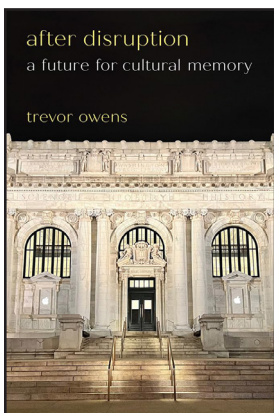


the greater challenges in recent history and, in a rather inspirational twist, reveals that it was the work of many different entities, both public and private, that made it possible to avoid a potential data vacuum in our social history. *Averting the Digital Dark Age* serves as a wealth of information for historians, particularly media scholars. It also provides a comprehensive look into one of the pressing issues of modern history and how a potential crisis was identified and avoided. Milligan states that the book is a study of historical scholarship, providing context for the role of media in the broader social world. Despite its subject matter, it doesn't concern itself too much with technology, but rather how technology, specifically the internet, affects society and its ability to harness its information, both past and present (11). As such, this volume would be an excellent addition to any academic library or archives that supports internet historians, providing fascinating insight into an otherwise overlooked era in media history. Should researchers wish to delve deeper into the subject matter, there is an excellent bibliography section as reference for further reading. —Dale E. Autry, *University of Southern Mississippi*

After Disruption: A Future for Cultural Memory, Trevor Owens, University of Michigan Press, 2024. 224p. Hardcover, \$80.00. 9780472076673



In *After Disruption: A Future for Cultural Memory*, Trevor Owens aims to dismantle the rhetoric of disruption and datafication that has permeated many aspects of our lives in the digital age by building towards a sustainable future outside of this problematic framework. The digital age has brought on what is widely known as a “period of disruption” — disruption being a keyword favored by tech moguls and Silicon Valley that characterizes rapid shifts in technology and digital media as well as its consequences on everything from the workforce to politics to our social lives (22). Memory work and cultural institutions have not been immune to this: the digital age has “played a role in changing how we collectively conceptualize memory itself” (1). Datafication has impacted how memory is processed, flattening and simplifying inherently dynamic and humanistic work. Owens demands that, as memory workers, we imagine a future beyond the rhetoric of disruption and invest in sustainable practices of care both in our professional work and workplace policies.

Owens argues that disruption has led to the devaluation of cultural memory institutions' more meaningful work in favor of infinite growth metrics, forcing organizations to push their workers to “do more and more with less ... [instead of] focus on what work really needs to be prioritized” (106). Owens additionally frames memory institutions' entrenched colonial practices in memory work within the ideological climate of the digital age; he calls for workers in the field to recognize how digitization can further entrench these problematic practices and to work towards a future that seeks to tap into previously underutilized diverse perspectives and enact justice. Our understanding of and ability to preserve our past depends on our ability to overcome this overreliance on metrics in favor of diverse frameworks of data measurement; meaningful, qualitative goals and initiatives; and building institutions of care, maintenance, and repair where we continually seek to understand the past more meaningfully.

Owens splits his argument into two parts: Part One, “Three Bankrupt Ideas,” traces the ideology of disruption from its conception in the 1990's into the digital age, where its impact

is revealed in memory institutions' disproportionate emphasis on metrics and how these elements that permeate modern society are in direct conflict with memory work. In Part Two, "Three Ways Forward," the author offers theoretical advice for memory workers seeking to move beyond the rhetoric of disruption and datafication. He draws on diverse theoretical practices of maintenance, care, repair, and revision to work against these damaging ideologies towards a more sustainable, anticolonial, and inclusive future. Crucially, Owens' argument lacks strategies of addressing political pushback that may come from institutions making a concerted effort towards goals that derive from these concepts, as they are ideologically under fire across the United States and much of the world. He instead focuses on efforts to pivot internal culture rather than external methods of resisting pushback. He says that memory institutions can foster a culture of care that is antithetical to the "move fast and break things" mindset and aim to create a framework of "meaningful goals over measurable goals" (76), juxtaposing the bankrupt ideologies that can bleed into our institutions with ways forward that re-adopt emphasis on meaningful outcomes and care over metrics.

One of the book's strengths is its ability to pinpoint precisely how ideologies of disruption have led to many of the issues common in memory and cultural institutions today, including labor shortages, low pay, and budget cuts. Many of these can be traced from an obsession with metrics that have created harm by "making the world more simplified and legible to those interested in controlling it" (67). A misguided emphasis on quantitative data and output based on this fixation has taken precedence over evaluating cultural and academic impact in more semantic ways. Owens draws on various philosophies to envision a collective future including data feminism, Afrofuturism, and indigenous knowledge. Some solutions Owens presents are applicable primarily to institutional administration in how effectively they can shape institutional policy, emphasizing creating environments that support their workers to shape the digital future of their institutions. However, other workers are similarly called to invest in marginalized groups and amplify their voices in how they are represented in the digital future (15). Owens makes a compelling argument for memory workers to stop trying to work within a framework not built for their institutions and instead create a culture that operates outside of and often against its expectations. This may be the only way for our institutions to survive into the future and maintain integrity of memory and justice-seeking "through maintenance, care, and repair" (195). Workers in institutions including libraries, archives, museums, and heritage sites will find inspiration to approach their work with hope for a more just future where memory work is valued not only for community impact that quantitative metrics cannot always capture but that is also justice-seeking and sustainable. The book calls for those in positions of power to advocate for and implement policies that align with notions of care rather than quantification, although it does not offer solutions when dealing with stakeholders who may not share these ideologies and who ultimately control funding. It encourages leaders to invest in their workers' expertise to create more meaningful work, although it does not provide practical tools to address pushback that is likely in today's political climate. *After Disruption* shares a compelling summary of the problematic notions stemming from the digital age into memory institutions, and it offers hope and inspiration for memory workers to pave the way for a more just culture beyond our current one. — Jaycee Chapman, University of Alabama, Birmingham