Uncommon
Culture
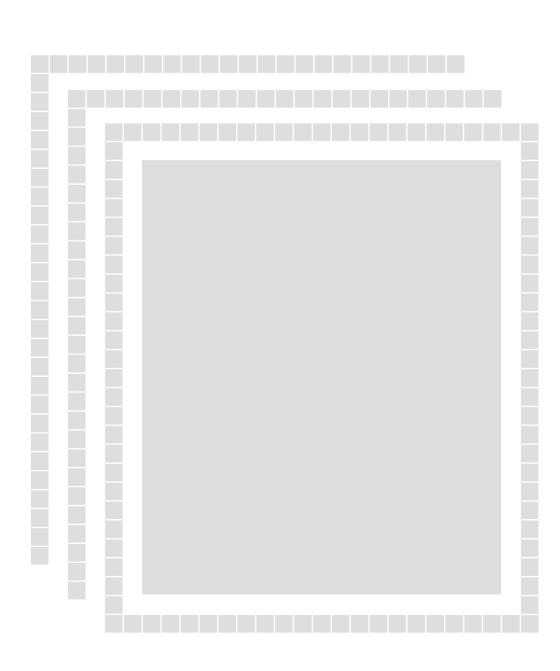
Dziekan Vince, Virtuality and the Art of Exhibition. Curatorial Design for the Multimedial Museum. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. 2012, 207 p. ISBN 978-1-84150-476-6

The book consists of two parts, Part I: Expositions and Part II: Exhibitions. The first part addresses the theory of virtuality in relation to exhibition, especially the relation of spatial practice and digital mediation. Dziekan focuses on the special quality of virtuality that can be described as an aesthetic experience influenced by contemporary technological conditions. The experience of virtuality is tied to the viewing conditions in physical space, i. e. the exhibition. The author investigates a concept of how virtuality can be applied by multimedia in the curatorial design of exhibitions. This investigation is followed by theoretical enquiries into the cultural concept of virtuality and a discussion of art and its relation to virtuality as seen by various art critics and philosophers. From this, the author concludes that the integration of digital media in the museum has far-reaching implications both for the role of the museum itself and for its functions through the medium of the exhibition and artistic practices as the act of collecting, preserving or presenting carries implicit political, ideological and aesthetic values. According to Dziekan, digital mediation will influence museological practice as new forms of contemporary art such as Net Art will change the curatorial practice: it will focus on the presentation of perspectives and context that facilitate dialogical transactions between artefact and (virtual) visitors. In the long run, the changing social, cultural and technological conditions will lead to a multimedial museum that will be a 'museum without walls' (André Malraux). Its role will shift from presentation to providing an infrastructure for virtual experiences. Dziekan continues by analyzing the virtual-reality experience of some exhibitions.

The second part of the book describes projects and case studies that put theory into practice combining exhibition design with digital objects from multimedia sound installations to virtual objects using a curatorial narrative to offer visitors experience and immersion.

Although the focus of the book is on multimedia in museums, it offers valuable insights into the concept of virtuality that can be transferred to digital exhibitions. Especially the first part covers a wide range of theoretical and practical reflections on the nature of virtual experiences and their potential impact on the museum. The book also indicates that virtuality is no threat to the museum but an enhancement of its communicative possibilities. Therefore, this book is a good starting point if you want to dive into the application of virtuality in museums.

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