

Raising the Perfect Child? Algorithms, Quantification and Prediction

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The nature and possibilities of the everyday are changing rapidly – new occupations, new skill sets and epistemological and ontological understandings are required. The environment in which the 0-8 year old child is conceived and raised increasingly draws upon the knowledge and the outputs of a technologized environment that is variously programmed, monitored, analysed and manipulated. Simultaneously, the expectations of parents, educators and health professionals are changing as new tools and new possibilities for quantifying; analysing and predicting the directions and futures of these children become available. Algorithms as ways of doing or fixing are central to this process. This paper will explore the power of algorithms within the everyday of the digital child and the questions this raises about the expectations, the challenges and the politics of raising the ‘perfect child’.

Understanding and articulating algorithmic power has become increasingly complicated with the introduction and expansion of the internet of things – the encoded and interconnected actions of a range of technologies in and around the everyday. From wearable technologies to digital and robotic assistants online and in the home, the intersection of the online spaces and the domestic, the personal and the public spaces we inhabit are increasingly inseparable, ‘data-fied’ and algorithmically entwined. This intersection of spaces and places and infiltration with the lived experiences of the everyday is an environment and a reality within which the raising of the 0-8 year old child is embedded and with which the child regularly engages or will engage.

This intersection also opens the possibility for all of the child’s activities to be recorded, surveilled and analysed. From the moment of conception onward, increasingly the activities and attributes of the child are monitored, captured, analysed and predicted within parental, health, commercial and educational concerns rendering the digital child as quintessentially embedded in an algorithmic derived amalgam of measurements, tools and discourses that describe not only the parameters of the perfect child but also create the expectations and detail the processes involved in achieving this outcome.