Session at SAH 2027 (Chicago, 14-18 Apr 27)

Voco Chicago Downtown/Holiday Inn Chicago Downtown 350 W. Wolf Point Plaza Building 1, Chicago, Illinois 60654, Apr 14–18, 2027
Deadline: Jun 8, 2026

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Surrogate Sites: Architecture, Landscape, and Environmental Substitution Design

Session at the Society of Architectural Historians Annual International Conference

Across the architectural and landscape disciplines, surrogate sites have long served as laboratories for testing ideas about environment and design. From alpine observatories to desert proving grounds and subarctic research stations, purpose-built simulation terrains have functioned as controlled environments where conditions that could not be accessed elsewhere were modeled and materially constructed. Whether Han dynasty hunting parks, “third nature” Renaissance gardens, or the contemporary planetary analogs of NASA, such sites are never neutral. Located in territories cast as “remote,” “empty,” or “extreme” through imperial, scientific, or military imaginaries, they operate as territorial proving grounds where imagined frontiers, earthly or otherwise, were constituted, appropriated, and made actionable.

Recent scholarship in the environmental humanities, critical outer space studies, and place-based sciences demonstrates how these terrains reproduced frontier narratives on Earth and beyond. Architectural and landscape histories reveal how these environments of substitution not only modeled future climates, altered ecologies, or extraterrestrial worlds, but also extended logics of extractivism, militarization, and colonial dispossession across shifting geographic and interplanetary scales. How did designers manipulate soils, topographies, microclimates, or entire ecologies to produce surrogates for elsewhere—whether a historical landscape, a colonial frontier, a military theater, or off-earth? What material and representational strategies rendered such sites plausible, persuasive, or politically instrumental?

This session explores how architecture and landscape architecture have shaped these substitute grounds and how built form and environmental simulation intersected with contested territorial histories. We invite papers from any period or geography on how the construction of microclimates, artificial ecologies, or simulated environments has reconfigured disciplinary methods, mediated between scientific abstraction and material worlds, or transformed the logistics of environmental design. Approaching these sites as “environmental substitution design” illuminates how spatial disciplines construct worlds through logics of proxy, substitution, and surrogacy; techniques that continue to shape how environments are designed, represented, and inhabited.

Session Chairs: Clemens Finkelstein, KHK global dis:connect / Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich; and Anny Li, Harvard University

Submission Guidelines:
- Confirmed 2027 Session Chairs are not eligible to submit to the Call for Papers
- Abstracts must be under 300 words.
- The title cannot exceed 65 characters, including spaces and punctuation.
- Abstracts and titles must follow the Chicago Manual of Style.
- Only one abstract per conference by an author or co-author may be submitted.
- A maximum of three (3) authors per abstract will be accepted.
- Please attach a two-page CV in PDF format.

Abstracts are to be submitted online using the link https://app.oxfordabstracts.com/auth?redirect=/stages/81452/submitter

https://sah.org/conferences/chicago-2027/

Reference:

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