BOOK REVIEW

SURVEILLANCE FUTURES: SOCIAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Emmeline Taylor and Tonya Rooney (Editors)

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Does it matter that children continue to be subjected to the relentless gaze of new technologies? This question hints at a self-evident state of affairs for children in the age of ubiquitous computing. Children's rights to privacy, and freedoms such as participation, development and association in the digital age continue to attract the attention of policymakers and scholars.[1] Article 24 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, for example, provides that children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. The move towards constitutionalising children's rights reflects values and norms long grasped by the international community when drafting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ('the Convention'). Article 3 of the Convention states that a child's best interests should be a primary consideration when actions taken are likely to impact them. *Surveillance Futures: Social and Ethical Implications of New Technologies for Children and Young People*, edited by Emmeline Taylor (Australian National University) and Tonya Rooney (Australian Catholic University) provides a timely reminder that the role and value of children's rights continue to be relevant. The collection of essays provides a close examination of the practices that threaten to undermine a child's autonomy and other values enshrined in the Convention. The thirteen chapters in this book not only draw on the concept of surveillance and the genealogy of the *oeuvre*, but help unpack the complex nature of the relationship between surveillance and values such as autonomy, dignity, identity, security and privacy.

Before examining the structure and topics in *Surveillance Futures*, a preliminary observation should be made: there is nothing new about children being subjected to the relentless gaze. As Taylor and Rooney note in their introductory chapter (Chapter 1: "Digital Playgrounds: Growing up in the Surveillance Age"), surveillance has long been a fact for children until they make the transition into adulthood (p. 1). In making this observation, I aim to draw attention to two aspects, which may help better frame the essays in this collected edition. First, it is right that attention is paid to the various ways childhood is constructed, and which entails consideration of their home, school and social spaces. Second, while there is general acceptance of what surveillance entails, its intensification and expansion in our networked environment has not merited sufficient attention amongst policymakers to address ongoing challenges. *Surveillance Futures* is a corrective to this complacency and may compel anyone

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[1] S Livingstone et al, "A Global Agenda for Children's Rights in the Digital Age" (2014) 8 *Journal of Children and Media* 317-335.

who mechanically regards surveillance of children as acceptable to provide evidence that measures adopted are legal, necessary and proportionate.

Surveillance Futures provides a three-dimensional approach to the concept of surveillance in the lifeworld of children: "Part I: Schooling and Education", "Part II: Self, Body and Movement', and "Part III: Social Lives and Virtual Worlds". This well-thought out approach should provide readers with an informed account of the challenges posed to children in an environment mediated by smart sensors and technologies. The introductory Chapter 1 situates the accounts of various aspects of surveillances technologies and practices and articulates the overarching goals of the book, while acknowledging the problems of boundary setting in networked environments (p. 10).

As children spend a large amount of their formative years in school, Part I provides an appropriate starting point with four chapters devoted to examining the interaction between education, information-gathering properties of new technologies, and their use. To understand how surveillance practices are problematised, we need to assemble three modalities of surveillance practices and technologies: first, the school is an institution of rules with its actors having clear and defined roles; second, established rules and norms determine the relation between students and educators; and third, new technologies come equipped with capabilities that enable tracking, classification and auditing to take place seamlessly.[2]

Emmeline Taylor's chapter (Chapter 2: "'If I Wanted to Be on Big Brother, I Would've Auditioned for It': Examining the Media Representation of CCTV in Schools and the Impact of Visual Surveillance on Schoolchildren") provides an account of the normalising properties of surveillance technologies such as CCTV in schools. Drawing on Science and Technology studies (STS) framing tools, she demonstrates how media depictions of CCTV in schools as devices for security often leave unexplored the ways in which these technologies become agents for disciplining and enforcing norms of behaviour without prior deliberation (pp. 28-32).

Deborah Lupton and Michael Gard (Chapter 3: "Digital Health Goes to School: The Implications of Digitising Children's Bodies") shed some much-needed light on why digital technologies used to promote "school health" should not be viewed simply in terms of promoting children's physical and mental health. This chapter evokes the genre of Foucauldian and Donna Haraway's to fill a gap in contemporary discourses on education. A case study from the United States is used to encourage readers to think about the emotional, pedagogical and corporatisation of an aspect of children's health and well-being. It would have been useful if case studies from other jurisdictions were used as comparators.

The emerging role and use of software and predictive analytics in schools is the subject of Ben Williamson's chapter (Chapter 4: "Calculating Children in the Dataveillance School:

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[2] R Kitchin, *The Data Revolution: Big Data, Open Data, Data Infrastructures & their Consequences* (London: SAGE, 2014).

Personal and Learning Analytics"). With ever increasing use of software to monitor the delivery of teaching and student performances, Williamson's discussion will provide readers with an accessible account of the invisible processes in play when personal analytics are harnessed to enhance student learning and experience. Williamson describes some of the ways processes such as machine learning and predictive analytics offer opportunities for improving cognitive tasks. This analysis is complemented by a consideration of the potential misuse. He points to the creation of "data doubles". These digital identities, unknown to the subject, may be used to restrict learning and educational opportunities (p. 57). It would have been interesting to gauge the thoughts of Williamson as to whether these elegant mathematical models have fallibilities that make them difficult to detect or regulate.

Emmeline Taylor's chapter turns our attention to another technology (Chapter 5: "'Teaching Us to Be 'Smart'? The Use of RFID in Schools and the Habituation of Young People to Everyday Surveillance"). Some will remember the use of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology to monitor movements of pupils in a school.[3] Taylor's discussion and analysis is accompanied with the warning that with increasing miniaturisation of tracking technologies and ease with which they can now be integrated into uniforms, identity tokens and wearables, schools may end up becoming laboratories for corporations (pp. 74-76).

New technologies are not neutral. The design of affordances creates new spaces for socialisation, habit formation and practices and consequently become embedded within the cultural milieu of children. Parts II and III of *Surveillance Futures* contain insights into the way new technologies become sites for resistance, negotiation and arguments about the ethics of making children's lives transparent. Both Parts share a common attribute that is easily overlooked in discussions about biopolitics and affordances: surveillance discourse too often focuses on the characteristics of technologies and perhaps underestimates how children use technologies in ways that become associated with individual and group norms and values.

In respect of Part II, the shift from the school as surveillance infrastructure to biopolitics illuminates the political and ideological meanings that implicate questions about the construction of children's digital identities. The discussion in Part II is rich and dense. Murray Lee and Thomas Croft set out the longstanding cultural tensions surrounding children and their sexuality (Chapter 6: "Sexting and Young People: Surveillance and Childhood Sexuality"). The vignettes chosen are apt and illustrate some of the reasons boundaries between legitimate monitoring on the one hand and expression of sexual identity and awareness on the other will continue to be fluid and contested (pp. 88-90). This is a theme that is clearly aligned with Jacqueline Vickery's chapter (Chapter 7: "Media Discourses of Girls at Risk and the Domestication of Mobile Phone Surveillance"). Vickery's account captures very candidly the interplay between media discourse and social construction of children and implications for parenting strategies (pp. 100-102). Why might media

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[3] WM Grossman, "Is UK college's RFID chip tracking of pupils an invasion of Privacy?" The Guardian (19 November 2013) available at https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/nov/19/college-rfid-chip-tracking-pupils-invasion-privacy (accessed 10 Oct 16).

characterisations of children as "vulnerable", "at risk" and "irresponsible" be relevant? The answer given is that children's social spaces, development and expression of identity are mediated by mobile phones. The domestication of mobile phone surveillance undermines children's right to agency, privacy and spaces for play and development. The domestication of mobile phone surveillance, to adapt Sherry Turkle's phrase, tethers children to their parents.[4] There is a deeper point that could have been pursued – media narratives structure the language through which values, behaviours and cultural attitudes are evaluated.

The trust deficit that is apparent in the preceding discussions is clearly signposted in the remaining two chapters in Part II. Carol Barron's chapter (Chapter 8: "'Where Are You, Who Are You With, What Are You Doing?' Strategies of Negotiation and Resistance to Parental Surveillance via Mobile Phones") recounts how mobile phones have evolved into repositories for monitoring and surveillance by parents. An important observation made in this chapter is that spaces of play, intimacy, identity formation and development become vulnerable to ongoing parental oversight. If we ever needed a reminder that technology is outpacing the evolution of social norms and domestic practices, these chapters provide a classic exposition of the ongoing tensions between surveillance and anti-surveillance/resistance practices in many households across the country. Scholars and policymakers have long debated about the extent to which parents should enable children to exercise agency, autonomy and responsibility. Clearly, these opportunities for development are in conflict with parental responsibility for a child's safety and well-being. Jessica Nihlén Fahlquist provides a good account of the significance of the tensions and conflicts arising from the use of GPS (Chapter 9: "The Ethical Concerns of Using GPS to Track Children"). The discussion provides readers with an opportunity to assess whether there are contexts and circumstances when it would not be right to use such technologies. Chapter 10, written by Emma Rich, focuses on digital health technologies ("Childhood, Surveillance and mHealth Technologies"). Health and fitness applications are heralding a new wave of biomedicalisation of children. Rich points to the design strategies adopted by commercial entities to monetise personal information of children. One conclusion reached in this chapter is that we should continue to question the lack of transparency and the decision-making capabilities of "black-box" analytics (pp. 138-142).

Part III echoes much of the earlier concerns about potential misuse and vulnerability of children to bias and discrimination. The four chapters in this final Part provide a new context through which we can gain a better understanding of why surveillance of children matters. Networked environments and communication devices can be seen as infrastructures for play, entertainment and socialisation. Tonya Rooney's chapter highlights the significance of the erosion of children's digital spaces (Chapter 11: "Spy Kids Too: Encounters with Surveillance through Games and Play"). Children are not passive to surveillance practices and the chapter undertakes a brief examination of the resilience of children to parental intrusion through use of obfuscation strategies. Andrew Hope's chapter (Chapter 12: "World of Spycraft: Video Games, Gamification and Surveillance Creep") draws attention to the

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[4] S Turkle, *Alone Together* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), Ch 9.

commercial infrastructures for mining children's digital footprints. This reconfiguring of spaces of play, to borrow Julie Cohen's phrase, introduces a pervasive and invisible infrastructure for tracking, monitoring and knowledge creating platform.[5] Hope's account also points to the maturing of digital technologies resulting in a tipping point as children assume new roles and competences in the digital economy.

Online activities create multiple opportunities for businesses to discover children's preferences, tastes and values. Valerie Steeves's chapter illustrates how these values are leading to new business models (Chapter 13: "*Terra Cognita*: Surveillance of Young People's Favourite Websites"). Steeves draws on her Young Canadian in Wired World Project to reflect on the dominance of major technology companies in the collection of children's personal information and privacy implications. The commercialisation of the children's lifeworld and steps to arrest this have long floundered on political lack of will, among other reasons. This is nothing new, particularly for those who recall the deliberations of the Bailey Review.[6] Finally, Rosamunde van Brakel closes the collection of essays with a discussion of the ethics of pre-emptive surveillance in relation to the sharing of children's personal data between local agencies (Chapter 14: "The Rise of Pre-emptive Surveillance: Unintended Social and Ethical Consequences"). Van Brakel rightly calls on practitioners to examine more closely the values driving and validating the data sharing agenda. The case study involving practices in the UK raises important policy and practical questions on the broader impacts of indiscriminate surveillance on children's development and autonomy. Van Brankel's central argument is that that while data sharing and monitoring practices are prized for their flexibility and realisation of safety and child protection goals, embedding a culture of surveillance through the maintenance of databases can lead to the erosion of fundamental children's rights and values.

There is no doubt that the topics in *Surveillance Futures* are relevant to the question of how best children's rights can be enhanced in the age of the Internet and new technologies. The essays in this book are necessarily condensed but readers should glean from the accounts that contexts and practices raise complex legal, cultural, ideological and institutional issues. Could more have been done? Possibly in two respects. First, the chapters could have been more robust in their examination of the structures and normative aspects of the tensions rooted in contemporary digital culture which map the logic of the market and industry. Second, children live in a world where adults make the rules. If we are to properly critique surveillance technologies, it may not be enough to identify the assemblages of power and authority. Categorising surveillance as either good or bad is not as straightforward as might first appear. *Surveillance Futures* is in essence a debate about the rights of children, and consequently, the implications for the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* must be fully

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[5] J Cohen, *Configuring the Networked Self: Law, Code, and the Play of Everyday Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), Ch 2.
[6] R Bailey, "Letting Children be Children: Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood" (2011) available at
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175418/Bailey_Review.pdf
(accessed 10 Oct 2016)

understood if we are to avoid replacing the relentless technological gaze with another equally troublesome and idealised legacy of adults constructing childhoods.

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