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:
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