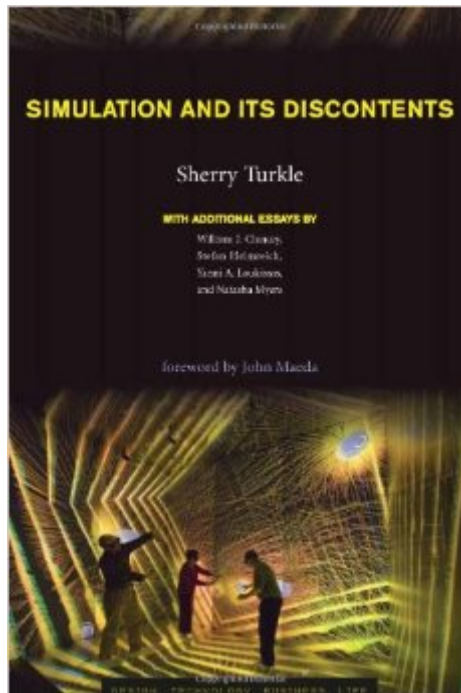


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Simulation And Its Discontents (Simplicity: Design, Technology, Business, Life)



Synopsis

Over the past twenty years, the technologies of simulation and visualization have changed our ways of looking at the world. In *Simulation and Its Discontents*, Sherry Turkle examines the now dominant medium of our working lives and finds that simulation has become its own sensibility. We hear it in Turkle's description of architecture students who no longer design with a pencil, of science and engineering students who admit that computer models seem more "real" than experiments in physical laboratories. Echoing architect Louis Kahn's famous question, "What does a brick want?", Turkle asks, "What does simulation want?" Simulations want, even demand, immersion, and the benefits are clear. Architects create buildings unimaginable before virtual design; scientists determine the structure of molecules by manipulating them in virtual space; physicians practice anatomy on digitized humans. But immersed in simulation, we are vulnerable. There are losses as well as gains. Older scientists describe a younger generation as "drunk with code." Young scientists, engineers, and designers, full citizens of the virtual, scramble to capture their mentors' tacit knowledge of buildings and bodies. From both sides of a generational divide, there is anxiety that in simulation, something important is slipping away. Turkle's examination of simulation over the past twenty years is followed by four in-depth investigations of contemporary simulation culture: space exploration, oceanography, architecture, and biology.

Book Information

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The book consists of Professor Sherry Turkle's long essay "Simulation and Its Discontents," and four shorter essays in a section titled "Sites of Simulation: Case Studies." Professor Turkle's essay is based on two ethnographic studies: one study looking at the introduction of intensive computing into Massachusetts Institute of Technology's educational practices in the mid-1980s; and another study (20 years later) that looked at computer simulation and visualization in science, engineering, and design. The four shorter essays are case studies about the use of computer simulation in the Mars Rover project, in deep-sea exploration, in architectural design, and in molecular biology research. Although the four shorter essays provide some interesting observations and insights into computer simulations, the heart of the book is Professor Turkle's long essay. Professor Turkle's essay discusses how various professions (including scientists, engineers, architects, and medical researchers) have struggled with the problems that have arisen because of the nature and limitations of computer simulations. Professor Turkle identifies some of the positive and negative effects that computer simulations have had on the various professions, and discusses how members of those professions have reacted to the growing use of computer simulations. Professor Turkle's observations about some of the unintended consequences arising from the use of computer simulations are both informative and sobering. Professor Turkle's essay provides an interesting perspective on the benefits, limitations, and unexpected consequences (some good and some bad) of computer simulations. The book is written in a style that does not assume the reader has formal training in computer simulations.

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