of the pervasive surveillance they will face in

society. Key examples in her chapter stem from offline games such as 'peek-a-boo' and 'hide-and-seek', but Rooney argues that the same freedom is of equal importance in digital play environments. This environment is the topic in the following chapter. Here, Andrew Hope (chapter 12) unfolds how various surveillance practices have crept into children's online gaming domains. He describes how intelligence agencies have begun spying on online domains such as *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life* based on fears that terrorists and criminal organisations could use such sites to communicate in secret, move money and recruit members. However, these imperceptible spying activities are but one aspect of the surveillance on these domains. As Hope describes, the gaming companies analyse player behaviour in order to infer patterns, parents are under increased pressure to be 'good guardians' who observe their children's online activities, and children are encouraged to act as 'secret agents' who spy and inform on other players. This multifaceted nature of online surveillance is interesting in itself, however Hope uses these surveillance tendencies together in order to discuss Gary Marx's (1988) important but theoretically underdeveloped concept 'surveillance creep'. In the following chapter, Valerie Steeves (chapter 13) reports on a large-scale quantitative study of what sites 9 to 17 year old children are using, how surveillance is folded into these sites, and who the children thought should have access to the data they generate on e.g. social media. Dispelling the myth that children do not care about their privacy, the study clearly shows that the children are highly critical about corporate surveillance of their social lives. Finally, Rosamunde van Brakel (chapter 14) turns to welfare surveillance as she looks at the RYOGENS database. RYOGENS stands for 'Reducing Youth Offending Generic Electronic National Solution', and is a database used by British government agencies such as Education and Social Services to pre-empt social decay and criminality among children. Categories such as mental and physical health as well as absence from school, learning difficulties and bad behaviour are used to predict bad trajectories for the children and to decide when to intervene. However, van Brakel argues that there are a range of problems with the database. In particular, she argues that data retention is problematic because it leaves no room for forgiveness and forgetfulness and may cause children to become stigmatised as 'potential criminals'.

Examining emerging surveillance practices in modern childhood and giving voice to children who are subjected to these practices are important goals. To this end, *Surveillance Futures* delivers a broad range of insights and empirical accounts. Yet, some criticism is also in order. First of all, the book's studies are exclusively from English speaking countries, and the book does not address how childhood surveillance might be different in countries that are more culturally different. Secondly, it is unclear how the book's foci were chosen. I am missing a description by the editors of the selection mechanism that was used in order to determine what technologies and contexts to include and exclude. Thirdly, I find the book as a whole to be overly critical and negative about surveillance and miss further reflections on the positive and productive sides of surveillance. Too often, David Lyon's (2001) two faces of surveillance (or similar nuances) are acknowledged as a prelude to a chapter that focuses almost exclusively on the harms of surveillance. In spite of these criticisms, I highly recommend the book, which certainly will shape my own research in the years to come.

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