



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Department of
Philosophy and
Cultural Heritage

PhD Programme
in the History
of Arts

7th Postgraduate International Conference



PETER PAUL RUBENS (1577-1640), *YOUNG MAN EMBRACING A WOMAN*, BEFORE 1632-1633, BLACK CHALK, SANGUINE, WHITE HIGHLIGHTS ON PAPIER BEIGE, 32.5 X 30.1 CM, AMSTERDAM, HISTORICH MUSEUM, LEGS C. J. FODOR (INV. TA 10301).

UNVEILING THE VOID: ERASURE, LATENCY, POTENTIALITY

October 8, 9, 10 2025

Ca' Foscari Zattere (CFZ) – Aula Tesa 1

Fondamenta Zattere, Dorsoduro 1392, 30123, Venezia (VE)

Organizing committee

Asia Benedetti

Ester Giachetti

Ilaria Grippa

Marta Del Mutolo

I. Call for Proposals

The 7th Postgraduate International Conference aims to explore the concept of the *relative void* and its various manifestations within the visual arts. From the idea of absolute void as a concept beyond human measurement, the conference will address the meanings and possibilities of this notion, as relied on movement and explosion. From this vantage point, the void emerges as a “scientific reserve not yet exploited” (Burini 2010) as “not a lack but an opportunity” (DeLillo in Watson, 2014), highlighting its expressive and communicative potentials.

Commonly defined as an “empty space”, the concept of the void is initially apprehended through its spatial connotation. Throughout scientific history, its meaning has evolved from from the Aristotelian conception of the void as an absence of matter, to its empirical demonstration in physics, notably through Torricelli’s experiment. In architectural discourse and practice, the void persists as a foundational spatial construct (Espuelas 2004; Siprito 2011; Ulisse 2018). Moreover, the philosophical dialogue between the binary structures of European thought and the Chinese language of the void as an integral element of natural existence, has complicated its interpretation (Jullien 1991).

One of the central aspects that enables a critical engagement with the concept of the void is its fundamentally relational nature. Drawing on Arthur Schopenhauer’s reflections in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), wherein the relationship between subject and object is foundational, and no object can be conceived without a subject to perceive it, this conference approaches the notion of the void from the perspective of its inextricable relationality. The relationship between void and presence is therefore crucial, especially in terms of how void can evolve when understood as a potential space.

What role can art play in interrogating the void, and how can it open up new readings of history and art histories? What practices and forms fall under its definitional scope across different media?

In the plastic arts, the void can be firstly conceived as the blank space situated between the figures: as the non-figurative place within a figurative composition, shaped by the rules of perspective and representation. Yet, from the late eighteenth century, with the rupture of the representational systems, and under the impact of modernist aesthetics and the historical traumas of the twentieth century, the void becomes an active presence. In its intrinsic complexity, the artwork itself can be understood as an object generated from the void, which precedes creation and endures beyond it as a persistent and inescapable presence.

The Conference invites contributions that explore the *relative void* as a structural condition of its relational nature, tracing its presence across historical periods — from the medieval and early modern eras to contemporary art — and through diverse visual media. Particular attention will be given to exploring its multiple manifestations, including:

1. Erasure

The void can emerge as a site, on the surface or support of the artwork, that has been deliberately stripped of figuration or matter. It is the presence of acts of removals, carried out with the intent to negate what is perceived as secondary, non-essential or intrusive. Erasure eventually disrupts narrative, undermines continuity, and resists total representation. It engages with the phenomena of *repentir*, historical effacements, and cancel culture within visual and media studies.

This form of absence assumes profound conceptual significance, as in Christian Boltanski’s *Personnes*, where empty garments evoke the absent bodies they once contained. The clothes

become a metonymy for the human figure (Trasforini 2012); the void becomes a metonymy for absence. The residual absence serves as a fragmentary support that no longer tells its story in full, evoking Marc Augé's reflection on the void as a damaged or incomplete casing (Augè 2004).

2. Latency

This second axis understands the void under its latent dimension, when absence simultaneously carries the potential for presence and reflects a latent quality waiting for realization. As a blank page or an empty space of exposition and performance, the void marks a place that presupposes a state of suspension.

In some cases, artists can choose to leave a blank, empty space: the void becomes a component of the creation of an artwork, already designed but deferring its final completion by deliberately leaving a suspended space. Yet, latency is not only conscious: the void can emerge from unconscious memories, and then resurface through artistic intervention or judgement. The void becomes an esthetic and moral presence, frequented through its non-frequenting, represented through its non-representation. It involves questions of time and temporality, as the unfolding of a previously hidden detail and the reconfiguration of memory.

3. Potentiality

This final axis considers void as the reflective interval where abandoned paths, forgotten alternatives and unrealized possibilities may emerge. Exploring these lost and unexploded paths reveals the variants of a single realized historical model and allows for the emergence of unexplored perspectives and different ways of interpreting non-linear history.

In this sense, the void can be understood as an intermediate space of potential, between individual experience and History, where both merge and are mutually reconfigured (Burini 2010). The void as a space of potential opens up possibilities for rethinking the past, present, and future.

II. How to Participate

The 7th Postgraduate International Conference is open to all Ph.D. students.

If you are interested in attending, please submit a proposal for a 20-minute presentation in English to: infoveniceconference@gmail.com.

Deadline for Submissions: **May 19th, 2025**

Successful applicants will be notified by: **May 26th, 2025**

The proposal should include the following details:

- Name and surname
- Contact details (email address and telephone number)
- Academic affiliation
- Provisional title
- Abstract (maximum 400 words)
- Curriculum Vitae (maximum 150 words)

Please combine all the information into a single PDF file with the following naming format: **Surname_Name_Title** (e.g., Dimmick_Lawrence_Architectural Elements of Space Identity).

The conference will be held both on-site and online.

While attendance is recommended for all days, online participation will also be available.

Language of the conference: English.

Further program details will be shared upon selection of participants.

There is no conference fee; however, participants are responsible for their own transportation and lodging.

Selected papers will be considered for publication as part of the conference proceedings. Successful candidates will receive detailed information in due course.

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