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Book Review: L. Pangrazio, *Young People's Literacies in the Digital Age: Continuities, Conflicts and Contradictions*. Oxon: Routledge, 2018, 188 pp. ISBN: 1138305553.

In an age in which digital data and technologies are ubiquitous and affect in insidious and complex ways how we live, work and think (Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier, 2013), Pangrazio's book, *Young People's Literacies in the Digital Age: Continuities, Conflicts and Contradictions*, provides a timely and important contribution to contemporary debates. Although young people's digital practices have attracted substantial attention in popular media and academic scholarship, discussion about youth and the digital has largely focused on practices (often in a normative way) without adequately addressing the broader power relations in which they were embedded. In this way, Pangrazio's book is especially compelling as it reconciles these two approaches by examining the *specificities* of young people's digital practices while simultaneously considering the structuring role of digital platforms, the complex social factors and the discursive ideological work done by the technology corporations that shape these practices.

More specifically, Pangrazio in this book seeks to explore the *diversity* and *divergence* of young people's experiences and uses of digital media in their everyday lives and relationships, as well as the complex social and cultural issues that shape them. By doing so, she challenges pervasive normative representations of young people's relationships with the digital (such as the idea of 'digital native'), often portraying in a homogenous manner the range of digital experiences and capabilities that young people have with digital media. Throughout the book, Pangrazio argues that the focus of debates taking place in educational and academic fields should shift from 'digital literacies' which run the risk of focusing mostly on capabilities and technical mastery to 'critical digital literacies', which are concerned to embed technical mastery within critical understandings of broader issues to do with ideology, discourse and power.

To support her argument, Pangrazio draws on empirical material produced in collaboration with three different groups of Australian young people aged 14 to 19 using a combination of traditional (interviews, online questionnaires) and innovative (a series of workshops based on 'provocations') qualitative methods. The 'provocations' – namely mapping of digital and non-digital experiences; visualising the internet; timelining digital practices; and rearticulating the icons of the internet – were designed to encourage young people to reflect upon their own digital practices as well as on the institutions, discourses and ideologies that shaped their experiences. Pangrazio's innovative methodological approach - in particular the provocation designed to critically consider and revisit Facebook friend' icon - makes the book a fascinating reading while providing deep insights into young people's understandings of the role of the platforms and social media corporations in mediating their socialities and identities.

Pangrazio makes use of the Foucauldian concept of 'dispositif' – an assemblage of discursive and non-discursive elements – to discern the various and sometime contradicting factors that shape young people's attitudes, understandings and experiences of the digital and digital media. These factors include the pervasive discursive work positioning young people as skilful, adept and responsible users of digital media, the materialities and structuring role of digital media and the influence of emotions and social expectations. The concept of dispositif allows her to discuss the continuities of young people's digital practices while also exploring their divergence. In Chapters 4 and 5, Pangrazio examines more closely how young people use digital media to represent their identities and to connect with others, evidencing the complex ways in which young people's uses and understandings were shaped by the architecture of the platforms as well as by the ideology of technology corporations. Chapter 6 sets to assess the kinds of

understandings young people had of digital media and of the roles that platforms played in their lives and in shaping their identities and relationships. While some of her participants expressed an awareness of issues such as the social hierarchies of digital platforms, the corporate ownership of media content or the technology companies' monopolies, the consensus view tended to be that these issues were a normal part of the internet. Picking up on this last point in the final chapter, Pangrazio advocates for a reconceptualisation of 'critical digital literacies' and for the development of tools designed to provide users, not only with a technical mastery of digital media but also with critical understandings of the broader social, technical and economic issues in which digital media are embedded.

In the book, Pangrazio not only debunks simplistic understandings of young people's digital media uses but also highlights the discrepancies between young people's complex experiences, academic conceptualisations of digital practices and common educational approaches to digital literacies, which have tended to individualise practices and subsequently digital risks and responsibilities. This book therefore is a crucial read for researchers in the field of new media and/or youth studies but also for educators and policy-makers working in the youth sector.

Overall, this book analyses in an approachable manner the inconspicuous but significant power that technology corporations hold in shaping discourses and social practices. Given these circumstances, Pangrazio convincingly argues that users – and young people especially – must be exposed to more critical perspectives of the digital. An argument that has recently bolstered in light of the recent Cambridge Analytica revelations and sits well within calls to develop tools to support users – in particular young users – to enhance their 'data agency' (Couldry and Powell, 2014; Kennedy et al., 2015). To move forward, one of the focus, alongside policing data protection and regulating the practices of technology corporations, has to be on operationalising critical digital literacies *on a societal level* and rendering visible the insidious ways in which digital platforms restructure social practices and in which technology corporations shape discourse, practices and ideology in relation to digital use.

References

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