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André Turmel. *A Historical Sociology of Childhood: Developmental Thinking, Categorization and Graphic Visualization.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xii + 362 pp. $115.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-87977-4; $35.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-70563-9.

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Charting Childhood

I am not a fan of postmodern theorizing. I find it hard to read and often wonder if more straightforward common English might express the ideas just as well, or better. And sometimes the opaque vocabulary of postmodernism seems pretentious. André Turmel's excellent book, *A Historical Sociology of Childhood: Developmental Thinking, Categorization and Graphic Visualizations,* has convinced me that I may be wrong, at least in this case. After reading Turmel's detailed, complex sociological text, I feel invigorated to use his thought-provoking questions and categorizations to create new analytical frameworks to investigate the history of childhood.

Turmel is dense, but worth it. Do not let me scare you off, but be prepared to deal with sentences such as: "Stabilization designates the handling of divergent standpoints given the heterogeneity of the multiple actors in the collective, which indicate furthermore the necessity to craft reliable connections among these entities considering the wide array of circumstances within which they interact"(p. 297). And: "Childhood is then considered as a space-time of initiating, building, and diversifying relationships, first in the family, then at school, afterwards with peers–establishing that these several stages are not sequential"(p. 313).

Turmel's main argument is that the theories and technology of developmental psychology, ideas about ages and stages and myriad graphs and charts that circulated among a network of experts and parents, represented a "textual inscription" of children, which culminated in the material object of a Developmental Record Form, which combined information about children's mental, behavioral, physical, and emotional development in a way that normalized and stabilized the "chaos" of childhood at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. He provides copious evidence from Europe and the United States to document this central idea. I am not convinced that developmental thinking and charting of childhood are sufficient to explain how concepts of normalcy developed–there were many events and technologies, such as wars, panics, and the media, that also played critical roles–but Turmel makes a very persuasive case for the importance of the explanation he proposes and does not claim that it is the exclusive answer, though acknowledgment up front of the existence of credible alternatives would have been welcome.

Turmel has attempted an ambitious task: to fill a large lacuna in sociology, the lack of a historical sociology of childhood. His explanation for this lacuna is that during the first decades of the twentieth century, sociologists and psychologists agreed upon a division of labor in which psychologists claimed the child and sociologists took the family. Developmental psychology played a major role in this division, by providing the scientific theory to buttress psychology's claim.

Turmel does not raise the interesting question of how to characterize the outcome of this contest. Most sociologists, he argues, with some notable exceptions, left the history of children alone. Was this an amicable solution to professional tensions, an organizational divide as in sociologist Andrew Abbott's *The System of the Professions* (1988), a draw in an academic turf war, or did one side win or lose? From the relative enrollments in our sociology and psychology departments at Wellesley College where I teach, and the healthy numbers in our developmental psychology track, it looks as if psychology may have won.

In his introduction, Turmel reviews the historiography of the construction of the concept of childhood. He says that his book is original in that no historical sociology of childhood has yet been written, an assertion for which I will take him at his word (p. 4). He notes that scholars in other fields, including psychology, his-

tory, education, and social work, have written at length about childhood, but "all stamped in the developmental paradigm" (p. 5). Here I have to disagree. While this seems right for many works in these fields, there are many fine historical works, such as Paula Fass's *Kidnapped* (1997) and Linda Gordon's *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (1999) that do not strike me as much influenced by developmentalist discourse.

Turmel goes on to say that though recent sociology of childhood has been "forceful" and "diligent," from the beginning it was weakened by sociologists' acceptance of psychology's positivistic, ahistorical, acultural "misconceptions" of a universal "child" (pp. 5-6). Turmel's endpoint is 1945. Although a number of psychologists today are attempting to rectify this universalist perspective, when I asked Barbara Rogoff, one of the leaders of the movement to make developmental psychology multicultural (who Turmel cites), when she thought developmental psychologists had stopped conceptualizing "the child," in the singular, she said, somewhat discouragingly, that she thought many of them still did (personal communication with author, May 2, 2010).

Turmel uses Actor Network Theory as his main theoretical scheme. He argues that "childhood as a social phenomenon is not basically the outcome of clear-cut ideas," instead it should be understood as the "rise of a childhood collective–numerous social actors interacting together to frame children and regulate their behavior–using diverse artifacts such as graphs and charts" (p.3). This heterogeneous group of human and non-human actors, including pediatricians, nutritionists, psychologists, psychometricians, social workers, parent educators, and other experts, formed a "childhood collective" that produced something similar to what Hamilton Cravens has called the "child sciences."[1] A global network, with rules and power relationships, the childhood collective created norms about average, healthy, and acceptable children, which were communicated to parents and children. These norms served to both regulate children and families, especially mothers, and to stabilize the "chaotic and disturbed situation in the last third of the nineteenth century" (p. 10) when urbanization, immigration, and the effects of modern capitalism led to high rates of infant mortality, morbidity, and other childhood afflictions.

In the first chapter, "Children in the Collective," Turmel goes into detail about the relationship of sociology and psychology and shows how sociologists employed psychological theories. He points out that Pierre Bourdieu, for example, relied unquestioningly on Jean Piaget. Turmel critiques socialization theory, the main way sociologists theorize about childhood, for positing childhood as a lack of adulthood. In attempting to unfold the "black box" of the child, he says that children must be seen in their "totality," something like what historians of childhood and early childhood educators call the doctrine of "the whole child."

Provocatively, Turmel argues that the now standard notion of the social construction of childhood is both too "tight" and too "loose," and has become "tired" (p. 59). By this he means that the idea of social construction has overemphasized representation and discourse and put aside questions of embodiment and materiality; that social construction has been accepted in a wholly unproblematic concept, in a "hazy" way; and that the meaning of social construction remains "open to question" and lacking clear constitutive elements other than that it challenges "biological reductionism" (p. 59). Turmel uses Ian Hacking's ideas: that social construction should, among other qualities, refer only to things that cannot be constructed otherwise; that more things are socially constructed than is usually thought; that social construction should at least in part deal with the process of building or assembling; and that much of social construction deals with "unmasking" rather than refuting ideas (p. 60).[2]

In the second chapter, Turmel analyzes the "graphs, charts, and tabulations" that he argues formed the "textual inscription" of children and their bodies. He critiques Jacques Derrida's reduction of knowledge to texts–one of the things I especially like about Turmel is his explicit criticism of the gods of postmodernism–and says that narratives and stories, which also circulate through networks, are important (p. 72). He traces the international history of child observation and recording. In addition to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Charles Darwin, Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, and others, Turmel focuses on the importance of the Swiss pedagogue Madame Adrienne Necker de Saussure (her full first name is actually Albertine-Adrienne), whose 1828 book *L'education progressive* outlined methods for investigating children. The ubiquitous G. Stanley Hall is given full treatment, along with Hall's student Arnold Gesell, whose research and charts figure centrally in Turmel's exposition. The work of the British philosopher/psychologist James Sully is also discussed. Oddly, Turmel leaves out Friedrich Froebel and the international kindergarten movement, one of the greatest networks of child observers ever established. Here, the work of historians on international kindergartens, such as my own, and that of Ann Taylor Allen, Roberta Wollons, Kristin Nawrotzki, and others would provide more perspective.[3]

In the third chapter, Turmel analyzes "social technologies," "regulation," and "resistance." He distinguishes between technology, which relies upon material objects such as graphs and charts, and general advice literature, which is "almost exclusively a narrative form" (p. 117). Here, more examples from the huge body of parent education literature discussed by Julia Grant in *Raising Baby by the Book* (1998) would be informative. Turmel features the use of growth charts to document infant morbidity and mortality, along with working-class resistance to being studied. Child guidance clinics and juvenile courts come up, about which books such as Kathleen Jones's *Taming the Troublesome Child* (1999) and Steven Schlossman's *Love and the American Delinquent* (1977) and others would provide additional historical perspective. Turmel also describes how child experts argued over charts in specific social settings. Turmel should note, however, that he is not alone in analyzing charts, graphs, and other forms children's records. Historians of childhood have been doing this for years.

In the fourth chapter, Turmel analyzes the construction of the "normal" child, which he divides into three categories: average, healthy, and acceptable. Under normal as average, he covers intelligence testing, of course, but also the history of public health and child labor surveys, such as that of factory children in Great Britain, the 1833 Report of the Commissioners on the Employment of Children, which found that factory children were smaller than other children (p. 200) and which led to the Factory Regulation Act of 1833. He notes how these surveys could be used for somewhat troubling purposes as well, such as the measurement of American black slaves, which showed that slave boys and girls were relatively tall, implying that their health might not have been as problematic as that of English factory children, for instance, and thus less worrisome than it was (p 202). Here historians of childhood might want more information about slave children, such as that found in Marie Jenkins Schwartz's *Born in Bondage* (2000) and other works. The discussion of normal as healthy includes pediatric procedures and forms, child hygiene, school health, and Gesell's charts of sequences of mental and physical health. Normal as acceptable includes juvenile courts, including again, the medicalization of delinquency, and related topics about which historians of childhood have written a great deal.

The last chapter deals with the evolution and uses of developmental thinking. Somewhat redundantly, Alfred Binet and Gesell reappear, but not other important early developmental psychologists and professional trends, such as James Mark Baldwin, and the organization of developmental psychology as a field, about which Emily D. Cahan has written.[4] Turmel says that the main device was the creation of age and stage norms, and terms Piaget's stage theory in the 1930s "the finest of developmental thinking in its sequential form" (p. 261). Here I would note that Piaget had not fully developed his stage theory in the 1930s; the mature theory came later, on into the 1940s as Piaget and his female colleague Barbel Inhelder designed less naturalistic tasks that supposedly measured stage transitions.

In a critique of the limitations of the classic sociological, non-developmental (Talcott) Parsonian socialization paradigm, Turmel asks how "relevant–or appropriate or suitable–is the concept of development with respect to children in sociology?" (p. 264). In a challenge to sociologists, Turmel wonders whether after having relinquished child development to psychology, social scientists now need to reinstate developmentalism, or if there is some other way of theorizing about children growing up. Turmel then summarizes some recent critiques of developmental thinking, saying that it is ahistorical, acultural, individualistic, universalistic, and biologically deterministic. He relies particularly on Erica Burman's *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (1994) and John Morss's *The Biologizing of Childhood* (1990) and *Growing Critical: Alternatives to Developmental Psychology* (1996), but does not mention that psychologists such as Jerome Bruner and Michael Cole began critiquing developmental psychology as early as the late 1970s. Turmel should especially note Michael Lewis's *Altering Fate: Why the Past Does Not Predict the Future* (1997), on the role of chance events in children's lives.

In almost his only direct mention of child workers, Turmel says that developmental thinking permeates the training and professional practices of "nurses, social workers, teachers, school administrators, welfare director and child association activists" (p. 281). Indeed it does, more so in the past than today, for good and for ill. This is my main criticism of Turmel's fine book; he largely omits child workers, the teachers and day care workers on the front lines who often spend more time with children during their waking hours than parents do and who keep informal, often oral, but very important records about children, which circulate in networks, as well. I am also thinking about the nursery school movement's clipboard-toting psychologists and teachers, such as Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Harriet Johnson at the Bureau of Educational Experiments nursery school in Greenwich Village in the 1920s, who kept detailed formal developmental records on children, and similar research at Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial-funded

child development institutes in the United States and Canada, and Susan Isaacs in England. In fact, Mitchell and Isaacs penned trenchant critiques of Piaget's developmental thinking in the 1920s and 1930s, for being too rigid, insufficiently child-centered, and ill-attuned to the realities of children's daily lives.[5]

It is a bit unfair to criticize Turmel for not including more historians of childhood. This is after all a work of historical sociology. But Turmel's book would benefit from deeper, broader discussion of the history of childhood. Since he mentions some historians and not others, I feel justified in suggesting that he at least read some major syntheses by Steven Mintz, Paula Fass, Linda Gordon, Peter Stearns, Judith Sealander, and others. And there is no mention of the gender of the chart-makers Turmel discusses, who were almost all male. Here again, inclusion of laboratory nursery schools, where there were many female psychologists, would provide some helpful balance.

That said, André Turmel's *A Historical Sociology of Childhood* is a magisterial work, international in scope, and theoretically sophisticated. Recommend it to your students, read it to refresh yourself on the strengths of postmodernism. In my view, the narrative turn has left some us and some of our students a little weak in analytical frames. Historians of childhood should benefit from Turmel's critique of sociology and developmental psychology and exposition of various theoretical discourses and methodologies. His global discussion of themes, events, and objects that many historians have studied from an American perspective should also be helpful. The close examination of surveys, graphs, and charts that some of us may not be familiar with, and explication of the complicated ways they were used should also be useful. In a larger sense, Turmel urges us to rethink and clarify social construction, and how we conceptualize childhood, and to explore categories other than age to analyze the history of children

Turmel's outstanding book also goes a long way toward making up for the long silence in sociology about the history of childhood. Now we have work to do. We need to collaborate more closely with sociologists and others in the childhood collective to explore how complex networks of experts, parents, child workers, and children interacted in the past.

This is where a standard review would end, with praise for the work, some critiques, and a challenge for future research. Like the old charts he describes, Turmel inspired me to dream about a flow chart for the history of childhood, sort of like Victorian geologist Edward Hull's cool, huge, multicolored *Wall Chart of World History* (1890) with the events of world civilizations running in parallel streams, on which we could start mapping the myriad parallel events of children's history. None of us can keep in mind all the simultaneous dates and interconnected networks of actors in the child sciences, child welfare organizations, law, politics, education, parent education, juvenile justice, and other fields, sprinkled with wars, panics, economic swings, innovations in technology, and changes in children's literature and material culture, to mention only some of what might be included. Wouldn't it be helpful to have such a grand material object to chart our growing field? We could keep it online and add to it and revise it, a bit like Wikipedia but refereed, and we could collaborate on it with other scholars of childhood, including sociologists. I know this is a fantasy, and that it would create the problematic stabilization and normalization of our field about which Turmel warns graphs, charts, and tabulations did historically for children, but anyone game?

Notes

[1]. Ian Hacking, "On Being More Literal about Construction," in *The Politics of Constructionism*, eds. Irving Velody and Robin R. Williams (London: Sage, 1998), 49-68. I am grateful for Julia Grant's helpful comments on a draft of this review.

[2]. Hamilton Cravens, "Child Saving in the Age of Professionalism, 1915-1930," in *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook*, ed. Joseph Hawes and N. Ray Hiner (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 415-488.

[3]. Barbara Beatty, *Preschool Education in America: The Culture of Young Children from the Colonial Era to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800-1914* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Roberta Wollons, *Kindergartens and Cultures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); and Kristen Nawrotzki, "'Like Sending Coals to Newcastle:' Impressions from and of the Anglo-American Kindergarten Movements, *Paedogogica Historica* 43 (2007): 223-233.

[4]. Emily D. Cahan, "Toward a Socially Relevant Science: Notes on the History of Child Development Research," in *When Science Encounters the Child*, ed. Barbara Beatty, Emily D. Cahan, and Julia Grant (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 16-34.

[5]. Barbara Beatty, "Transitory Connections: The Reception and Rejection of Jean Piaget's Psychology in the Nursery School Movement in the 1920s and 1930s," *History of Education Quarterly* 49 (2009): 442-464.

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