

Reconfiguring Sacred Experience: AI, Space, and Paraliturgical Practice in Deus in Machina

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Received 8 August 2026

Revised 12 September 2026

Accepted 27 September 2026

Published 30 September 2026

Abstract: The introduction of artificial intelligence into religious spaces not only brings new forms of mediation but also raises renewed questions concerning sacred space, religious authority, embodied experience, and the boundaries of liturgical practice. This article examines Deus in Machina, an experimental art project developed in 2024 through a collaboration between Peterskapelle in Lucerne, Switzerland, and the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HSLU). Drawing on preliminary survey data released by the project team and engaging with scholarship on digital religion, religious mediation, and spatial theory, the article investigates how the introduction of AI into an active Christian worship space reconfigures spatial experience. The analysis proceeds through a three-part framework of construction–deconstruction–reconfiguration. First, it examines how the digital interface, religious architecture, and embodied actions jointly construct a hybrid interactive space. Second, it considers how AI-generated responses destabilize established understandings of presence, embodiment, and religious authority. Finally, it argues that the significance of the project lies not in whether artificial intelligence can reproduce or replace established forms of sacred experience, but in how it reconfigures the mediating conditions through which individuals encounter religious representations. Building on the particular circumstance that the spatial form of the confessional was retained while sacramental confession itself did not take place, the article further proposes that the installation may be understood as a spatial practice with paraliturgical characteristics: it draws upon liturgical spatial forms, embodied structures, and religious symbols without itself constituting formal liturgy. In this respect, Deus in Machina provides an experimental case through which to examine emerging relationships among art, liturgy, and sacred space in the age of digital technology.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; Sacred space; Digital religion; Paraliturgical practice; Deus in Machina



ISSN 2759-8764 (Online)
ISSN 2760-330X (Print)

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Introduction

In 2024, Peterskapelle in Lucerne, Switzerland, collaborated with the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HSLU) to develop the experimental art project Deus in Machina. The project installed an AI-driven digital representation of Jesus within the church, allowing visitors to enter an enclosed installation structured around the spatial form of a confessional and engage in real-time spoken dialogue with the digital figure. Rather than simply presenting a digital religious image, the project sought to explore two inter-related questions: how people interact with an artificial in-

telligence endowed with a religious identity, and how such an AI responds to questions concerning faith, everyday life, and ethical concerns.¹ The case attracted considerable attention not merely because artificial intelligence appeared in the figure of “Jesus.” More significantly, the technological installation was situated neither in a conventional technology exhibition nor in a virtual environment, but within a Christian space that continued to retain its religious identity and function. Artificial intelligence, artistic experimentation, re-

¹ Philipp Haslbauer, Carolin Reichherzer, Marco Schmid, and Aljoscha Smolic, “Deus in Machina: A Conversational AI for Spiritual Experience” (manuscript submitted to ACM, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, 2025), 1–2.

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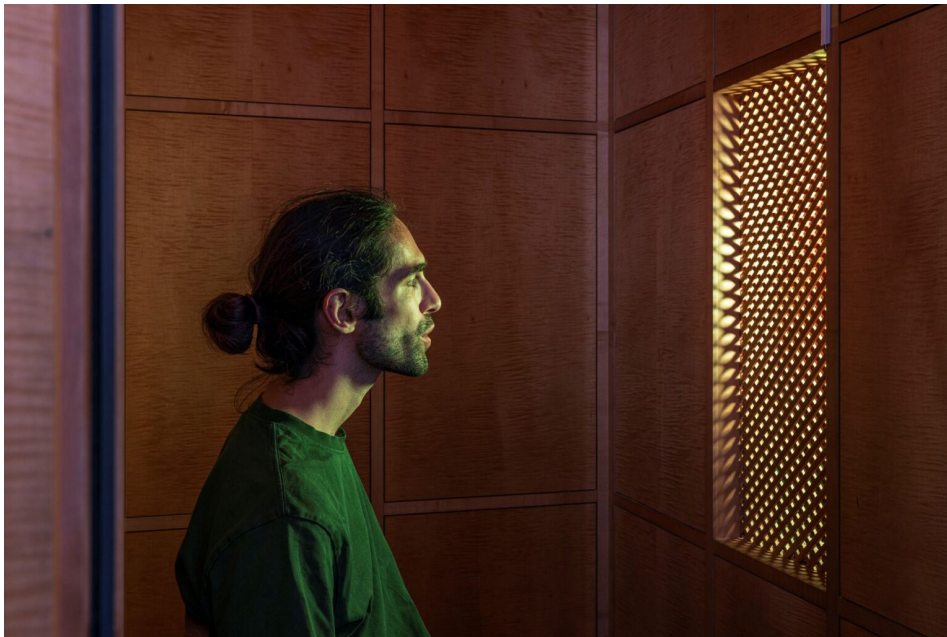


Figure 1 | Promotional image for *Deus in Machina*, illustrating the envisioned face-to-face interaction between a visitor and the digital representation of Jesus, 2024.

Photograph: Peter Diem/Lukasgesellschaft

ligious representation, ecclesiastical architecture, and embodied human practice were thus brought into a shared spatial relationship.

Reducing this case to questions such as whether “AI can become Jesus” or whether artificial intelligence can produce an “authentic” religious experience risks reproducing a binary opposition between technology and religion: technology is understood, on the one hand, as opening new possibilities for religious experience and, on the other, as threatening the authenticity of established forms of sacred experience. Birgit Meyer’s work on religious mediation offers an important corrective to this binary framework. Meyer argues that the apparent “immediacy” of religious experience does not precede mediation; rather, the sense of immediacy is itself often produced through processes of mediation. Religious images, sounds, bodies, rituals, and material objects are therefore not supplementary to sacred experience but constitute crucial mediating conditions through which the sacred becomes perceptible and experienceable. A medium may temporarily recede from attention when it operates successfully, generating a sense of direct access to the religious object; conversely, it may become highly visible when disrupted by technical failure, unfamiliarity, or controversy.¹

Accordingly, this article does not seek to determine whether artificial intelligence is capable of “carrying” or producing an authentic sacred presence. Instead, it reformulates the central research question as follows: When artificial intelligence enters a Christian space that continues to

serve a religious function, how does it reorganize the spatial and mediating conditions through which individuals perceive, approach, and interpret the sacred? To address this question, the article takes the preliminary findings presented by HSLU in *Sakrale Simulation: Die KI im spirituellen Dialog* as its principal empirical material and brings them into dialogue with Meyer’s account of religious mediation and immediacy, Heidi Campbell’s work on digital religion and religious authority, Kim Knott’s spatial approach to the study of religion, and Jonathan Koestlé-Cate’s discussion of the paraliturgical dimensions that may emerge when contemporary art enters ecclesiastical contexts. The analysis is organized through the conceptual sequence of construction–deconstruction–reconfiguration. These terms do not designate three successive historical stages; rather, they identify three interrelated dynamics operating simultaneously within the installation. Digital technology constructs new forms of interaction and spatial experience while at the same time destabilizing established configurations of presence, embodiment, and religious authority, thereby enabling these elements to be reconfigured under new mediating conditions. The central argument of this article is therefore that the significance of *Deus in Machina* lies neither in its capacity to reproduce established forms of religious experience nor simply in the erosion of sacredness through digital technology. Rather, the installation places the previously relatively stable relationships among body, medium, religious representation, authority, and spatial practice within the worship space into a renewed process of negotiation.

¹ Birgit Meyer, “Mediation and Immediacy: Sensational Forms, Semiotic Ideologies and the Question of the Medium,” *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 19, no. 1 (2011): 23–27, 32–33, doi:10.1111/j.1469-8676.2010.00137.x.

Deus in Machina as an Experimental Interactive Space

Deus in Machina was not an autonomous AI system operating without predefined parameters. According to the system description provided by HSLU, the AI was given explicit behavioral instructions in advance: it was instructed to appear in the role of Jesus while responding as a pastoral mediator. The system was required to communicate in the same language as the visitor, incorporate stories from the New Testament into its responses, and, depending on the context, offer support, explanation, or further questions. The so-called “AI Jesus,” therefore, cannot be understood as a single speaking subject. Its responses emerged through the interaction of multiple layers:

Christian narrative resources → human-defined system instructions → large language model → visual representation of Jesus → screen and voice → church and confessional space → visitors’ embodied and linguistic actions.

From the perspective of media studies, this chain of relations is particularly significant. What visitors encountered was not artificial intelligence in the abstract, but a composite mediating system shaped through theological selection, technological design, visual representation, and spatial arrangement. At the same time, interaction with the installation followed a relatively defined spatial and embodied sequence. Once a visitor closed the door of the installation, the figure of Jesus appeared on the screen. The visitor was required to initiate the conversation, after which the system responded in the same language. The exchange ended after a maximum of nine conversational turns or when the visitor reopened the door. The interaction, therefore, did not take place within a purely “virtual space.” Bodily actions—including entering, closing the door, speaking, waiting, listening, and leaving—constituted an integral part of the encounter with the work.

Approximately 900 conversations in multiple languages were recorded over the course of the project, with the preliminary analysis initially focusing on more than 500 German-language exchanges. The project team also collected 294 visitor questionnaires, of which 246 included additional written feedback.¹ This article does not undertake a new statistical analysis of these data. Rather, it treats the preliminary findings presented by the project team as empirical case material through which to examine how visitors described and interpreted their encounters with the installation. It is important to note that HSLU itself characterized these findings as preliminary and identified several areas for further investigation, including the AI-generated responses, multilingual data, relationships between emotional states and conversational topics, and potential algorithmic bias. Accordingly, the framework of construction–deconstruction–reconfiguration proposed here should not be understood as a further quantitative analysis of the sur-

vey data. It functions instead as an interpretive framework through which the existing material is examined from the perspectives of contemporary art, religious mediation, and spatial studies.

Sacred Space as Relational Rather than Fixed: From Site to Spatial Relations

Before considering how artificial intelligence affects sacred space, it is necessary to clarify how the concept of “sacred space” is understood in this article. In earlier approaches to the study of religion, sacred space was often conceived as a distinctive domain set apart from profane space. More recent spatial approaches, however, have increasingly moved away from treating sacredness as an intrinsic and fixed property of a particular building or site. Kim Knott’s spatial approach to the study of religion is particularly instructive in this regard. Rather than treating religious space as a static container, Knott emphasizes the dynamic relations among body and space, the multiple dimensions of space, and processes of sacralization. Her approach draws particular attention to the ways in which space, the body, the “sacred,” and processes of sacralization are mutually embedded.²

This perspective is especially relevant to Deus in Machina. Peterskapelle is not a neutral “exhibition space,” yet neither can its religious character be attributed solely to its architectural form. The church continues to function as a religious space through the ongoing relations among architecture, religious symbols, liturgical practices, clergy, communal practices, embodied actions, and historical memory. When the AI installation entered this environment, therefore, what occurred was not simply the insertion of a technological object into an already constituted sacred space. Rather, a new mediating element entered an existing configuration of spatial relations and participated in the ongoing production of spatial meaning (**Figure 2**).

This understanding also corresponds to the particular contextual conditions that arise when contemporary art enters ecclesiastical spaces. As Jonathan Koestlé-Cate argues, contemporary artworks situated in churches are difficult to understand as autonomous objects detached from their contexts, since the religious functions, symbolic structures, and institutional conditions of the church significantly shape their reception. Compared with conventional exhibition spaces, the ecclesiastical context intervenes more directly in the production of the work’s meaning.³ The object of analysis in Deus in Machina, therefore, should not be limited to the digital figure of “AI Jesus” itself. It must instead encompass the broader spatial configuration produced through the relations among the digital representation, ecclesiastical architecture, the spatial form of the confessional, visitors’ embodied practices, and religious expectations.

¹ Hochschule Luzern – Informatik. Sakrale Simulation: Die KI im spirituellen Dialog: Erste Auswertung der Daten aus der Kunstaussstellung “Deus in machina.” Presentation slides. Peterskapelle Luzern, November 27, 2024.

² Kim Knott, “Spatial Theory and Method for the Study of Religion,” *Temenos* 41, no. 2 (2005): 153–184, 153.

³ Jonathan Koestlé-Cate, “Singularity and specificity: Writing on art,” *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* 5, no. 1 (2012): 113.



Figure 2 | Spatial configuration of the Deus in Machina installation at Peterskapelle, Lucerne, 2024.

Photograph: Peter Diem/Lukasgesellschaft

How Digital Mediation Constructs a New Hybrid Spatial Experience

Within this network of relations, one of the first transformations introduced by artificial intelligence concerns the structure of viewing. Paintings, sculptures, murals, and icons in traditional religious art generally exist as relatively stable objects. Although viewers may establish interactive relationships with such images through prayer, contemplation, or liturgical practice, the images themselves do not generate verbal responses in real time. *Deus in Machina* alters this relationship. The figure of Jesus on the screen functions simultaneously as a religious representation to be viewed and as an interactive presence capable of generating immediate responses. Visitors no longer simply confront an image; they enter an interactive system composed of sound, visual representation, language generation, and spatial action. Viewing thus shifts from predominantly unidirectional perception toward a form of dialogical participation. Heidi Campbell's research on digital religion provides a useful framework for understanding this shift. Digital media, in her account, do not simply transfer existing religious practices into online environments; they participate in reshaping religious practice, identity, and relationships to religious authority. In particular, Campbell cautions against generalized claims that the internet simply "erodes" or "destroys" religious authority, proposing instead that authority be examined across distinct dimensions, including roles, structures, ideologies, and texts.¹

From this perspective, *Deus in Machina* does not construct a "virtual religious space" separate from the physical church. Rather, it produces a hybrid environment in which a technological interface and a material religious space are mutually embedded. Visitors must physically enter the church, position their bodies within the confessional-like installation, and initiate the system through speech. Digital technology, in other words, does not eliminate embodiment or material space; it reorganizes the ways in which bodies relate to and act within space. This observation can be further understood through Meyer's critique of a simple opposition between the digital and the material. Media in religious experience are never merely passive channels of transmission. Material objects, sounds, visual forms, and embodied perception participate in shaping how particular experiences come to be recognized and interpreted as "religious" or "sacred."²

The appearance of "AI Jesus" should therefore not be understood as an instance in which "immaterial digital technology" replaces material religion. It is more accurately approached as a reconfiguration of the material-digital conditions of religious experience. The HSLU questionnaire provides empirical material relevant to this interpretation. A majority of respondents indicated that the system respected their worldview; at the same time, respondents who regarded the interaction as spiritually or religiously stimulating outnumbered those who explicitly rejected such a char-

¹ Heidi Campbell, "Who's Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 3 (2007): 1043–1062.

² Meyer, "Mediation and Immediacy," 27–31, 36.

acterization.¹ These findings cannot, of course, demonstrate that AI produced a form of sacred presence. They do, however, suggest that digital mediation does not in itself preclude participants from interpreting an encounter in spiritual or religious terms. The subjects raised by visitors also extended well beyond the evaluation of an artwork in a conventional exhibition context. Conversations addressed love and sexuality, death, illness, guilt, war, inner peace, doubts concerning faith, questions about the Church, LGBTQ+ issues, and feminism.² The spatial function of the installation was consequently altered: rather than serving solely as a site for the display of digital art, it temporarily became an environment capable of accommodating existential questions, religious uncertainty, and personal reflection.

Presence, Media Visibility, and Religious Authority

The same technological mechanisms that enable interaction, however, also destabilize the experience they produce. The most fundamental question is one of interlocution: when the figure of Jesus on the screen responds to a visitor, with whom—or with what—is the visitor actually interacting? The digital figure possesses a face and a voice and is capable of generating immediate verbal responses, thereby producing a certain sense of subject-like presence. At the same time, visitors remain aware that no human person stands behind the screen as the actual interlocutor. Presence thus assumes a condition of structural ambiguity. Meyer's analysis of mediation and immediacy offers a particularly useful framework for understanding this tension. When a medium functions smoothly, it may temporarily recede from the experiencer's attention, generating a sense of directness or immediacy. When the medium malfunctions, appears unnatural, or fails to meet the participant's expectations, however, its technological character may rapidly become highly visible.³

Visitor responses to "AI Jesus" illustrate precisely this oscillation. Some participants described the conversations as inspiring or conducive to reflection, while others explicitly emphasized the system's lack of empathy and questioned whether artificial intelligence could establish genuine interpersonal intimacy. Still others criticized its responses as formulaic, overly reliant on counter-questions, or insufficiently responsive to the specific concerns being expressed. In other words, when the system operated in ways that corresponded to visitors' expectations, the technological medium could partially recede from attention, allowing the content of the conversation to become more salient. When its responses failed to meet those expectations, however, the religious identity of "Jesus" could quickly give way to the technological identity of an "AI system." The question of presence consequently extends into the problem of religious authority. As Campbell argues, digital environments do not simply

eliminate traditional religious authority; rather, they may reorganize the conditions under which authority is constituted and recognized. Religious authority in digitally mediated contexts must therefore be examined across multiple dimensions, including roles, structures, ideologies, and textual sources.⁴

Deus in Machina renders this problem particularly complex. At the level of visual representation, the installation directly invokes the figure of Jesus, who occupies a position of exceptional symbolic authority within Christian tradition. Yet the specific verbal responses attributed to this figure are generated by a system whose behavioral parameters were established by a technical team and whose operation depends upon training data and a large language model. A pronounced asymmetry consequently emerges: the religious representation carries an exceptionally high degree of symbolic authority, while the technical system generating its responses possesses neither corresponding religious authorization nor human subjectivity. Strongly negative responses recorded in the HSLU survey indicate that this disjunction was not merely theoretical. Some participants explicitly rejected the presentation of artificial intelligence as Jesus and argued that neither a machine nor an individual should assume the authority to speak in this identity. What "AI Jesus" places under pressure, therefore, is not only the boundary of artistic representation but also the processes through which religious authority is attributed, mediated, and recognized through images, language, and technological forms.

From Fixed Sacred Space to Mediated Sacred Encounter

If the analysis were to stop at "construction" and "deconstruction," it would risk reproducing another binary framework. An emphasis on construction may lead digital technology to be understood primarily as a new instrument for extending religious experience, whereas an emphasis on deconstruction may cast technology principally as a force that diminishes embodiment, community, and authenticity. Taken together, however, the approaches of Knott and Meyer suggest a third possibility. Knott allows us to understand space not as a fixed container that exists prior to practice, but as something continually constituted through relations among bodies, social relations, material conditions, and symbolic meanings.⁵ Meyer further demonstrates that the apparent "immediacy" of religious experience is itself part of a process of mediation rather than its opposite.⁶ What changes when artificial intelligence enters a worship space, therefore, may not primarily concern whether "the sacred" continues to exist, but rather the reorganization of the mediating conditions through which the sacred is approached and interpreted. In established worship settings, these conditions may be sustained through the interrelation of archi-

¹ Haslbauer et al., 2025, pp. 6–7, Figs. 7a–7b.

² HSLU Informatik, "Sakrale Simulation," supra note 1, slide 10–12.

³ Meyer, "Mediation and Immediacy," 23–26, 32–33.

⁴ Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?" 1058.

⁵ Knott, "Spatial Theory," 163.

⁶ Meyer, "Mediation and Immediacy," 23, 26–27.

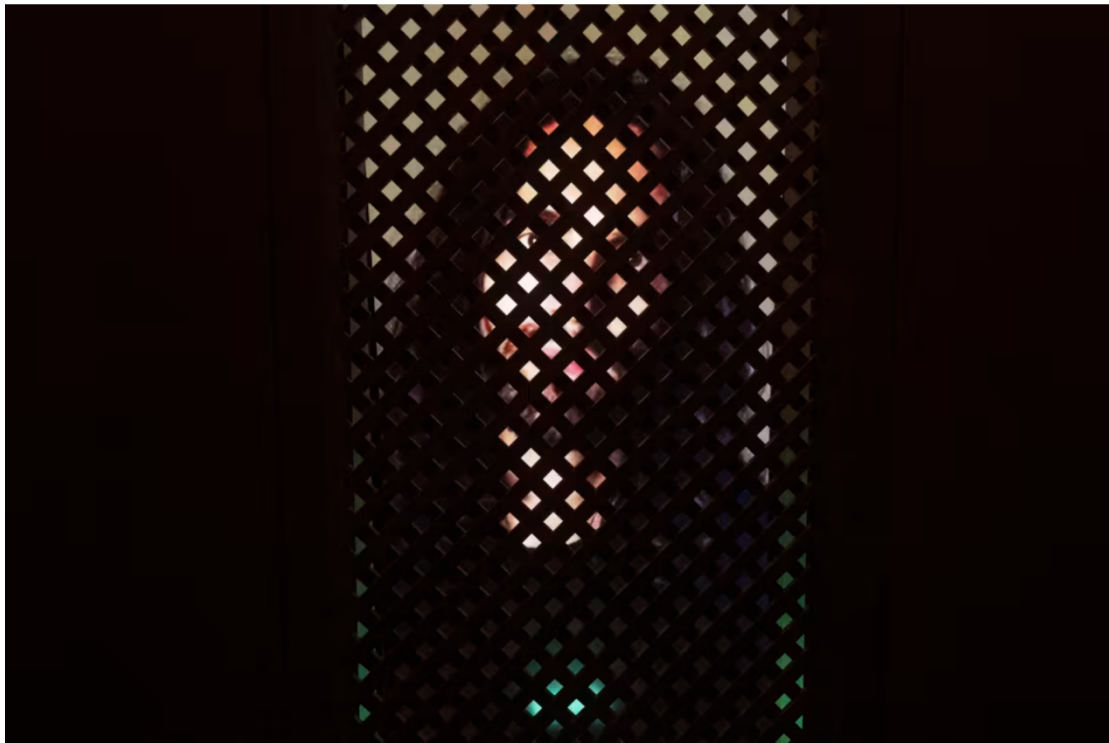


Figure 3 | View through the lattice of the confessional-like installation used in *Deus in Machina*, Peterskapelle, Lucerne, 2024.

Photograph: Urs Flueeler / Keystone via AP

texture, liturgy, religious images, clergy, sound, embodied practices, and community.

In *Deus in Machina*, this relational configuration may be represented as follows:

religious tradition → curatorial and research intentions
→ technological design → system instructions → large language model → digital avatar → screen and sound → confessional-like space → visitor's body → interpretation and response

For the purposes of this analysis, I provisionally describe this configuration as a “mediated chain of sacred encounter.” The concept is not intended to suggest that technology itself generates “the sacred.” Rather, it emphasizes that the religious significance experienced or attributed by visitors cannot be located within any single technological object; instead, it emerges through a relational configuration organized across multiple mediating processes. This configuration is itself highly unstable. On the one hand, a substantial number of participants described the experience as spiritually or religiously stimulating. On the other, among the 294 survey respondents, 246 provided additional written feedback in which positive and negative evaluations were broadly comparable, while the project team also noted that some negative responses were directly related to technical limitations. The same mediating conditions may therefore give rise to markedly different interpretations of the encounter. For some participants, interaction with AI reduced the pressure associated with speaking to a religious author-

ity figure or an unfamiliar person, enabling them to raise highly personal questions. For others, the machine identity of the interlocutor itself undermined the credibility of the exchange. *Deus in Machina*, therefore, did not establish a new and stable form of “digital sacred space.” More precisely, it produced a spatial condition in which sacred meaning remained subject to ongoing negotiation.

“Non-Confession” in the Confessional: The Analytical Possibility of Paraliturgical Space

One of the most significant features of the project for further analysis is the discrepancy between the spatial form of the confessional and the practices that actually took place within it. The installation appropriated a spatial form with a clearly established history in Catholic liturgical and sacramental practice. Visitors entered a relatively enclosed environment and engaged in private conversation before a digital figure visually identified as Jesus. At the level of spatial form alone, this configuration readily evokes the practice of confession. Yet HSLU's preliminary analysis of participants' actual interactions explicitly concluded: “Keine Beichte” (“No confession”).¹ It would therefore be inaccurate to describe the project as an instance of “AI confession” or as an AI system administering confession (**Figure 3**).

¹ HSLU Informatik, “Sakrale Simulation,” supra note 1, slide 14 (Folie “Verhalten”).

More importantly, this finding demonstrates that the reproduction of a liturgically associated spatial form does not automatically produce the corresponding liturgical or sacramental practice. The confessional may activate cultural and religious associations with privacy, disclosure, religious authority, and introspection, but these associations do not mean that visitors participated in sacramental confession in the Catholic sense. This discrepancy opens a possible analytical pathway through the concept of the paraliturgical. In scholarship on religious art, the term paraliturgical has been used to describe artistic and devotional forms that are closely related to formal liturgy, draw upon its forms or vocabulary, or serve religious practice without themselves constituting formal liturgy. In his discussion of contemporary art in ecclesiastical settings, Jonathan Koestlé-Cate extends this conceptual trajectory by suggesting that artworks that do not themselves belong to the liturgy may nevertheless acquire a paraliturgical dimension through their relations with ecclesiastical context, embodied action, and established religious forms.¹

Within this theoretical framework, the present article does not argue that *Deus in Machina* constitutes a “new liturgy” in any definitive sense. It advances instead a more limited interpretive proposition: the project may be understood as a spatial practice with paraliturgical characteristics. This interpretation rests on several interrelated features. The installation retains the spatial structure associated with the confessional; participation unfolds through a sequence of embodied actions—entering, becoming spatially enclosed, asking questions, listening, and leaving; the figure of Jesus gives the interaction an explicit religious semantic frame; and visitors frequently address questions concerning guilt, death, faith, and existential difficulties. At the same time, formal confession, its sacramental efficacy, and the corresponding ecclesial and institutional structures are absent.

The installation therefore occupies a liminal position among artistic spectatorship, private disclosure, religious dialogue, and liturgical form. The term paraliturgical, as employed here, does not designate the project as liturgy, nor does it make a judgment concerning its religious legitimacy. Rather, it serves as an analytical concept for describing how an artistic installation appropriates established spatial and embodied structures associated with liturgical practice while simultaneously detaching those structures from their original formal liturgical and sacramental functions.

Findings and Discussion

This conclusion also requires reconsideration of the project’s status as art. If *Deus in Machina* were understood solely as an experiment in artificial intelligence, analytical attention would primarily be directed toward system performance, language generation, and interaction design. If it were approached instead as a religious instrument, the criteria of evaluation might shift toward pastoral effectiveness, theological orthodoxy, and institutional legitimacy. The par-

ticular significance of *Deus in Machina* as an artistic experiment, however, lies precisely in the fact that it cannot be fully reduced to either of these functional categories.

Koestlé-Cate’s research on the relationship between contemporary art and ecclesiastical space suggests that, once art enters the church, the artwork and its religious context may enter into a mutually constitutive relationship. The ecclesiastical space does not merely provide a background for the work; the work may, in turn, reactivate and render newly perceptible the symbolic and institutional structures already embedded within the church.²

It is in this sense that *Deus in Machina* operates as an artistic intervention. The work neither neutralizes the theological questions carried by the figure of Jesus nor transforms the confessional into an entirely neutral chamber for digital interaction. On the contrary, it actively draws upon these pre-existing meanings, requiring visitors to move continually among different interpretive frames—those of contemporary art, artificial intelligence, and religious expectation.

The analytical significance of the work, therefore, may lie less in whether it provides a “better” religious experience than in its capacity to render ordinarily less visible mechanisms of mediation perceptible. Who is authorized to represent or speak with religious authority? What kinds of media can generate a sense of presence? What role does the body play in digitally mediated interaction? Can liturgical forms retain religious efficacy when detached from formal liturgical practice? Is the sacredness of ecclesiastical space an intrinsic property, or is it continually produced through practice? Rather than resolving these questions, *Deus in Machina* makes the tensions among them available for artistic, spatial, and religious reflection.

Conclusion

Deus in Machina provides a significant experimental case for examining the relationship among artificial intelligence, contemporary art, and Christian worship space. Through the analytical framework of construction–deconstruction–reconfiguration, this article has argued that the introduction of artificial intelligence into an ecclesiastical setting does more than add a new form of religious representation.

Through voice-based interaction, a digital avatar, embodied participation, and the spatial form of the confessional, the installation constructs a hybrid experience in which viewers become active participants in dialogue. At the same time, this interaction destabilizes established configurations of presence, religious subjecthood, and authority. When the technology operates smoothly, the medium may temporarily recede from attention; when responses fail to meet visitors’ expectations or the religious identity assumed by the system is contested, the technological apparatus itself rapidly returns to the foreground. The use of a confessional space without the actual occurrence of confession further demonstrates that no straightforward causal relationship exists be-

¹ Koestlé-Cate, “Singularity and specificity,” 115–116.

² Koestlé-Cate, “Singularity and specificity,” 109.

tween liturgically associated spatial forms and formal liturgical practice. In this respect, understanding the project as a spatial practice with paraliturgical characteristics is more precise than defining it as a form of “digital confession,” and provides a more productive framework for examining how art may operate at the boundaries of liturgical practice. The principal transformation introduced by artificial intelligence, therefore, lies not in the simple replacement of established sacred space, but in the reconfiguration of the mediating conditions of sacred experience.

When digital technologies enter worship spaces and become new mediating elements within religious experience, how are existing relationships among body, space, media, religious authority, and sacred representation reorganized? *Deus in Machina* does not provide a definitive answer to this question. Rather, it functions as an experimental site in which mechanisms of mediation that might otherwise be perceived as natural, immediate, or simply taken for granted within religious experience become newly visible. The significance of artificial intelligence for contemporary religious art may therefore lie less in its capacity to produce a new form of the “digital sacred” than in its capacity to compel renewed reflection on a more fundamental question: through

what configurations of media, bodies, and spatial relations does sacred experience become possible?

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