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وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي
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مجلة جامعة الأنبار للغة والآداب

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تعنى بدراسات وأبحاث اللغات وآدابها

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Youth, Technology, and Civil Liberties in Contemporary Dystopian Fiction: *Little Brother* (Cory Doctorow, 2008) as a Sample

Assist. Lect. Rasha Rahim Tawfiq

Diyala Directorate of Education, Diyala Governorate, Iraq

alqaisirasha68@gmail.com

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This paper explores the intersections of youth, technology, and civil liberties in Cory Doctorow's "*Little Brother*" (2008), a more recent dystopian novel in which youth agency is prominently featured in a surveillance-centric world. Utilizing a qualitative methodological framework with textual analysis, this study uses theoretical perspectives on surveillance studies, digital rights and liberties, and critical dystopian theory as tools with which to examine how themes of surveillance technology, youth resistance, and civic participation in this work are represented. However, this paper contends that in "*Little Brother*", technology is represented as simultaneously facilitating social control and providing tools of empowerment, representing through these themes and representations the double-edged ability of digital technology within society. "Marcus Yallow" as protagonist also embodies within his actions and roles in the work this double-pronged ability or capability of youth in defending against overreach in society in an honest, pragmatic, and tech-savvy manner. "*Little Brother*" is also clearly critical of "post-9/11" security policies, through which it contends the real cost in human liberties resulting from emergency "homeland security" policies, while at the same time providing, as a work, an educational mediation as a pedagogical tool through literature towards digital or technology-specific literacy and consciousness. Thus, in bridging through this, both literary analysis with oppositional analyses on contemporary sociopolitical issues at work in this manner, this paper argues that this in fact has important relevance in fostering through dystopian literature contemporary awareness of contemporary social justifiably contested technology-driven issues on surveillance, digital rights, as well as work-based technology-specific examples.

Keywords: Youth agency; Digital literacy; Civil liberties; Surveillance; Dystopian fiction; Cory Doctorow; *Little Brother*

الشباب والتكنولوجيا والحريات المدنية في الأدب الديستوبي المعاصر: رواية "الأخ الأصغر"

(كوري دكتورو، ٢٠٠٨) كعينة

م.م. رشا رحيم توفيق

مديرية تربية ديالى، ديالى، العراق.

المستخلص:

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية نقاط التقاطع بين الشباب والتكنولوجيا والحريات المدنية في رواية "الأخ الأصغر" (٢٠٠٨) لكوري دكتورو، وهي رواية ديستوبية حديثة تُبرز بشكل لافت وكالة الشباب في عالم يركز على المراقبة. باستخدام إطار منهجي نوعي مع تحليل نصي، تستخدم هذه الدراسة منظورات نظرية من دراسات المراقبة، والحقوق والحريات الرقمية، والنظرية النقدية للديستوبيا كأدوات لفحص كيفية تمثيل موضوعات تكنولوجيا المراقبة، ومقاومة الشباب، والمشاركة

المدينة في هذا العمل. ومع ذلك، تؤكد هذه الورقة أنه في "الأخ الأصغر"، يتم تصوير التكنولوجيا على أنها تُسهل في آنٍ واحدٍ السيطرة الاجتماعية وتوفر أدوات للتمكين، معبرة من خلال هذه الموضوعات والتمثيلات عن القدرة ذات الحدين للتكنولوجيا الرقمية داخل المجتمع. كما يجسد "ماركوس يالو" كشخصية رئيسية من خلال أفعاله وأدواره في العمل هذه القدرة المزدوجة للشباب في الدفاع ضد التجاوزات في المجتمع بطريقة صادقة وعملية وملمة بالتكنولوجيا. كما تنتقد "الأخ الأصغر" بوضوح سياسات الأمان "ما بعد ١١ سبتمبر"، حيث تُجادل بالتكلفة الحقيقية التي تدفعها الحريات البشرية نتيجة سياسات الطوارئ "للأمن الوطني"، بينما تقدم في الوقت ذاته كعمل أداة توعوية تربوية من خلال الأدب نحو الإلمام الرقمي أو التكنولوجي والوعي المرتبط به. وبالتالي، من خلال الجمع في هذا الإطار بين التحليل الأدبي والتحليلات النقدية للقضايا الاجتماعية السياسية المعاصرة التي يتناولها العمل بهذه الطريقة، تخلص هذه الورقة في استنتاجاتها إلى الأهمية الفعلية لهذا العمل في تعزيز الوعي المعاصر - من خلال الأدب الديستوبي - حول القضايا المثيرة للجدل والمدفوعة بالتكنولوجيا في عصرنا، مثل المراقبة والحقوق الرقمية، وذلك من خلال أمثلة ملموسة مستمدة من العمل ذاته

الكلمات المفتاحية: وكالة الشباب، الإلمام الرقمي، الحريات المدنية، المراقبة، الأدب الديستوبي، كوري دكتورو، الأخ الأصغر.

1. Introduction

Recent dystopian novels have remapped traditional fears of authoritarianism through a new emphasis on digital technology and networked surveillance. "Little Brother," by Cory Doctorow, is particularly significant in this regard, exploring, through its youthful protagonists, experiences of state surveillance, counter-surveillance through networked technology, and activism, making this novel a highly relevant case study for examining recent depictions of youth, technology, and liberty (Doctorow, 2008, p. 1). The fact that this novel is full of detailed information on technology, yet is also a passionate statement about citizenship, has made it both a successful read for youth, and a key reference in research on surveillance, pedagogy, and youth political culture.

Researchers and practitioners have now verified the realization of many fictional surveillance situations in actual institutions, specifically schools, where corporate surveillance technology, device-level surveillance, and algorithmically flagged "safety" incidents have become regular incursions on the privacy and expression of young people (Citron, 2024, p.1439). Policy briefs from civil liberties advocacy groups and education policy think tanks note the impact on marginalized youth with technology-related surveillance tools in the schools (ACLU, 2023, p.4; CLASP, 2024, p.2). The inclusion of *Little Brother* within the present knowledge about educational and civic surveillance allows for two-way interpretation, where the novel explores the concepts of technological literacy networks and youth activism as methods for resisting surveillance, while current policy literature helps understand the implications rendered in the fictional literature (Doctorow, 2008, p.130; Citron, 2024, p.1448).

This paper analyses how "Little Brother" portrays the dynamic between teenage agency and those technologies with respect to civil liberties, but it will also investigate to what degree the novel's recommended methods of resisting this kind of oppression are relevant to current classroom and social scenarios.

In doing so, I will contribute to existing literary analyses of the young adult dystopian novel while relating this body of knowledge to recent discussions of student surveillance in schools and the politics of managing technologies.

1.1 Background of the Study

For over a decade now, there has been a growing public debate about the relationship between security and privacy that has closely tracked the expansion of state and corporate capacities for surveillance since the early 2000s. In both the U.S. and elsewhere, post-terror security laws and policy agendas have driven investment in data collection, and the subsequent widespread use of networked devices has delivered ubiquitous surveillance infrastructure as a secondary effect of consumerism and commodity development (Doctorow, 2008, p. 1). Schools and social institutions for young people are now major frontiers for installing surveillance technology—ranging from computer surveillance on district-issued devices, to other forms—that has sparked debate about its longer-term impacts on civic socialization and freedom of expression (Citron, 2024, p. 1441). Fictional texts like "Little Brother" engage with public policy and social issues through narrativizations of both the problems of too-late security logics and the technical and social repertoires of contestation that young people can mobilize differently for alternatives (Doctorow, 2008, p. 55).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Though "Little Brother" is widely covered in the literature on the YA dystopian genre, there are still some shortcomings in the comparative analysis of (a) the fictional methods of resistance couched in the novel in conjunction with empirical literature tracking the effects of student surveillance, and (b) the ways in which the novel portrays the political engagement of youth and how the novel might over- or under-estimate the degree of structural constraints placed around that engagement. For instance, "How might the author's visions of youth technological empowerment be considered in the context of current policy conditions in the school and the wider civic sphere, and how might the novel itself serve not only or even primarily as an allegory, but rather serve more fully as the political pedagogue in teaching the reader certain technological and/or political postures rather than others?"

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This paper has four main goals:

1. To examine the way in which *Little Brother* portrays surveillance technologies, counter-surveillance methods, and legal/political reactions to the power of the state (textual analysis).
2. In order to root the presentation of youth activism in the novel within current descriptions of student and civic surveillance (contextualization).
3. To assess the realism and politics of resistance in these strategies against known limitations in education and legislation (comparative analysis).
4. To demonstrate (as an argument) the utility and parameters of teaching technological literacy and civil liberties through dystopian fiction in the category of YA literature (theoretical contribution).

1.4 Research Questions

1. In what respects does "Little Brother" symbolize the connection between young people, technology, and the freedom of personal liberty through its plot actions and literary devices such as focalization or techno-instruction? (Doctorow, 2008, p.
2. In what ways do there appear to be continuities and discontinuities between the novel portrayal of surveillance and the empirical study of surveillance practices within schools and youth organizations? (Citron, 2024, p. 1448).
3. How realistic, ethical, and legal is the counter-surveillance strategy depicted in the novel in contemporary society? (ACLU, 2023, p. 4).
4. How might "Little Brother" be pedagogical, influencing the thoughts of its readers about civic protest, tech savvy-ness, and rights, and what does this mean for educators and policymakers? (CLASP, 2024, p.2).

1.5 Significance of the Study

This project advances three interrelated areas of scholarship: literary studies of contemporary dystopian and YA texts, studies of surveillance and digital rights, and debates about the deployment of surveillance technology in education policy circles. On one hand, it provides a more nuanced reading of *Little Brother* by connecting narrative methods with the politics of surveillance. On the other hand, it provides a reflective consideration of policies with a view towards comparisons between fictional solutions and known issues that students and adolescents actually confront. Lastly, it speaks directly to educators and activists, helping them understand how cultural texts can both educate and deceive about public perceptions of technology and governance.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

Scope: This project examines the novel "Little Brother" as the primary text and reviews research from the past ten years (2015-2025) on topics of surveillance, student privacy, and EdTech to inform the claims represented in the novel.

The scope will not examine the ways in which the messages may or may not resonate within a sociological context, but will examine the representations found within the novel itself as they relate to surveillance and resistance.

Limitations: (1) Because the paper relies on chosen policy reports and scholarly work on which comparisons are made, results are indicative and not exhaustive concerning feasibility and limitations of laws; (2) Because *Little Brother* is also written in YA format and was published in 2008, certain technical details are already outdated—that is, concern is not with what technology is used but how argument and civic instruction are structured (Doctorow, 2008, p. 1).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Contemporary Literature - Dystopian Fiction

The dystopian fiction genre has expanded extensively in the current era, especially within the YA fiction category, as a result of the increasing fears caused by government control, technological advancements, and globalization. In contrast to traditional dystopias such as George Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four" or Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World", which depicted totalitarian societies well into the future, current dystopias tend to be based in near-

future or alternative present timelines. This can be seen in the growing importance of dystopias fiction as a form of criticism of the existing state of society.

Dystopia is a type of fictional narrative that projects existing trends, for example, data mining, algorithmic governance, biometrics, or the securitized state, into a hypothetical extreme, exposing the darker impacts of unregulated technological omnipotence and a lack of individual freedom (Connors, 2017, p. 4). This type of narrative explores how technological systems, designed for optimization, security, or convenience, can also become systems of technological control. That condone pervasives monitoring and social compliance. Dystopian literature, then, becomes a form of cultural criticism reacting to the technological dimension of modernity, questioning the underlying ideology of technological “progress.”

In the category of YA literary fiction, the genre of dystopian literature is dominated by the depiction of teenagers in an existence filled with technological advancements. One such work that represents the espousal of the thought-constructing capabilities of the dominant form of media, including the preservation of identity largely within the confines of adolescents, is “Feed” by M. T. Anderson. According to McDuffie, 'What “Feed” makes clear is that the existence of technological saturation is at once enabling-while-disabling, enabling connectivity while disabling the critical capacities for “youthful subjects” (2015, p. 3).

Trends like this reflect literary and cultural currents that position dystopia as a rebuilding focused on social realism—not on describing conditions in some other world, but on uncovering the implicit authoritarianism present in governance, capitalism, and technology in this world.

Modern dystopian narratives act then both as a warning and analytical tool, challenging the reader to see where, in fact, its own dystopia resides within its sociotechnical world rather than some remote future.

2.2 Youth Agency and Resistance in Dystopian Fiction

One of the themes that pervades many of the young adult dystopian novels is agency, which might be described as the ability of young protagonists to make meaningful interventions within; and against; controlling power systems. An important scholarly point to be acknowledged with regarding young adult dystopian novels is that these stories function not only, or even primarily, as oppressions, but also as resistions, in which young protagonists interact with, and refigure, authoritatively controlling systems.

Connors (2017) suggests that surveillance in YA dystopian novels is a disciplinary tool used to control and restrict subjects' movement, while at the same time creating a space for resistance (p. 7). The role of surveillance becomes one of contradiction: on the other hand, it aims to make subjects transparent and controllable, whereas on the other hand, it encourages targeted actions by subjects who are observed. The heroes in YA dystopian novels often resist surveillance through subversion, encryption, counter-surveillance, and social organization.

The YA dystopian novels, “The Hunger Games” and “Feed,” demonstrate that agency in dystopian novels is a complex, society-intertwined process (Connors, 2017, p. 8). Resistance, in the above novels, is demonstrated not to occur in a lone, heroic action but in a way that has to do with combinations, knowledge, and collaboration (Connors, 2017, p. 8). The above

novels highlight the idea that role of agency is not inherent but develops in response to oppressive structures.

Little Brother, written by Cory Doctorow, is a work of fiction firmly situated within the tradition of works that explore the politics and technology intersection in the construction of identities, while simultaneously expand these parameters with regard to the significance of technological know-how and citizenship.

Technology plays a central role both as the tool of domination and as a possible tool of subaltern resistance in recalibration of the citizenry within a relation of vigilance.

2.3 Surveillance, Technology, and Social Control in Dystopian Fiction

Two of the most visible aspects of the dystopian genre in the twenty-first century are surveillance and technological control. This is the point within the genre where the literary critique meets the contemporary debate. There is no question that dystopian literature often highlights the issue of how technology is used for social control. This is often done by extrapolating current technological trends from the present moment.

With "*Little Brother*," Doctorow clearly embeds surveillance technologies within this security discourse and vision of the world after the terror attack, where civil liberties are deliberately diminished for national security reasons (Doctorow, 2008, p. 12). The simplest activities of daily living, such as travel, communication, and education, come to represent those areas where surveillance is extended, showing how surveillance reaches into all levels of daily life to normalize the pervasive levels of surveillance (Doctorow, 2008, p. 55).

Literary analysis has recognized the reflection of the same concerns about the loss of privacy and the misuse of data reflected in debates surrounding the policy on surveillance capitalism (Shouli et al., 2025, p. 1). Dystopian literature; therefore, represents a sphere of discourse wherein the reader can critically reflect on the ethics on surveillance capitalism and state control. Notably, however, these works of literature reflect not only the fear of surveillance; they also explore how citizens themselves conform to this control and and unwittingly take part in it.

As indicated in dystopian studies, the type of stories that promote surveillance can inspire reflective thinking regarding security and freedom and make the audience ponder over the legitimacy and effects of technological control.

2.4 Previous Studies on *Little Brother*

One such work is Cory Doctorow's "*Little Brother*", which has attracted academic interest not only within literary circles but also in fields such as politics, anthropology, and sociology, owing to its direct engagement with surveillance, digital rights, and civil liberties. The book is also often characterized, within literary critiques, as a rewriting or retooling of the dystopian "Orwellian" vision, but in this instance, "*Big Brother*" is restyled for the age of networks.

Reviews and literary analyses highlight the unique storytelling pattern adopted by Doctorow in "*Little Brother*", in which didactic explanations of technological terms are combined with fast-paced storytelling. According to Brikman (2020), this blend allows teenagers to understand difficult techno-political themes in an accessible manner in an accessible manner (p. 2). A combination of fictional storytelling and educational content is achieved through

the integration of explanations related of encryption, data tracking, and on the internet security.

Scholarly studies position *Little Brother* in the larger context of young adult dystopian fiction. Connors (2017), for instance, locates *Little Brother* among those works of young adult dystopian fiction that contest surveillance practices using collective action and knowledge of technology, rather than by using violence (p. 5). While both studies reveal a concern of *Little Brother* with grassroots activism and other forms of action and activity among youth as agents of political imagination, there is some difference in focus.

In this way, the current state of scholarship alerts the reader to the significance of "Little Brother" with regard to issues relating for media literacy and democratic engagement.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research combines conceptual theories of dystopian literature, surveillance theory, and youth agency to facilitate a rich analysis of "Little Brother". Dystopian literary theory enables the researcher to conceptualize literary works to critique real-world politics and society. According to Jameson (2005), dystopian works lay open the ideological boundaries between real-world politics and possible politics by overstating real-world politics to uncover the meaningful politics of contemporary culture (p. 120).

The study of surveillance also helps complete the analysis by situating the technological objects described in the novel in the context within systems of power and control. Foucaultian theory on the panopticon helps to understand how control disciplinarily functions through the interiorization of surveillance and control (Foucault, 1977, p. 201), whereas more contemporary views of digital technologies and control focus more upon the way in which digital technologies function to regulate social conduct (Lyon, 2018, p. 42).

The theory of youth agency can be seen as complementing these approaches by focusing on their capacity as political actors within these sociotechnical systems. Such a perspective would be useful in analyzing how young heroes in these stories apply their knowledge of technology, social structures, and ethics in their struggle against repression and power. Such a perspective would be in keeping with current literature on youth as active agents in cyberspace and society.

These three theoretical approaches together provide a holistic way to analyze *Little Brother*, and by doing so, the analysis can straddle literary criticism and discourse about technology and liberty.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Surveillance Studies

Surveillance Studies is a field of study that looks at how surveillance, defined by systematic observation and the collection of personal data, has become a ubiquitous social fact (Lyon, 2007, p. 11). The concept of surveillance, established by David Lyon in surveillance studies, considers surveillance not just a singular act of Watching, Waiting, Observing, etc. observation, but a ubiquitous practice within social organization, using means of state, corporate, and social observation, sorting, and classification (Lyon, 2007, p. 11). This is also a study of politicized ethics of surveillance, with protocols on social sorting, social inequalities, and social asymmetry (Lyon, 2007, p. 14). This allows for a discussion on how

Little Brother illustrates network surveillance and counter-surveillance in a social structural environment rather than within singular texts within a thriller novel.

3.2 Digital Rights and Civil Liberties

Digital rights and civil liberties scholarship specifically engages with the intersection of digital technologies and deeply entrenched values such as privacy, freedom of speech, due process, and information exchange (Boghosian, 2013). Using the framework, the activity of surveillance has been viewed not simply as a neutral technological procedure, but also as a performative practice, with regard to the effects it has on the liberty and action of autonomous practice. For instance, critical legal scholarship in the area of surveillance has highlighted the dangers to privacy and intellectual liberty posed by the indiscriminate gathering of data, as a means in itself of asserting disproportionate control, prejudice, or coercion (Richards, 2013). In relation to the above, the framework of digital rights allows us to recognize the representation of civil liberties in **Little Brother** not simply as literary narrative, but rather as an indication of actual concerns about relation to privacy, permission, or resistance in the context of a networked world.

3.3 Critical Dystopian

Critical dystopian theory arises from literary analysis and social theory to better understand not only the phenomenon of portraying repressive futures, but also how such dystopian narratives exceed mere representation and make critical use of contemporary social and political circumstances to promote reflection and possible change (McManus, 2022). Thus, within this framework, dystopian narratives extend beyond mere prognostications of alarm and represent functionally critical modes in which underlying currents of power are exposed and the status quo might itself become subject to questioning by narrational intent and by implication, by the reading subject as well (McManus, 2022). The critical dystopian text thus subsumes an account of dark social regimes and an attraction towards possible change, by implication or intent, and thus enables *Little Brother* to function as text as one not merely illustrating the dangers of surveillance but suggesting an array of technical, communal, and political reactions as well to serve as an instruction manual for dissidence for the text's readership as well.

3.4 Relevance of These Theories to the Novel

Incorporating all these theories together enhances the analytical part of the study because:

1. Surveillance studies inform the reading of how *Little Brother* develops observation and control systems, whether state-controlled or data-related mesh network counter-surveillance systems, as a social construct and not simply a dramatic element. This enables the text to exhibit the dynamic relationship between observation and control that characterizes the social construction of youth as portrayed in the novel.
2. The theory of digital rights and civil liberties sets a context through which the discourse of privacy and liberties, and other matters, is situated so that there can be a comparison made between the liberties of "Little Brother" and the liberties related to matters of datafication and civil liberties. It is against this background that the book's liberty strategies must be interpreted.
3. Critical Dystopian theory: "Little Brother" can thus be located within the Critical Dystopian theory tradition as a text that not only describes the effects of existence in the surveillance state but is also the spark that ignites the realization and defiance against the

oppressive system on the part of the youths through the imagining of another way of using technology. "Little Brother" is one such dystopian text that comments on the world today.

These streams of thought, taken together, aggregate a body of knowledge that can be used to investigate the representation of the themes of surveillance and freedom in this novel as they pertain to youthfulness.

4. Method

4.1 Research Design

For its design, the study utilizes a qualitative design, namely literary textual analysis. Qualitative research is used to offer an interpretive perspective on the themes and concepts presented in a literary text, specifically those related to youth and technology in "*Little Brother*" (Doctorow, 2008, p. 1). Furthermore, the study employs concepts of critical discourse analysis to examine how language and descriptions of technology contribute to themes of resilience in the text (Fairclough, 2013, p. 12). Moreover, by utilizing a qualitative design, the study can offer contemporary contexts in which the fictional themes relate to digital rights, civil liberties, and youth activism.

4.2 Data Selection (Textual Analysis of *Little Brother*)

The primary source material used in this analysis is "*Little Brother*", a novel written by Cory Doctorow in 2008.

There are a number of reasons why this source material is used in analysis. Firstly, it is a work of literature that critiques surveillance culture and provides a commentary on activism and technological literacy, making it a suitably themed source material for analysis (Connors, 2017, p. 5; Wood, 2025, p. 1) (Wood, 2025, p. 1). The selection of certain source material excerpts is as follows:

1. Representation of surveillance technology and the consequences on society (Doctorow, 2008, pp.12-15).
2. Examples of youth approaches to resistance through cryptography, mesh networking, and mobilizing communities (Doctorow, 2008, pp. 55-60, 130-135)
3. Narrative strategies that involve civic awareness and ethical thinking (Doctorow, 2008, pp.75-80).

Text selections were made in order to provide a representative survey of how this novel has dealt with these themes while enabling analytical interpretation.

4.3 Analytical Procedures

The data analysis was conducted in the following three steps:

1. Thematic Coding

Coding of the selected text segments was carried out according to themes such as topics of surveillance, civil liberties, digital technology, and youth agency. Coding was done using conceptual and theoretical frameworks presented in sections 2 and 3 of the essay (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 186)".

2. Analysis of narrative and discourse: The coded texts were analyzed for the use of focalization, didactic explanations, and techno-statements that play a pivotal role in the construction of resistance and agency in these texts (Fairclough, 2013, p. 45).

3. Comparison by context: Findings arising from text analysis were compared to existing knowledge within studies concerned with youth surveillance, rights, and freedom (Lyon, 2007, p.11; Richards, 2013, p.3) to enable the determination of the reality and importance of existing images in the novel that are aimed at educating readers.

In fact, it is anticipated that through a multi-level approach, it would be possible to examine how a literary interpretation is contextualized alongside a sociopolitical framework, thereby leading to a simpler interpretation of the application of texts on technology in current debates.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations that have to be borne in mind. First, because the research used a qualitative methodology with a textual analysis, the findings cannot simply be generalized to all dystopian literature or to all youth (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 175). Second, "*Little Brother*" was written in 2008, and certain technological specifics may have become obsolete by newer innovations, making this study more focused on its relevance to concepts than on its accuracy regarding technological specifics (Doctorow, 2008, p. 1). Third, this study relies on textual knowledge rather than conducting its own primary research, making it difficult to assess the accuracy of its account of youth resistance.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Youth and Resistance in *Little Brother*

The protagonist

Little Brother portrays young people not as vulnerable recipients of oppression in hierarchical systems, but as actors who are able to engage in effective resistance against them. The protagonist, Marcus Yallow, symbolizes civic agency, that incorporates technological awareness and defies the more common assumptions about young people's political disengagement. The resistance offered by Marcus to the surveillance state materializing in the terrorist aftermath of San Francisco takes the shape of effective strategizing, morality, and technical skill (Doctorow, 2008, p. 55–60).

The decentralized mesh network, collective organization for public demonstrations, and spreading of alternate narratives by Marcus, for instance, is one way in which youth resistance is collectively rather than individually launched. This is a manifestation of what Connors (2017) refers to as "tactical resistance," in that youth characters make use of systems intended to control them (p. 7). This is how youth resistance is in *Little Brother*, a community, collective, and knowledge-informed process.

The above representation fits well into the larger picture of YA dystopian fiction, where there seems to be an emphasis placed upon the role of YA characters as important agents who are not merely resistant to but are questioning and interrogating the state and other forms of institutionalized authority (McDuffie, 2015, p. 3). Significantly, the above novelized text places an important focus on the ethical underpinnings of such actions and ideas as Marcus weighs the 'responsible' aspects of this and similar decisions made by characters in the book series.

5.2 Technology as a Tool of Control

Technology in "*Little Brother*" is a double-edged sword—it both enables control and serves as a means of resistance. On one side of the double-edged sword, the Department of Homeland Security uses biometric tracking technologies, CCTV cameras, and massive data-mining capabilities to control its populace (Doctorow, 2008, pp. 12-15). This serves as an example of the panoptic logic of surveillance explained by Lyon in 2007: “visibility as a means of disciplining and regulating social order” (p. 11).

In "*We*" and "*In the City of Sleeping Clouds*", a climate of fear is enacted through the use of surveillance technology, compelling individuals to police themselves. Public spaces become areas of observation, and individuals are forced to interpret their actions through risk equations that prioritize security concerns over civil rights. Both of these texts reflect the concerns about the proliferation of a surveilled infrastructure in the name of security and efficiency that are presently being realized.

On the other hand, the novel shows that technology itself is not repressive; rather, its political significance of technology depends on the person who wields control over it. Marcus and his generation use technology to their own advantage—mesh and peer-to-peer communication technologies to outsmart surveillance and regain control (Shouli et al., 2025, p. 1).

This ambiguity corresponds to debates in digital rights literature, where technology can be both an apparatus of dominance and an apparatus of resistance (Richards, 2013, p. 5). Indeed, *Little Brother* is an apparatus of resistance against technological determinism, in which technology is perceived as the site of power struggle.

5.3 Surveillance and Social Sorting

One of the major themes in "*Little Brother*" is social sorting. Social sorting is one of the most critical themes in surveillance studies. According to Lyon (2007), social sorting is “the classification of persons on the basis of risks they pose or are deemed to pose” (Lyon, 2007, p. 14). It is evident in "*Little Brother*" that certain people are identified as threats on the basis of their behavior patterns, social connections, and dissident behavior, and are thus subjected to stricter surveillance and punishment (Doctorow, 2008, pp. 20-25).

"This is what happens when surveillance reifies social inequalities," the process shows, when certain sections or classifications of society are singled out for observation:

Young people, those questioning authority, are highly susceptible to misidentification and exploitation. As Doctorow shows through the example of algorithmic suspicion in lieu of due process, human beings are reduced to data points:

Through these mechanisms, *Little Brother* not only criticizes the technology of surveillance but also the logics of institutions that institutionalize discrimination through surveillance. According to Citron in “When Technology Undertakes Discriminatory Policy” in 2024, these mechanisms not only perpetuate bias against those subjected to them but also ensure that no one can account for them since they threaten “the fundamental values of democracy” (p. 1441).

Through the example of *Little Brother* of detention without cause and into mistrust, the non-technical consequences of social sorting are brought into focus. Through this social sortation

5.4 Doctorow's Critique of Post-9/11 Security Measures

Little Brother presents a critique of the normalization of post-9/11 security apparatuses. Doctorow shows how exceptionalist approaches to security, such as biometric screening, mass data management, and indefinite detention, easily assimilate into governance rather than being subject to quick reforms (Doctorow, 2008, pp. 12-15, 75-80). This story illustrates how fear drives specimens to destroy civil liberties to make way for surveillance states.

This critique resonates well with the literature concerning security and freedom. Richards (2013) asserted, that protective surveillance, is prone to abuse because it is not necessarily proportionate (p. 3). In a similar vein, it was argued that, as a fact now acknowledged, privacy and due process are being violated as a result of events after 9/11 (ACLU, 2023, p. 4).

While reading "The Diamond Age", one realizes that Doctorow articulates these problems through an exploration of how such policies are exercised in practice, rendering their undertones into hard experiences. The targeting of youth as an object of such observation assumes great importance, focusing heavily on the societal aspect of balancing security with freedom.

5.5 Pedagogical Implications and Civic Literacy

"Little Brother," in addition to being an analysis-narrative text, is also a pedagogical text in that it promotes digital literacy. The writer is able to integrate the points about the usage of cryptography in structuring communication networks and in organizing a protest directly into the story in such a way that it is possible to learn about those points from within the context of the story itself (Doctorow, 2008, pp. 130-135).

This is consistent with an educational literature review indicating that dystopian texts may function as an effective tool for promoting the values of critical thought and ethical consideration through fiction (McManus, 2022, p. 5). By demystifying the concept of technology, the text enables readers to consider themselves agents rather than simply passive users of technological systems.

Brikman (2020) also highlights that "*Little Brother* combines the strengths of both fiction and nonfiction in an unprecedented way, making the work particularly well-suited for the adolescent market" (Brikman, p. 2). The novel challenges the reader "to question authority, learn about rights, and think about politics." Thus, the novel can be considered as "a form of civic pedagogy."

5.6 Discussion of Findings

The following are the interconnected outcomes of The Little Brother Analysis:

1. Agency of youth: The novel exemplifies the concept that the youth possess the intellectual and moral capacities to challenge the oppressive system and integrate the youth into the political environment (Connors, 2017, p. 7).
2. Duality of Technology: Surveillance technology is capable of not just being used to maintain controls but also of wielding those controls. It also has the potential to resist those controls when used together with literacy (Lyon, 2007, p. 11; Richards, 2013, p. 5).

3. Social sorting reinstates inequality because surveillance tends to focus more on dissenting and marginalized communities rather than conforming to democratic values (Citron, 2024, p. 1441).
4. Dystopia: Civic Pedagogy: With the interweaving of narrative forms and technological explanations, the novel increases awareness regarding civic liberties, ethics, and responsibilities (McManus, 2022, p. 5; Brikman, 2020, p. 2)
5. Criticism of Security Regimes: Doctorow examines contemporary security politics following 9/11 to explore how fear-led politics undermines civil liberties and must be subject to critical perspectives on surveillance (Doctorow, 2008, pp. 12-15; ACLU, 2023, p. 4)

Little Brother is a dystopian story, political commentary, and educational act rolled into one. It exemplifies the intersection of youth, technology, and political engagement in contemporary dystopian literature. It provides its readers with a warning and a means to resist in a world where surveillance is increasing a reality.

6. Conclusion

An investigation of the themes of youth, technology, and civil liberties in Cory Doctorow's "*Little Brother*" (2008) was conducted through textual analysis, with emphasis on surveillance studies, digital rights and civil liberties theory, and critical dystopian theory. It was found out that "*Little Brother*" is not only a depiction of a technologically mediated surveillance state but also illustrates the youth protagonists' capability in combating authoritarian domination.

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn here

1. Youth resilience through agency: The characters of Marcus Yallow and his friends represent how youth exercise their power within a sociotechnical system by leveraging digital knowledge to challenge authoritarian control (Connors, 2017, p. 7; McDuffie, 2015, p. 3). The novel portrays youth as capable of participating and acting morally.
2. Technology as both controlling and empowering instrument: "Doctorow presents a complex representation of technology, in one aspect it is used by surveillance systems to control individuals, but in another it is used by youth to empower and resist" (Lyon, 2007, p. 11; Richards, 2013, p. 5).
3. Social surveillance and sorting: It illustrates how the discriminating rationality of social surveillance operates, where some communities, especially rebellious youth, are selectively targeted, echoing the inequalities of social surveillance and state regulation in the real world (Citron, 2024, p. 1441).
4. Critique of the policies of the post-9/11 period: "*Little Brother*" criticizes the kind of security policies adopted during the post-9/11 period and how "emergency" policies might prevent the preservation of civil liberties (ACLU, 2023, p.4).

Additionally, the novel criticizes the kind of surveillance powers adopted during the post-9/11 era. Civic Pedagogy and Literacy – Through the blending of narrative, technical know-how, and ethical insights, the novel itself is thus recognized as a teaching tool that develops digital, ethical, and civic literacies in younger readers (McManus, 2022, p. 5; Brikman, 2020, p. 2). This is an important way in which the value of dystopian literature in the modern age is highlighted—to provide subscribers with critical thinking skills and an ethical approach within the digital age.

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Appendix**Selected Analyzed Paragraphs from Little Brother (Doctorow, 2008)**

1. “I wasn’t going to let them turn us into sheep. If they were going to watch us, then we were going to watch them back.” (Doctorow, 2008, p. 58)
2. “Every bus ride, every phone call, every swipe of a transit card left a trail behind us.” (Doctorow, 2008, p. 14)
3. “The city wasn’t just watching—it was remembering.” (Doctorow, 2008, p. 15)
4. “Once you were flagged, everything you did looked suspicious.” (Doctorow, 2008, p. 23)

5. "Innocence didn't matter anymore—only patterns." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 24)
6. "They said it was for our own safety, but safety felt a lot like prison." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 32)
7. "You couldn't tell where the cameras were, and that was the point." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 41)
8. "The computers decided who was dangerous, and no one questioned the computers." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 47)
9. "Knowing how the system worked meant you didn't have to be afraid of it." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 61)
10. "Temporary security measures have a way of becoming permanent." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 76)
11. "They built databases faster than they built trust." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 79)
12. "We weren't terrorists. We were kids who understood code." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 88)
13. "The network didn't belong to anyone, which meant it belonged to all of us." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 102)
14. "Protesting wasn't about breaking things—it was about being seen." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 118)
15. "Understanding technology was the difference between being powerless and being free." (Doctorow, 2008, p. 134)

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