

Empty Boxes? Modeling the Lost and Ephemeral (Rome, 29–30 May 25)

Rome, Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History, May 29–30, 2025
Deadline: Jun 15, 2024

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"Empty Boxes? Modeling the Lost and Ephemeral in Premodern Sacred Spaces", Rome, Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History, May 29-30, 2025.

Organizers:

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Promoting Institutions:

Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History
Deutsches Historisches Institut in Rom
Research Project CANTORIA – Music and Sacred Architecture
Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

An interdisciplinary conference to be held in Rome in May 2025 will focus on the digital simulation of perishable materials, objects, and architectural installations, as well as musical and sonic manifestations in premodern sacred spaces. The Bibliotheca Hertziana, the German Historical Institute in Rome and the research project "CANTORIA – Music and Sacred Architecture" (University of Mainz) invite all interested researchers to submit proposals.

Premodern sacred space was never in stasis. It was moving, active, and filled with materials, objects, sounds, and people that combined to create an atmosphere of the sacred and, sometimes, the miraculous. As space in flux by definition, the sedimented temporality of devotion – ie. the fundamental composition of the space over time – poses many difficulties for historical modeling, conservation, and restoration practices, against the backdrop of the dramatic changes that spaces, installations, and practices have undergone over the centuries.

More durable evidence has won out in the history and historiography of spatial reconstruction. But what of perishable materials, objects, and architectural installations, as well as musical and sonic manifestations? How do we responsibly approach recreating such ephemeral features that once graced these interiors, enlivening the volumes of often-vacant digital models?

Models constitute a frozen image, necessarily in conflict with such activated sacred space. Despite this seemingly contradictory polarization, modeling "snapshots" of activated spaces enriches our understanding and documentation of the past and advances previously stagnant historiographic queries. In particular, immaterial elements such as sound and movement can be

made communicable through digital reconstructions. The combination of 3D reconstructions, virtual acoustics (auralizations) and historical performance practice enables immersive simulations of the multi-sensory experience of premodern sacred spaces.

Responding in part to the sensory turn, this workshop seeks papers that address the lost or ephemeral aspects of premodern sacred spaces in two senses:

- material, installation, or object-oriented holistic approaches to reconstruction,
- innovative approaches to modeling or reconstructing embodied experience, visually and aurally induced imaginaries, and sensorial interactions with sacred space through, for example, agent-based modeling.

We foresee three possible thematic sessions:

Session 1: Spatial Voids: Modeling the Gray Zones

Advancements in 3D modeling have significantly improved the understanding of complex architectures. However, ensuring academic accuracy in these visualizations remains a subject of debate. This session invites papers addressing the challenges of digitally reconstructing lost or significantly altered buildings, proposing methods to compensate for limited historical data, and transparently conveying interpretative decisions to viewers.

Session 2: Digitally Reconstructing the Ephemeral: Music, Sound and Textile Architectures

In light of recent interdisciplinary progress in the emergent field of sound studies, this session seeks papers addressing the incorporation of acoustic data into spatial models. A special focus on textiles is desired but not required for this session, as such virtual soundscape modeling is uniquely impacted by ephemeral materials, like veils, curtains, or other architectural installations.

Session 3: Simulating Sensoriums: Virtual Experiences and the Problem of Sensory Archiving

Sensory studies open new questions for spatial modeling even beyond auralization processes. This session seeks papers taking new approaches to the integration of sensation into virtual models, for example, through agent-based modeling which might simulate historical performance practices.

The decidedly interdisciplinary workshop addresses art and architecture historians, musicologists and musicians, digital engineers, 3D environmental artists, (archo)acousticians and sound engineers.

Submission:

We are particularly interested in receiving proposals for 20-minute papers presenting results from collaborative endeavors and incorporating problems, methodological challenges, open questions, and potential next steps in the field. We welcome submissions and papers in German, Italian, and English.

Interested speakers are invited to submit an abstract of their proposed paper (max. 500 words) and a short CV (max. 300 words) through the Bibliotheca Hertziana's recruitment platform by June 15th: <https://recruitment.biblhertz.it/auth/Apply/0/Position/13565982/Step/0>

The organization will provide accommodation for speakers and will offer reimbursement –within reasonable bounds– for travel expenses.

Reference:

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