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# GLITCH HOROLOGIES

by Rosa Menkman

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Artist and researcher Rosa Menkman introduces a special issue on the artistic practice of glitch.



Rosa Menkman: *New Horolog*, 2023

In recent cycles, a lot has been written about “glitches” or “glitch art.”

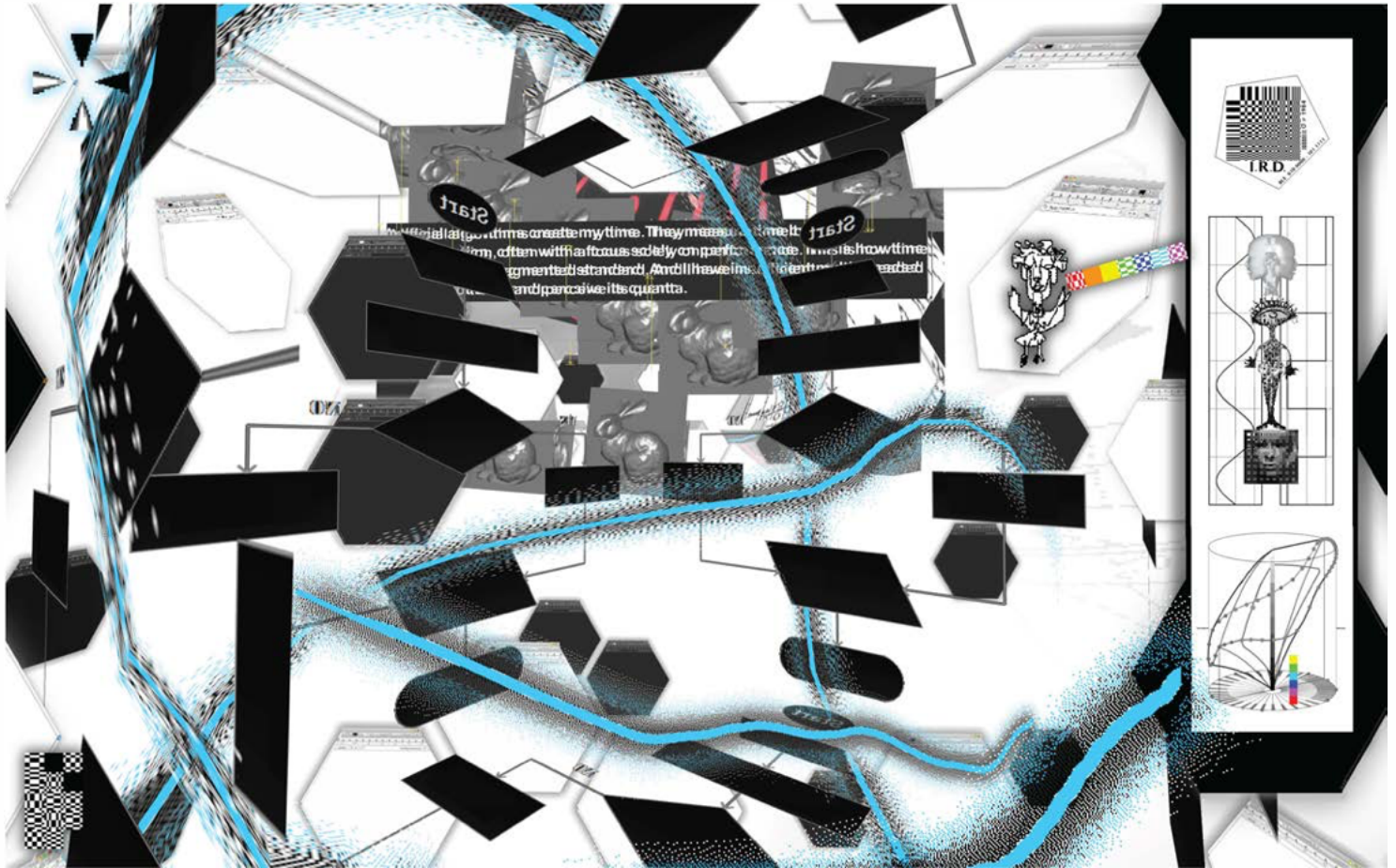
I am using the word “cycle” here because I am referring not to the linear time of seasons, years, or histories, but rather to the nonlinear and overlapping cycles of clocks, drops, and iterations our technologies, as well as most genealogies, now inhabit.

While some of us still fetch, decode and execute, time is no longer just hi-fi, rhythmic or real. In fact, in the realms of computation, most segments of time are imperceptible to humans. Instead, these moments are governed by an undertow of artificial transforms: the gears of our algorithmic systems that cut time in opaque increments, prioritizing data-driven efficiency and productivity. These increments, cut by machines for machines, are no longer sensible nor recognizable at human scale.

We can no longer take time. Instead, time takes us.

And woven through this new, invisible fabric of time, rules about functionality and performance determine the capacities and affordances of humans. The ways we see, use, and understand are now resolved with compromise, because while our experience and knowledge of these new “logical frameworks” is fragmented and truncated, so is our perception.

We no longer see with technology. Instead, technology sees for us.



In traditional systems design, the engineer's role was to establish "institutions"—often seen as *illogical bridges* that would connect distinct *logical systems* (such as languages, programs and databases). These mathematical institutions ensured coherency, interoperability and streamlined functionality. But the computational tides have turned: under the guise of "distributed intelligence," AI no longer connects different logical programs and frameworks. Instead, it

creates, modifies, and integrates different programs in opaque ways.

We no longer write the program. Instead, the algorithm uses our prompts.

And as we prompt, the potential for glitch cycles fortuitously through the opaque layers of rewrite and transform: the glitch is no longer (just) a momentary break from an unexpected flow in a system, because the system is no longer one of linear flows and moments. The system is a fabric woven of cycles of complexities in which the glitch stretches, scratches, hides or disappears, to pop up seemingly randomly at a next prompt.

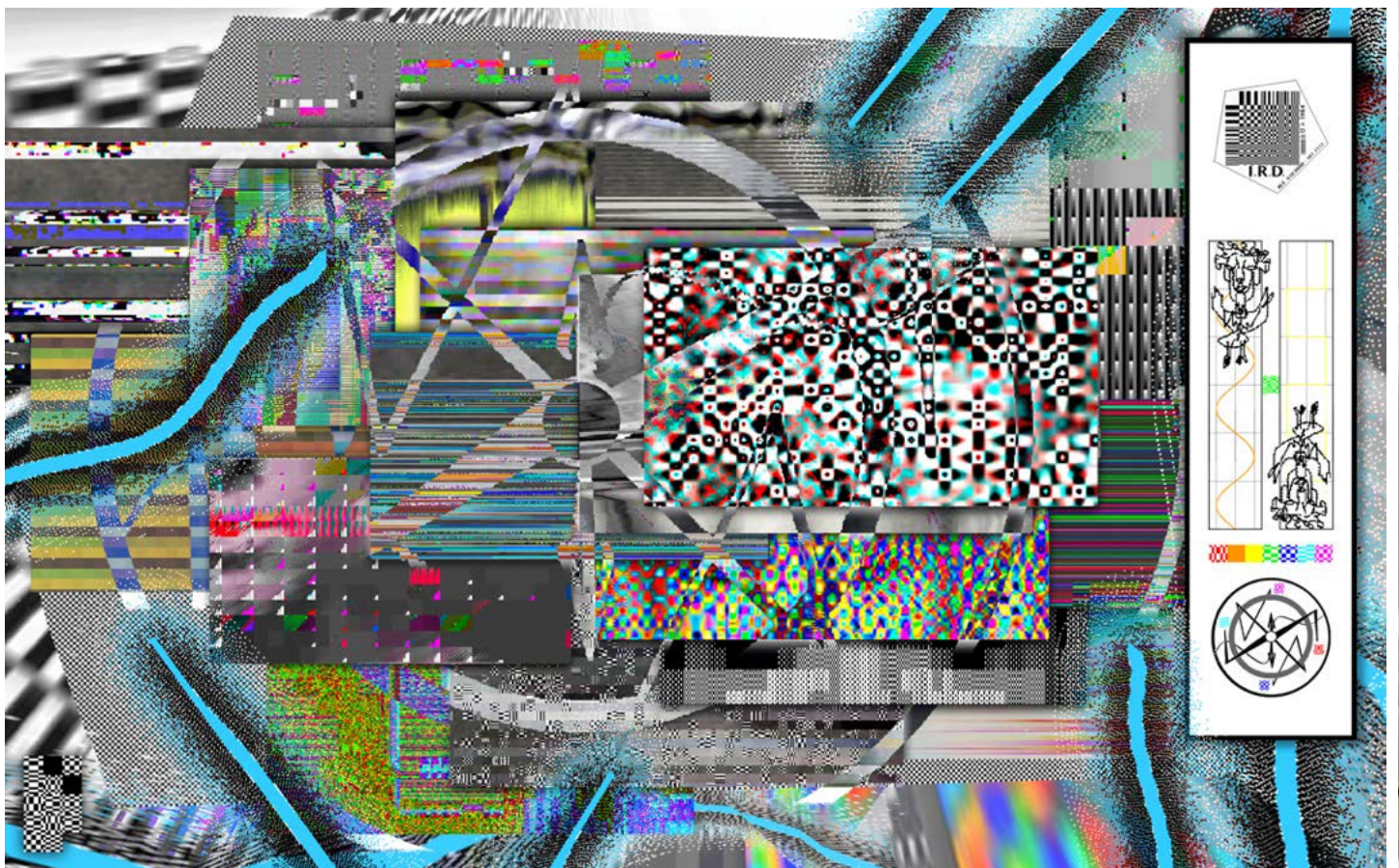
Just like the system, the glitch has become distributed, recursive and opaque—it may sometimes still look traditional; however, the majority of glitches remain unseen or rather, normalized, underestimated, accepted or justified as floating-point error, to only surface more gravely in another cycle.

The glitch is in the world, as an integral, possibly critical part of our systems.

But let's not underestimate the glitch, traditional, hidden or new: critical points are reached, filters are carved, thresholds broken, and turns made. Glitches cast a mesh of ripples and distortions through our landscapes of programs (engineered,

linguistic, or aesthetic). Yet it is impossible to see the ((if any), & or all  $\Rightarrow \int f(x) dx$ ) of it. The glitch is in the world, as an integral, possibly critical, part of our systems.

Is the question still “what is a glitch”? Or should we (also) ask “Who or what gets to experience, deploy, deconstruct or be wronged/righted by or with the glitch? Where is the glitch? Whose glitch can we see, and what glitches remain invisible?” A small database error may escalate into a personal future t/error overflow or a category of knowledge previously impossible. Yet for now and at a distance, unseen, unresolved, unknown, and unacknowledged, at least to most of us, everything is still (unfortunately) just/fine.



Rosa Menkman: *New Horology*, 2023

Agamben once wrote: “The contemporary is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time.” Those outside the contemporary (our un-contemporaries) can recognize the shapes in the darkness of the now more clearly than the contemporary ever will.

Paradoxically, if we no longer live in a shared contemporary, we may find a way to briefly stand out of our time, to observe and obtain a momentous perspective of its glitches. As a result, we may weave the glitch into a tapestry of other anomalies; enmeshed by noise, and sharded by the crash, the glitch finds a place between the bug, the error, and stack overflow; a missed reference, a database collapse, a hiccup, the hang and freeze, a critical 404, the corruption, malfunction, or a tactical other. The glitch finds a place alongside these failures, as the failure of a filter and the filter of that failure.

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There are as many stories of glitch as there are practitioners and individuals experiencing or working with the glitch. As a consequence, it is impossible to write an all-encompassing introduction, to curate an adequate edition on glitch or its

“chronology” or “his-tory.” Writing these stories of glitch merely means to write certain practitioners or glitches out of the program.

What I therefore hope to accomplish in this edition of *Outland* is to offer some lenses on glitch, to illustrate and unpack a few fragments of its complexities, cycled genealogies and turns.

I want to extend a warm thanks to all the writers and collaborators, dear artists, curators, and theoreticians who are part of this edition.

Signed, Rosa—a Media Archeologist, *sitting in a cycle different from the one you are in now.*

*Rosa Menkman is an artist, researcher and guest writer for *Outland's* special issue on glitch.*

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