Felix Stalder, **The Digital Condition**, London, UK: Polity Press, 2018, 220 pp., $58.60 (hardcover), $18.67 (paperback).

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Felix Stalder's *The Digital Condition* explains productions and reproductions of social meaning in the postdigital era as characterized by the critical-queer theory and postcolonialism. Stalder's position is not immediately clear; his writing is dense and difficult to follow at times. This makes reading this book a challenge for casual readers unfamiliar with his Marxist approach and terminology rooted heavily in academia. Stalder demonstrates his position as a critical theorist in the way he builds upon examples of queer-normativity and postcolonialism to explain underlying value creation within cultural commodities. Stalder explains how companies that combat "heteronormativity" and embrace uniqueness in their strategy could tap into huge, hidden potential for wealth.
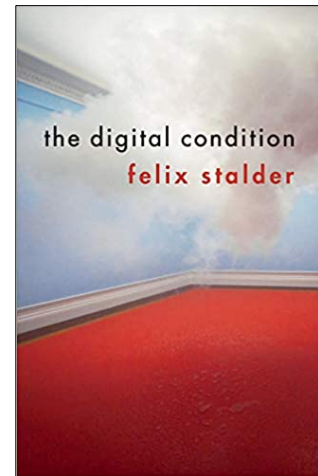
Stalder acknowledges that his opinion deviates from market concerns. He argues for the good of public interest and embracement of culture. He states,

> Costs or benefits that inadvertently affect people who are uninvolved in a given market transaction are referred to by economists as "externalities," and market participants do not need to care about these because they are strictly pursuing their own private interests. (Location 2086, Kindle)

His underlying ideal is to reframe cohabitation into a sense of community. That being said, he also recognizes the value of investing in creative industries. When discussing "The Culturalization of the World" (Location 919, Kindle), he contradicts his dismissal of economic value in cultural revolutions, explaining that because culture is at the center of the world, it organizes societal value and drives consumption. The author explains the coevolution of creative industries and media channels from this critical-queer/postcolonial perspective.

Initially, Stalder identifies three major historical tendencies at the foundation of the digital condition: the dismantling of heteronormativity, the spread of the knowledge economy, and the shift from postcolonialism to cultural hybridity. Stalder promulgates an extensive historical account tracing labor markets to events of social and cultural empowerment. He explains how, through media developments, displays of tremendous social movements instill societal transformations in cultural values. Stalder uses the term "culturization of the economy" to underscore the importance of creative industries. He emphasizes the importance of media as it portrays and reproduces enactments of social progressions, which in turn reorganized society in a way that is evident in the construction of a digitally displaced society. Stalder discusses the characteristics of media that share underlying values of "portrayal" or "mediation," but his examples distract rather than focus the argument.

He goes off on superfluous tangents on issues like the history of "costume play" or "cosplay" (Location 1905, Kindle) and details about Alan Turing and the first calculating machines (Location 2516, Kindle). These intermittent examples make it difficult to generalize about how creative industries affect labor markets.

The Digital Condition explores how media's integration is a reflection of society that distorts truth. Stalder builds on Manuel Castells' formulation of the "network society," which precedes the sociotechnical nature of "the digital condition." Stalder sees this as a societal turning point that creates cultural materials that are "born digital." He distinguishes between "analog material," as converted to digital format, and material first published on the Internet, or "born digital." In the latter part of the book, he delineates how material "born digital" is convoluted because corporations dictating these platforms (Facebook, Google, Twitter, etc.) are profit seeking and therefore commodify user data. This then affects the user's experience on the platform and perception of the content. These appraisals are overarching, given that this phenomenon is implicit by nature.

More centrally, Stalder explains the differences between analog materials turned digital and "born digital" materials as both circulate through on and offline spaces. Affirming the position of sociotechnicalities, he examines in some detail "forms" of the digital condition in terms of "referentiality," "communality," and "algorithmicity."

Stalder examines the organization of "referentiality" in online space. The body of knowledge available on the Internet allows authors to compare and contrast opinions and facts, which opens creative possibilities (predetermined by modern, freer forms of identity). The abundance of information also allows individuals to select and organize articles to supplement information and construct unique subjective purviews.

"Communality" refers to the way the digital context blurs the line between "public" and "private" and the "singularity/individual (asynchronous)" versus "communal/social." He describes how public spaces interact in a "community" with private, singular obligations. The communal aspect of the platform also permits the ubiquity of time and space under the same "rules" of social practice.

"Algorithmicity" refers to the aggregation of data in platform affordance as realized through context. Stalder describes how algorithms reify ongoing structures, an idea that articulates technical structuration and a critical-social purview of the embellishment of existing structural inequalities. He also discusses, somewhat tangentially, data behaviorism and the impenetrable forces iterating dominance.

In an example of how the digital condition affirms and reproduces forms of power, the author claims how even the democratization of horizontal communications on digital platforms serves large corporations to centralize powers. He argues that email facilitates horizontal communications; but dominance in existing hierarchical power remains because Google (gmail) and other large corporations own and monopolize control of this service. He extends the argument about control and dominance to power relations on the Internet through the aggregation of social media. The relationships between media and cultural events imply the relevance of social and cultural events and suggests that cyber politics in postdemocracy are being established by hegemonic media platforms. This politicizes digital spaces and accentuates the sociotechnical and culturally technical nature of society. *The Digital Condition* explains how imbalances of power in ownership allow larger corporations to more effectively predict market demand and modify their business models using privileged information. Stalder

admonishes readers about the commercialization of data and describes how powerful actors are normalizing power differentials in their favor. Stalder calls for resistance and revolution. Stalder's foundational piecemeal evidence is innovative, but his contributions describing Internet dominance do not add much new information to support his argument.

The strength of Stalder's argument lies in the originality of his description and construction of what it means to be "digital." However, his argument would have been stronger if it built on evidence to develop a more prescriptive argument. Stalder appropriates far-flung examples to establish his agenda. This is clear in the book's shift to frame the "digital condition" (referential, communal, algorithmic) with a Marxist framing of relations of producers and owners. Stalder argues that the consequences of the digital condition crystalize institutional values and maximize control and profit. He disparages forces of capitalism that claim decentralized power and postdemocratic idealism. Stalder exaggerates terms of production by oversimplying what it means to create, distort, and incur value in society, specifically in the post-digital age. He assimilates and transposes Marx's pejorative conception of being a "producer," to connote productions of value in a technical, sociotechnical, and importantly economically-politicized sense. There are overlaps between defining vertical hierarchy and Marx's tradition of owners and producers; however, Stalder assumes, without much evidence, that technical reformations affirm and deconstruct these orders of power, resulting in the monopolization of the digital condition.