

Noise as Signal: Rorschach's Garden as Iterative Transduction

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Abstract

Rorschach's Garden is a single-channel audiovisual installation that treats noise as its primary material. Video footage is pushed through deliberate degradation and recursive AI regeneration, an iterative palimpsest built by discarding most of what each cycle produces. Audio follows a parallel but distinct logic: AI systems interpret the finished imagery into text, then into raw musical stems, curated into a sonic palette and layered into its own palimpsest against the edited image. Named for the Rorschach inkblot test, the work treats its AI pipeline as an administered test, presenting ambiguous material and harvesting the system's response, and inverts computational audiovisual practice's default pull toward coherence, treating generative systems as engines of divergence rather than resolution.

1 CONTEXTUALISING THE PRACTICE FIELD

Rorschach's Garden treats noise, error, and the unstable signal as primary material rather than a problem to correct. This traces to Russolo's call for a sustained observation of all noises (Russolo, 1913/1986), and to Cascone's account of post-digital music, which treats digital failure as raw material rather than defect (Cascone, 2000).

While a more traditional view holds noise to be an inescapable and undesirable condition of any channel (Shannon, 1948), authors like Menkman and practitioners such as Nam June Paik or the net.art collective JODI capitalise on electromagnetic distortion or software-error exploitation, formalising glitch as art and exposing the myth of a noiseless channel embedded in media systems (Menkman, 2011).

Whereas AI tools are designed to discard this noise and generate coherent content, Rorschach's Garden pushes the limits of machine interpretation, cutting against its intended function and requiring the generative systems to compound instability and abstraction rather than resolve it.

Rorschach's original test presents a subject with an ambiguous form and treats what is projected onto it, not the form itself, as the site of information, a structural openness recalling Eco's open work, where indeterminacy invites the interpreter to complete a field of meaning (Eco, 1989) rather than a flaw to resolve.

The image pipeline repeats this structure: ambiguous, degraded material is presented to a generative system, and what it returns becomes the material carried forward. The audio pipeline repeats it again through transduction: the imagery itself, already a generated response, becomes the ambiguous stimulus for a further round of interpretation, transduced from image to description to prompt to sound.

While human response to Rorschach ambiguity is inseparable from perception, memory, and an implicit model of other minds (Vecchio et al., 2023), a generative

system's response is statistical completion, not perception. This absence is not a limitation to be concealed but the condition the pipeline below is built to exploit.

2 METHODS

The work was developed through two parallel pipelines, each moving from degradation through generation to curated assembly, but governed by distinct logics: the visual pipeline proceeds by iteration, the audio pipeline by transduction.

2.1 Visual pipeline

Footage was manually degraded in DaVinci Resolve, resolution reduced, compression artefacts exposed, colour depth fractured, then layered into a digital palimpsest building density before any generative processing. Selected frames were processed through Grok (xAI), each pass yielding ten to fifteen variations selected for productive instability rather than coherence, then recursively regenerated before assembly into a timeline shaped by visual rhythm and the unstable forms that emerged.

2.2 Audio pipeline

The audio pipeline follows a different logic. Rather than selecting for instability, sonic material is generated from the AI systems' own interpretation of the finished imagery: stills from the Grok-generated visuals were described by ChatGPT, whose readings were transformed into prompts by Claude and rendered into raw musical stems by Suno AI. What shapes the resulting sound is interpretive drift accumulated across this relay, image into description, description into prompt, prompt into sound, a chain of transduction in which each computational shift produces a new signal rather than a recoded copy of the last, regenerating meaning rather than merely carrying it over (Rodríguez-Ortega, 2024). These stems were collected into a working sonic palette, and from it a second, audio-specific palimpsest was built, echoing the image pipeline's layering stage: stems were layered against one another, then assembled against the visual sequence, following the piece's visual development rather

than an independent musical logic. Open-source audio samples were layered in at the most charged visual beats, producing moments of tight audiovisual synchrony (Chion, 1994) that give those moments weight against the surrounding instability. The final audio is shaped at every stage by human editorial decision, not AI output.

3 MANUFACTURED INSTABILITY: REFLECTION ON THE PROCESS

The methodology above documents a sequence of steps, but the more significant claim concerns the behaviour of generative systems themselves. Left to default operation, Grok, ChatGPT, Claude, and Suno are optimised to produce coherence: legible imagery, resolved phrases, stylistic consistency. Instability is not a property these systems generate spontaneously; it has to be manufactured against the grain of what the tools are built to do.

Both pipelines manufacture this instability by different means, the image pipeline through recursive discard, the audio pipeline through transduction, but the underlying claim holds across both: authorship resides not in a single originating act but in the selective and structuring acts applied to what the systems produce. The AI systems already transform their training sources into image, description, prompt, and sound; the artist's discard, palimpsest, and placement against picture rework that chain again, a second-order judgment applied to a first-order act of generation.

This labour stands in for the apparatus the AI lacks: where a human response to ambiguity is inseparable from perception, memory, and affect, here the artist's discard-and-select judgment supplies the still missing weight. A weight doubled again as the piece moves from studio process to accepted, exhibited work and gains the institutional 'facticity' from each resemiotization (Iedema, 2003).

4 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

A second version, Rorschach's Garden v2, has since been co-authored with composer Juan Carlos Vásquez, who reworked the soundtrack. A comparative study of the two versions is in preparation, examining how the same visual material supports two distinct authorial approaches to mediated sound, one routed through AI transduction, the other through human composition.

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AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

The author declares no conflicts of interest. No human subjects were involved; no ethical approval was required.

AI Disclosure: Grok (xAI) generated images in stages three and four of the visual pipeline; ChatGPT described visual sequences into text, and Claude transformed those descriptions into prompts for audio generation; Suno AI generated musical stems from those prompts. All AI-

generated material was selected, curated, edited, and assembled by the author.

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