Call for papers: *Historical interiors and the digital – the possibilities and limits of virtual reconstructions for research*
Paris, Versailles, November 17–18, 2022

The virtual reconstruction of historical interiors – from architecture to wall decoration and furniture to textiles – has been a proven instrument of cultural mediation in recent years, particularly in museums, exhibitions and/or for the study of historical monuments (for instance in archaeology). Questions of spatial proportions and fundamental architectural units are today at the forefront, with emphasis often placed on the possibility of visiting these spaces virtually, either on a 2D screen or with an immersive headset.

However, when it comes to the recreation of the aesthetic characteristics of interiors, which are one of the key issues for their understanding, the possibilities of these new models seem limited. Depending largely on the harmonious interaction of different materials such as woods, metals, and textiles, as well as the structures of their respective surfaces, the nuances of colour or gold, or even the traces of artisanship, the existing solutions in rendering the materiality of an historic interior remain insufficient, both aesthetically and scientifically. The hope to swiftly overcome the excessively sanitized surfaces of digital models, expressed in 2013 (Kohle 2013, p. 166), has not yet come to fruition. Nevertheless, there is more to it than that, as the possibilities of using virtual reconstruction effectively for researching historical interiors - for example, through the virtual insertion of materials that are no longer ethically justifiable or prohibited today - are not fully exploited.

Focusing on the possibilities and limits of virtual reconstructions of historical interiors, of which questions of materiality are only one aspect, this conference highlights the fundamental issues that occupy current research. Firstly, there is the question, not yet completely resolved, of the utility of three-dimensional virtual models – often drawn from the video-game sector – as instruments or even auxiliaries for research in art history. We cannot respond satisfactorily without also exploring the genesis and transformation of the object studied and the representation of one or more states including later modifications. Although research, and in particular archaeology, has already established a tradition of haptic and digital modelling of space, the history of art still seems to be far behind on this front (Messemer 2020). Such a circumspect attitude is off pace with the growing use of three-dimensional models and augmented-reality applications for the transmission of knowledge in museums or in connection with monuments and places of memory (Jeffrey 2021).

Moreover, this disciplinary reservation seems to contradict the often reaffirmed claim of the capacity of digital models to densify scientific reflection beyond the possibilities of language (Pfarr-Harst 2020). Analysis of historical interiors involves confronting architectural structures along with moving objects. However, in the scientific use of three-dimensional models to date, these structures and objects have largely been considered separately. This is why most discourses are interested either in the architectural dimension of spaces or in the objects themselves, considered in isolation. In this context, we would note that the 3D modelling of objects (e.g. pieces of furniture) can give rise to discussions of notions of reproduction and authenticity or, more recently, to questions of cultural appropriation (Jeffrey et al. 2020; Jeffs 2020).

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As for the *mise-en-scène* of social representations and power (Hoppe/De Jonge/Breitling 2018), embodied in the visual and bodily perception of spaces (in their use, particularly ceremonial), this remains insufficiently conveyed by virtual reconstructions, as does the dimension of the use of objects – chairs or desks, for example – as constituting the experience of the room. In addition to the exploration of scenarios of historical utilization in comparison with modern exigencies, the modelling of the acoustic and thermal properties of spaces that were abundantly furnished with textiles (carpets and rugs, curtains, wall hangings, baldachins, and Gobelin tapestries) opens up new research perspectives of the utmost interest. Generally speaking, the absence of those sensory elements integral to the art of interior design constitutes a considerable limitation in the potential benefits of virtual representation.

The international conference – organized jointly by the German Center for Art History Paris (DFK Paris), the Mobilier national, and the Centre de recherche du château de Versailles (CRCV) – will allow for an exchange of information among specialists from the world of museums, historians and historians of art, and experts in digital reconstruction and 3D modelling. It will give occasion to reflect on the stages prior to modelling and virtual restoration, on the creation phase of the tool and dialogues between art historians and technicians, and finally on the future and the public's reception of such tools. The conference will also enable young researchers to present their own research projects and submit them for discussion in a circle of specialists in the field.

The symposium will take place in Paris, both in person and via videoconference (DUAL MODE), in the conference room of the DFK Paris and the auditorium of the palace of Versailles on November 17 and 18, 2022.

Organizing Committee: Muriel Barbier (Mobilier national), Marc Bayard (Mobilier national), Markus A. Castor (DFK Paris), Jörg Ebeling (DFK Paris), Anne Klammt (DFK Paris), Benjamin Ringot (CRCV), Mathieu da Vinha (CRCV)

Presentations will be limited to 30 minutes. Proposals – in French or English – of around 3,000 characters (including spaces) must include the title of the paper, along with an abstract of its argument, and be accompanied by a short biography (1,200 characters) and the contact details of the candidate. Materials must be received before 5 June 2022, via email to *interieursetnumerique@dfk-paris.org*.

Applicants will receive a response regarding their participation in the conference by 5 July 2022.

Selected bibliography

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Rensinghoff, Berenike, *Eine digitale Teilrekonstruktion des Palais Beauharnais in Paris : Open Source Modellierung und Evaluation verschiedener 3D-Viewer = A digital partial reconstruction of the Palais Beauharnais in Paris; Open Source Modelling and Evaluation of various 3D Viewers*, Bamberg: Masterarbeit, Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg/Masterarbeit, Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften Coburg, 2021.

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