

a single type of object, service or place, became the unconscious measure of everything that could be linked to it.

To conclude, this book is both comprehensive research and methodological guide, offering a non-linear historical reconstruction from which to understand the practices of institutionalisation and de-institutionalisation within the production of knowledge. As such, the book's focus on hybrid labs offers a perspective for resisting the standardisation of practices subjected to the tyranny of the production of a 'tradable future', a process that is shaping universities and cultural institutions causing the expulsion of liminal and chrono-divergent practices.

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Kate Eichhorn, *Content*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2022; xiv + 168 pp.; ISBN 978-0-262-54328-6, \$15.95 (pbk)

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In this short book, Kate Eichhorn, a professor of culture and media at The New School in New York, grapples with an intriguing question: around the turn of the millennium, why did people across the media landscape converge on the use of the word "content" for any and all forms of cultural production? Why did the concept emerge when it did, what does it mean, and what are its implications for culture, society, and politics? Despite its brevity, her book makes a meaningful contribution to a body of scholarship on the issue of abundance in digital media that might include longer works, such as Jay David Bolter's *The Digital Plenitude: The Decline of Elite Culture and the Rise of New Media* (2019) and Jodi Dean's *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (2010).

Eichhorn sheds light on the nature of "content" by re-tracing the brief history of media's digitization in recent decades—a history I had largely forgotten until revisiting its major moments here. Beginning with the birth of the web in the mid-1990s, Eichhorn's longue durée perspective shows the main building blocks of the shift from broadcast to digital media falling into place only incrementally. Chief among them were the gradual but steady increase in bandwidth and connection speeds (primarily, at first, in North America and Europe), resulting, soon after the turn of the millennium, in an explosion of uploading and sharing of user content; the rise of social media—all of the major platforms emerging, as Eichhorn notes, within a brief, 3 or 4 year span in the mid-aughts; and the advent of Google's AdSense program, leading to the rise of content farms, and an ever-shorter news cycle.

One of Eichhorn's central insights—her response to the question of why the prevalence of digital media led to the embrace of the concept of "content"—has to do with the idea of circulation. Content marks a shift, she suggests, from an emphasis placed on the nature of what is contained in a work to the extent of its circulation. The "quintessential

example” (p. 5) of this shift is what is known as the “Instagram egg,” a simple photographic depiction of an egg that went viral in 2019, garnering some 50 million likes. The fact that a meaningless text or photo could go viral epitomizes the priority in digital media of circulation over signification or meaning.

Eichhorn draws on two bodies of theory to lend context to the transition marked by the concept of content. One is the discussion of the impact of computerization on knowledge in Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). Lyotard foresaw the primacy of circulation in the age of content in noting that “knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange” (p. 17). He anticipated the value of artistic or cultural production online consisting less in the immediate uses of texts or artefacts—what they mean for individual users—and more in the aggregate or larger flow of data to which they contribute, on platforms or in databases where algorithms can shape and exploit them. A further antecedent to making sense of content is Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s critique in “The Culture Industry” (in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1997 [1947]) of the erosion in early 20th-century American culture of distinctions between high and low, culture and advertising, and of a certain “monotony” in art as a function of the “automated succession of standardized operations” (p. 16).

Later chapters explore how the emergence of content has transformed much of the culture we consume online, which is to say much of what we now encounter as culture. Chapters on content farms and the phenomena of content automation shed light on the impetus for the acceleration of content production and on its possible limits. Another chapter examines the impact of content on journalism and politics, noting, among other trends, the growing influence of commerce on the press, the rise of “news deserts” or the demise of local media, and the “monetization of political content” (p. 117).

The most interesting chapter is the one titled “Content Capital”—a concept Eichhorn coins drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital. In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu (1993) described the artistic field as a “site of struggles” (p. 82) in which writers, actors, and painters seek recognition as real artists from authoritative figures—publishers, directors, curators—who possess the power to confer this. For Bourdieu, the more accomplished a person is in the arts, the more cultural capital they possess, the more effectively they can engage in “position-takings” (p. 83) or conferrals of recognition or non-recognition on other figures, which structure the cultural field. In the age of the content-creator who can write, film, or record their own work and also publish or distribute directly to large audiences, what comes to matter more than cultural capital—approval by elite gatekeepers—is the size of one’s following, the degree of one’s power to put content into wide circulation: one’s “content capital.”

The concept of content capital provides Eichhorn with context for a series of provocative claims about the implications of this new form of cultural power in the larger field of cultural production. Distinctions between forms of content are breaking down since the emphasis is increasingly on producing and placing content into circulation. It is coming to matter less what kind of creator a person happens to be—writer, filmmaker, podcaster—so long as they actively produce. The line between professional and amateur is blurring and the importance of “traditional forms of critical reception” is waning (p. 97).

Her assertions here may be debated, but it's clear that *Content* offers much insight into a profound and transformative trend in culture and society.


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Andy Ruddock, *Digital Media Influence: A Cultivation Approach*. SAGE: London, 2020; xvi + 134 pp.; ISBN 9781526499226, £45.00 (hbk)

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In *Digital Media Influence: A Cultivation Approach*, author Andy Ruddock revisits cultivation theory, offering possibilities for its application in understanding and explaining digital media influence. Broadly, cultivation theory is conceptualized as media's power to "define social reality," affecting "how we act in the social world" (p. xiv). Ruddock connects cultivation to mediatization, or "the condition of living with digital media" (Hjarvard, 2013, as cited in Ruddock, 2020: xii). Scholars also live with media, meaning their social realities are likely influenced or "conditioned" by media to some extent (even if we may refuse to admit it). In particular, those who control the funding and publishing of media research remain influential figures in scholarly output. As such, Ruddock ultimately argues that the people, institutions, and powers that create, fund, and disseminate knowledge should be evaluated in tandem with that knowledge. By centering this narrative around George Gerbner, the scholar generally credited with postulating cultivation theory, Ruddock posits an unorthodox, yet effective theoretical argument. Instead of a dense, theoretical manual, this book is akin to the "great person" genre of historical writing (p. xiii). Effectively, Ruddock narrativizes Gerbner's career and positions this narrative as vital for understanding critical interpretations and applications of cultivation theory in digital media research.

In support of the critical use of cultivation theory, Ruddock cites a variety of the expected source material, such as Gerbner's long list of publications and other studies