

Noisy Systems: Aesthetics, Epistemology, and Computation (Rome, 4-5 Jun 26)

Bibliotheca Hertziana—Max-Planck Institute for Art History in Rome, Jun 4–05, 2026

Valentine Bernasconi, Bibliotheca Hertziana

This conference proposes to examine noise as a position of reference across technical, social, and cultural domains, bringing together insights from machine learning, critical AI studies, media theory and archaeology, art history, philosophy, and practice-based research.

In machine learning and information theory, noise is typically defined as an unwanted intrusion into a signal—an error to be minimized, filtered, or regularized. Yet recent advances in large language and diffusion models place noise at the center of their operation: from randomized probabilities in token prediction to noise seeds in image, sound, and video generation. Philosophical and aesthetic perspectives have meanwhile long recognized noise as a force of disruption and invention—one that opens systems to unpredictability, difference, and transformation. Noise, in other words, is not only what obscures meaning, but also what enables new meanings to emerge.

This tension raises fundamental questions. Who determines what counts as “signal” and what is discarded as “noise”? What happens when noise is no longer conceptualized as merely impeding communication in the Shannon–Weaver sense, but becomes a constitutive part of both the channel and the model’s behavior? Such conditions call for sharper critique and theorization of what this workshop reframes as “noisy systems”. Noisy Systems: Aesthetics, Epistemology, and Computation thus proposes to examine noise as a position of reference across technical, social, and cultural domains, bringing together insights from machine learning, critical AI studies, media theory and archaeology, art history, philosophy, and practice-based research.

Scientific Organization: Violaine Boutet de Monvel, Eryk Salvaggio, Amira Moeding

PROGRAM

Thursday, 4 June 2026

10:00 – 10:10 Welcome

10:10 – 10:30 Introduction: Amira Moeding (University of Cambridge)

10:30 – 10:40 Discussion

Panel 1: Noisy LLMs

Chair: Valentine Bernasconi

10:40 – 11:00 Ryan Heuser (University of Cambridge) – The Statistical Unconscious: Noise, Desire, and the Law of AI Alignment

11:00 – 11:20 Ivar Frisch (ACS Research) – Noise Between Worlds: Computational Contingency and Representational Collision in Multi-Agent LLM Systems

11:20 – 11:40 Discussion

11:40 – 12:00 Coffee break

Panel 2: Governed Noise

Chair: Giulia Flenghi

12:00 – 12:20 Michael Castelle (University of Warwick) – Song Implements Thom: Determinism and Noise in the Statues of Contemporary AI

12:20 – 12:40 Mariya Dzhimova (University of Music and Performing Arts Munich) & Benediket Zönnchen (Munich University of Applied Sciences) – Translating Noise: The Social Construction of Indeterminacy in Art, Engineering, and Machine Learning

12:40 – 13:00 Discussion

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch break

Panel 3: Threshold Images

Chair: Ludovica Schaerf

14:00 – 14:20 Christoph Engemann (Ruhr University Bochum) – Graphs: Navigating Noise

14:20 – 14:40 Paula Muhr (Brand University of Applied Sciences) – Foregrounding Noise: Sub-threshold Analyses and 'Transparent' Visualisation in Contemporary Neuroimaging

14:40 – 15:00 Discussion

Panel 4: Signal Regimes

Chair: Eryk Salvaggio

15:00 – 15:20 Shuyi Yin (Columbia University, online) – Adjudicating Noise: Heritage Documentation and the Governance of Signal

15:20 – 15:40 Bronac Ferran (independent researcher) – Edge-Detectors: How Semiotic Noises First Permeated Postwar Concrete Texts and Early Computer Art

15:40 – 16:00 Discussion

16:20 – 17:00 Keynote: Cécile Malaspina (The School of Materialist Research)

17:00 – 17:20 Discussion

Friday, 5 June 2026

10:10 – 10:30 Introduction: Violaine Boutet de Monvel (Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History)

10:30 – 10:40 Discussion

Panel 5: Programmed Aesthetics

Chair: Leonardo Impett

10:40 – 11:00 Ben Pulver (University of Toronto) – Slop in the Machine: Art, Computers, and Kitsch

11:00 – 11:20 Paola Lagonigro (Sapienza University of Rome) – Traces of Information Aesthetics in Pietro Grossi's HomeArt

11:20 – 11:40 Discussion

11:40 – 12:00 Coffee break

Panel 6: Soft Images

Chair: Ryan Heuser

12:00 – 12:20 Bernd Behr (University of the Arts London / Royal College of Art) – La Belle

Noiseuse: Adversarial Noise between Ichnography and Semantic Topology

12:20 – 12:40 Tuomo Rainio (Aalto University) – Technical Images with Soft Edges: Noise and the Epistemic Model of Digital Images in Artistic Practice

12:40 – 13:00 Discussion

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch break

Panel 7: Counter-Visualities

Chair: Amira Moeding

14:00 – 14:20 Edoardo Pelligra (University of California, Los Angeles) – An Aesthetics of the Indefinite: Surveillance Art and Queer Embodiment

14:20 – 14:40 Anoushirvan Masoudi (Offenbach University of Design and Art) – A Counter-Visuality: Grain, Noise, and Distortion in Iranian Amateur Video Culture

14:40 – 15:00 Discussion

Panel 8: Entropic Practices

Chair: Violaine Boutet de Monvel

15:00 – 15:20 Connor Cook (Design Academy Eindhoven / Amsterdam Academy of Architecture) – Bodies In-Formation: Noisy Skill Acquisition in Competitive Cheerleading

15:20 – 15:40 Arnaud Mery (Université de Montréal, online) – How to cook a doubtful haze: a recipe for anti-normative entropy modulation with Stable Diffusion

15:40 – 16:00 Discussion

16:00 – 16:20 Coffee break

16:20 – 17:00 Screening: Eryk Savaggio (University of Cambridge) – Human Movie: Six Meditations of a Compression Algorithm

17:00 – 17:20 Closing remarks

Reference:

CONF: Noisy Systems: Aesthetics, Epistemology, and Computation (Rome, 4-5 Jun 26). In: ArtHist.net, May 27, 2026 (accessed May 27, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52572>>.