


# Chapter 7

## Algorithmisation of Childhood: The Social and Digital (Re) Construction of Children

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### ABSTRACT

*This article analyses the evolution of the city as a space of childhood, highlighting the transition from urban contexts open to children’s social interaction towards environments increasingly mediated by digital technologies. Drawing on a critical review of historical and social processes, it discusses the gradual exclusion of children from public spaces and their confinement within controlled environments, resulting in an “algorithmisation of childhood”. Furthermore, it examines the concept of musicmedia to describe forms of cultural co-construction within domestic digital environments. The findings emphasise the need to consider children’s relationships with technologies without disregarding the importance of rethinking public policies aimed at the (re)occupation of public spaces by children, grounded in the inclusion of their voices.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Historically, the city has been configured as a dynamic and multifaceted space in which the multiple experiences of childhood(s) are inscribed, constituting a stage where children have, over time, performed diverse and continually re-signified roles — at times as social agents endowed with competences and rights, and at others as subjects rendered vulnerable by processes of exclusion and marginalisation that contribute to the precarisation of their living conditions (UNICEF, 2012). This urban trajectory of childhood is marked by a constant tension between freedom and control, appropriation and prohibition, physical presence in public spaces and the technological mediation of everyday life.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, however, this tension assumes a new configuration under the impact of digital technologies and the regime of algorithmic mediation that characterises contemporaneity. Childhood, which once unfolded within the physical spaces of the city, now also inhabits digital ecosystems governed by algorithms, within which visibility, recognition, and forms of social belonging are negotiated. Algorithms, as socio-technical and ideological devices, cease to function merely as neutral tools for organising information and come to operate as structuring forces in the production of beliefs, values, and imaginaries that shape children's experiences. The city, within this new horizon, extends into digital space, transforming into an algorithmic city where the boundaries between the urban and the virtual become increasingly porous and interdependent.

Since Florestan Fernandes' seminal publication, which, in portraying the *Trocinhas do Bom Retiro*, made visible the streets of São Paulo in Brazil as privileged spaces of sociability, experimentation, and learning in childhood, up to the contemporary digital scenario of the so-called Generation Alpha (McCrindle & Fell, 2021), the city — as a space of childhood — has been profoundly reconfigured by socio-political, cultural, and technological transformations. During the early years of industrial urbanisation and throughout the modernisation of cities, streets progressively ceased to be perceived as safe and accessible territories for children's autonomous play, being replaced by regulated and segregated spaces, often conceptualised as “islands of protection” (Zeicher, 2003). This reconfiguration intensified from the 1990s onwards, coinciding with the emergence of the Sociology of Childhood and the proclamation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) — milestones that contributed to the recognition of children as competent social actors, endowed with agency and capable of actively producing, inhabiting, and re-signifying urban spaces in meaningful ways.

However, the advent of digital technologies and the worsening of urban mobility crises in subsequent decades have resulted in a progressive confinement of children's experiences to private domains, heavily mediated by screens and technological de-

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