GLITCH STUDIES MANIFESTO
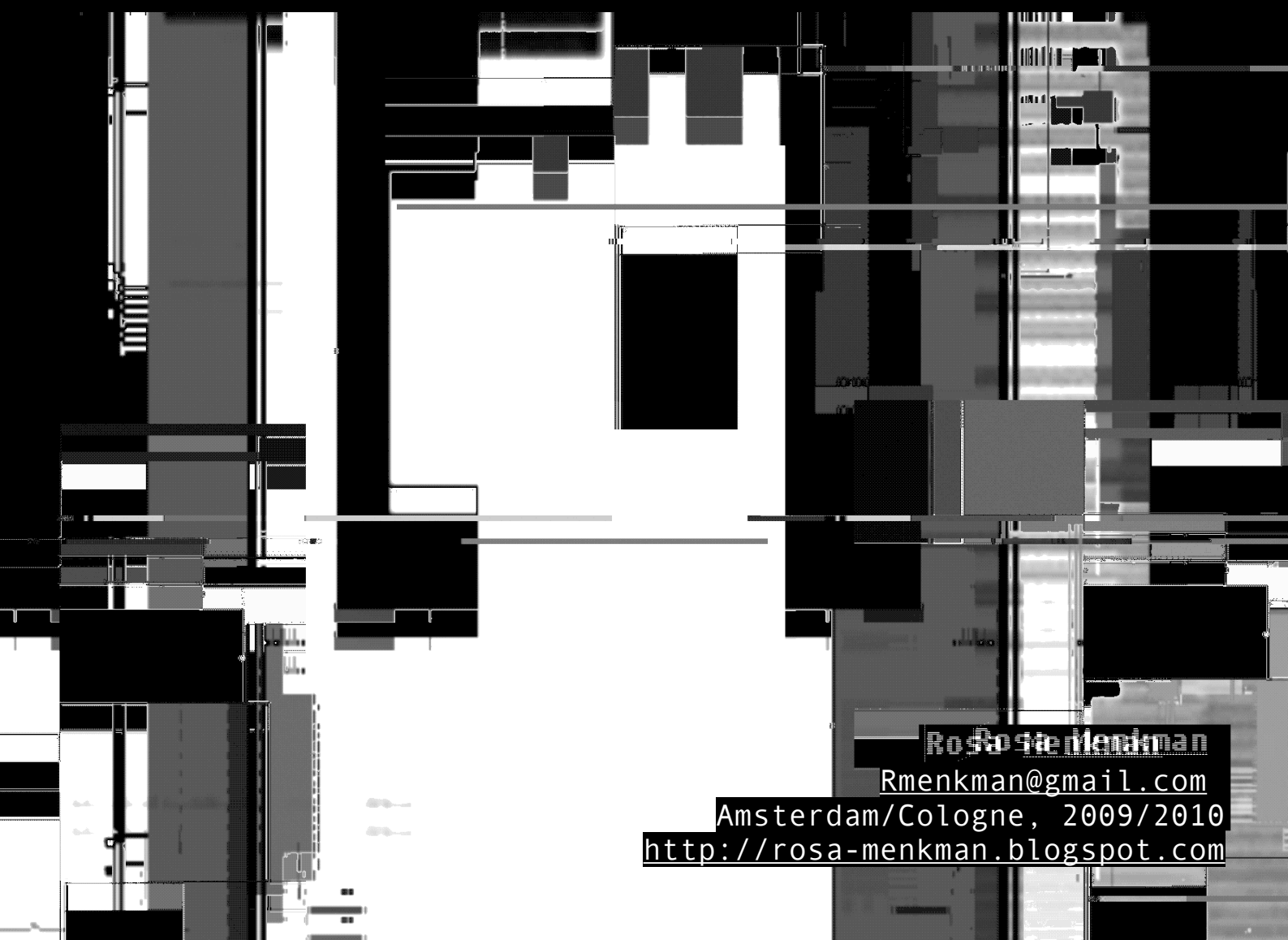
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The dominant, continuing search for a noiseless channel has been, and will always be no more than a regrettable, ill-fated dogma.

Even though the constant search for complete transparency brings newer, 'better' media, every one of these new and improved techniques will always have their own fingerprints of imperfection. While most people experience these fingerprints as negative (and sometimes even as accidents) I emphasize the positive consequences of these imperfections by showing the new opportunities they facilitate.

In the beginning there was only noise. Then the artist moved from the grain of celluloid to the magnetic distortion and scanning lines of the cathode ray tube. he wandered the planes of phosphor burn-in, rubbed away dead pixels and now makes performance art based on the cracking of LCD screens.
The elitist discourse of the upgrade is a dogma widely pursued by the naive victims of a persistent upgrade culture. The consumer only has to dial #1-800 to stay on top of the technological curve, the waves of both euphoria and disappointment. It has become normal that in the future the consumer will pay less for a device that can do more. The user has to realize that improving is nothing more than a proprietary protocol, a deluded consumer myth about progression towards a holy grail of perfection.
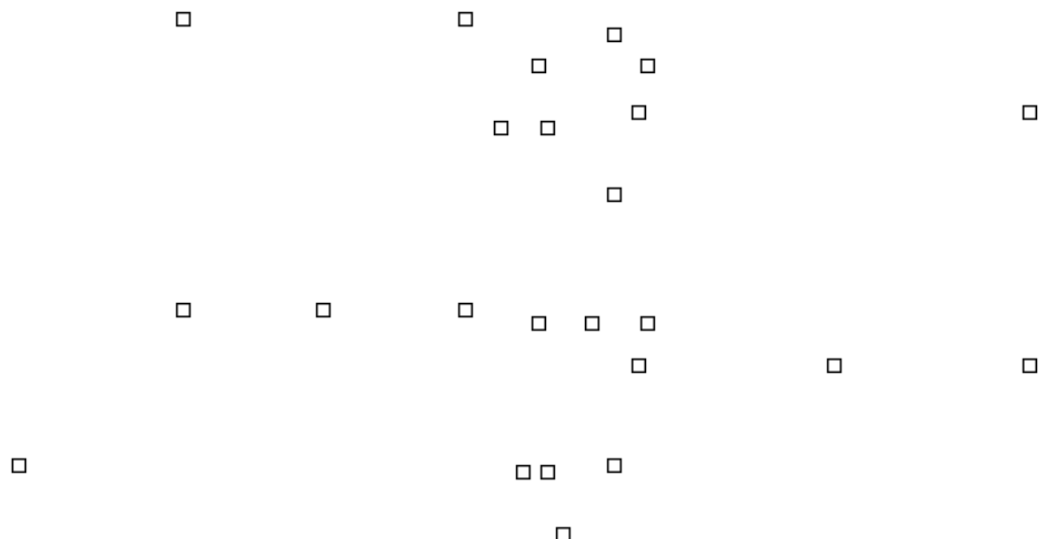
Dispute
the operating templates of
creative practice by fighting
genres and expectations!

I feel stuck in the membranes of knowledge, governed
by social conventions and acceptances. As an artist I
strive to reposition these membranes; I do not feel
locked into one medium or between contradictions like
real vs. virtual or digital vs. analog. I surf the
waves of technology, the art of artifacts.

The quest for complete transparency has changed the
computer system into a highly complex assemblage that
is often hard to penetrate and sometimes even
completely closed off. This system consists of layers
of obfuscated protocols that find their origin in
ideologies, economies, political hierarchies and
social conventions, which are subsequently operated by
different actors.
    Some artists set out to elucidate and deconstruct
the hierarchies of these systems of assemblage. They do
not work in (binary) opposition to what is inside the
flows (the normal uses of the computer) but practice on
the border of these flows. Sometimes, they use the
computers' inherent maxims as a façade, to trick the
audience into a flow of certain expectation that the
artwork subsequently rapidly breaks out of. As a
result, the spectator is forced to acknowledge that the
use of the computer is based on a genealogy of
conventions, while in reality the computer is a machine
that can be bend or used in many different ways. With
the creation of breaks within politics and social and
economical conventions, the audience may become aware of
the preprogrammed patterns. Now, a distributed awareness
of a new interaction gestalt can take form.

G e t
     away from the established action scripts and
     join the avant-garde of the unknown. Become a
     nomad of noise artifacts!

  There are three occasions in which the static, linear notion of transmitting
  information can be interrupted. I use these instances to exploit noise
  artifacts, that I sub-divide as glitch, encoding / decoding (of which
  compression is the most ordinary form) and feedback artifacts.

 Etymologically, the term "noise" refers to states of aggression, alarm and
 powerful sound phenomena in nature ('rauschen'), such as storm, thunder
 and the roaring sea. But when noise is explored within a social context,
 the term is often used as a figure of speech and as such has many more
 meanings. Sometimes, noise stands for unaccepted sounds: not music, not
 valid information or what is not a message. Noise can also stand for a
 (often undesirable, unwanted, other and unordered) disturbance, break
 or addition within the signal of useful data. Here noise exists
 within the void opposite to what (already) has a meaning. Whichever
 way noise is defined, the negative definition also has a positive
 consequence: it helps by (re)defining its opposite (the world of
 meaning, the norm, regulation, goodness, beauty and so on).
     Noise thus exists as a paradox; while it is often
 negatively defined, it is   also a positive, generative
 quality (that is present in   any communication medium). The
 voids generated by a break   are not only a lack of meaning,
 but also powers that   force the reader to move away
 from the traditional   discourse around the technology,
 and to open it up.   Through these voids, artists and
 spectators   can   understand the politics behind the
 code and voice a   critique towards the digital media.
 It can be a source   for new patterns, anti-patterns and
 new possibilities   that often exist on the border or
 membrane (of for   instance language).

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    Use
   t h e
 glitch as
an exoskeleton
of progress.
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The glitch is a wonderful experience of an
interruption that shifts an object away from its
ordinary form and discourse. For a moment I am
shocked, lost and in awe, asking myself what this
other utterance is, how was it created. Is it
perhaps ...a glitch? But once I named it, the
momentum -the glitch- is no more...

But somewhere within the destructed ruins of meaning
hope exists; a triumphal sensation that there is
something more than just devastation. The negative
feelings make place for an intimate, personal experience
of a machine (or program), a system showing its
formations, inner workings and flaws. As a holistic
celebration rather than a particular perfection the
glitch can reveal a new opportunity, a spark of creative
energy that indicates that something new is about to be
created.
 The glitch has no solid form or state through time; it is
often perceived as an unexpected and abnormal mode of
operandi, a break from (one of) the many flows (of
expectations) within a technological system. But as the
understanding of a glitch changes when it is being named, so
does the equilibrium of the (former) glitch itself: the
original experience of a rupture moved passed its momentum
and vanished into a realm of new conditions. The glitch has
become something new and has become an ephemeral, personal
experience.

Use bends
and breaks as a metaphor for difference

As an artist, I find catharsis in disintegration, ruptures and cracks. I manipulate, bend and break any medium towards the point where it becomes something new. This is what I call glitch art. Even so, to me, the word 'glitch' in 'glitch art' means something slightly different than the term 'glitch'.

The genre of glitch art moves like the weather; sometimes it evolves very slowly while at other times it can strike like lightning. The art works within this realm can be disturbing, provoking and horrifying. Beautifully dangerous, they can at once take all the tensions of other possible compositions away. These works stretch boundaries and generate novel modes; they break open previously sealed politics and force a catharsis of conventions, norms and believes.

Glitch art is often about relaying the membrane of the normal, to create a new protocol after shattering an earlier one. The perfect glitch shows how destruction can change into the creation of something original. Once the glitch is understood as an alternative way of representation or a new language, its tipping point has passed and the essence of its glitch-being is vanished. The glitch is no longer an art of rejection, but a shape or appearance that is recognized as a novel form (of art). Artists that work with glitch processes are therefore often hunting for the fragile equilibrium; they search for the point when a new form is born from the blazed ashes of its precursor.

Even so, glitch art is not always (or by everyone) experienced as an art of the momentum; many works have already passed their tipping point. This is because glitch art exists within different systems; for instance the system of production and the system of reception. Not only the artist who creates the work of glitch art is responsible for the glitch. The 'foreign' input (wrongly encoded syntaxes that lead to forbidden leakages and data promiscuity), the hardware and the software (the 'channel' that shows functional? collisions) and the audience (who is in charge of the reception, the decoding) can also be responsible. All these actors are positioned within different (but sometimes overlapping) flows in which the final product can be described or recognized as glitch art. This is why an intended error can still be called glitch art and why glitch art is not always just a personal experience of shock, but also (as a genre) a metaphor for a way of expression, that depends on multiple actors.

Realize that
the gospel of glitch art also tells about new
norms implemented by corruption.

Over time some of the glitches I made developed into personal archetypes; I feel that they have become ideal examples or models of my work. Moreover, some of the techniques I (and others) used became easily reproducible for other people, either because I explained my working process, or sometimes because of the development of a software or plugin that automatically simulated or recreated a glitching method (that then became something close to an 'effect'). I noticed that these kinds of normalizations or standardizations happen very often. Therefore, to me, the popularization and cultivation of the avant-garde of mishaps has become predestined and unavoidable.

The procedural essence of glitch art is opposed to conservation; the shocking experience, perception and understanding of what a glitch is at one point in time, cannot be preserved to a future time. The beautiful creation of a glitch is uncanny and sublime; the artist tries to catch something that is the result of an uncertain balance, a shifting, un-catchable, unrealized utopia connected to randomness and idyllic disintegrations. The essence of glitch art is therefore best understood as a history of movement and as an attitude of destructive generativity; it is the procedural art of non con-formative, ambiguous reformations.

Nevertheless, some artists do not focus on the procedural entity of the glitch. They skip the process of creation-by-destruction and focus directly on the creation of a formally new design, either by creating a final product or by developing a new way to recreate the latest archetype. This can for instance result into a plug-in, a filter or a whole new 'glitching software'.

This form of 'conservative glitch art' focuses more on design and end products then on the procedural breaking of flows and politics. There is an obvious critique: to design a glitch means to domesticate it. When the glitch becomes domesticated, controlled by a tool, or technology (a human craft) it has lost its enchantment and has become predictable. It is no longer a break from a flow within a technology, or a method to open up the political discourse, but instead a cultivation. For many actors it is no longer a glitch, but a filter that consists of a preset and/or a default: what was once understood as a glitch has now become a new commodity.

But for some, mostly the audience on the receptive end, these designed errors are still experienced as the breaks of a flow and can therefore righteously be called glitches. They don't know that these works are constructed via the use of a filter. Works from the genre 'glitch art' thus consist as an assemblage of perceptions and the understanding by multiple actors. Therefore, the products of these new filters that come to existence after (or without) the momentum of a glitch cannot be excluded from the realm of glitch art.

Even so, the utopian fantasy of 'technological democracy' or 'freedom' that glitch art is often connected to, has little to do with the colonialism of these glitch art designs and glitch filters. If there is such a thing as technological freedom, this can only be found within the procedural momentum of glitch art, -when a glitch is just about to relay a protocol.

Celebrate
the critical trans-media
aesthetics of glitch artifacts

I use glitches to assess the inherent politics of any kind of medium by bringing it into a state of hypertrophy.

Within software art, the glitch is often used to deconstruct the myth of linear progress and to end the search for the holy grail of perfect technology. In these works, the glitch emphasizes what is normally rejected as a flaw and subsequently shows that accidents and errors can also be welcomed as new forms of usability. The glitch does not only invoke the death of the author, but also the death of the apparatus, medium or tool (at least from the perspective of the technological determinist spectator) and is often used as an anti 'software-deterministic' form.

This fatal manner of glitch presents a problem for media and art historians, who try to describe old and new culture as a continuum of different niches. To deal with these breaks, historians have repeatedly coined new genres and new media forms to give these splinter practices a place within this continuum. As a result, an abundance of designations like databending, datamoshing and circuitbending have come to existence, which in fact all refer to similar practices of breaking flows within different technologies or platforms.

Theorists have also been confronted with this problem. For them, terms like post-digital or post-media aesthetics frequently offer a solution. Unfortunately, these kinds of terms seem to be misleading because in glitch art 'post' actually often means a reaction to a primer form. But to act against something does not mean to move away from it completely - in fact a reaction also prolongs a certain way or mode (at least as a reference).

I think that an answer to the problems of both historians and theoreticians could be found when glitch art is described as a procedural activity demonstrating against and within multiple technologies. Something I would describe as critical trans-media aesthetics. The role of glitch artifacts as critical trans-media aesthetics is twofold. On the one hand, these aesthetics media   show a medium in a critical state (a ruined, unwanted, not recognized, accidental and horrendous state). These aesthetics transform the way the consumer perceives the normal (every accident transforms the normal) and describe the passing of a tipping point after which the medium (might) become something new. On the other hand, these aesthetics critique the medium (genre, interface and expectations).They challenge its inherent politics and the established template of creative practice while producing a theory of reflection.

The
nomad of noise
travels the acousmatic videoscape.

I am a voyager of videoscapes: I create conceptually
synesthetic artworks, that use both visual and aural glitch
(or other noise) artifacts at the same time. These artifacts
shroud the black box, as a nebula of technology and its inner
workings.

What actually happens when a glitch occurs is unknown, I stare at
the glitch as a void of knowledge; a strange dimension where the
laws of technology are suddenly very different from what I
expected and know. Here is the purgatory; an intermediate state
between the death of the old technology and a judgement for a
possible continuation into a new form, a new understanding, a
landscape, a videoscape..
   Whenever I use a 'normal' transparent technology, I only see one
aspect of the actual machine. I have learned to ignore the
interface and all structural components, to be able to understand a
message or use a technology as fast as possible.
   The glitches I trigger turn the technology back into the
obfuscated box that it already was. They shroud its inner workings
and the source of the output as a sublime black veil. I perceive
glitches without knowing where they originate from. This gives me an
opportunity to concentrate better on its form - to interpret its
structures and to learn more from what I can actually see. They create
an acousmatic videoscape in which I can finally perceive an output
outside of my goggles of speed, transparency and usability. The new
structures that unfold themselves can be interpreted as a portal to an
utopia, a paradise like dimension, but also as a black hole that
threatens to destroy the technology as I knew it.
   The videoscape thus uses critical trans-media aesthetics to
theorize the human thinking about technology; it creates an
opportunity for self reflexivity, self critique and self expression.
It uses synesthesia not just as a metaphor for transcoding one medium
upon another (with a new algorithm), but a conceptually driven meeting
of the visual and the sonic within the newly uncovered quadrants of
technology.

http://videoscapes.blogspot.com

I curate a Vimeo video pool about conceptual synesthetic artifact
videos:
http://vimeo.com/groups/artifacts

Speak
the totalitarian
language   of
disintegration

I   believe   that
'Glitchspeak' can
democratize society,

Glitchspeak   is   a
vocabulary of new
expressions; an always
growing language. These
expressions teach the
speaker something about
the inherent norms,
presumptions and
expectations of a
language. It teaches
what is not being said
and what is left out.
Glitches do not
exist outside of
human perception.
What was a glitch 10
years ago is not a
glitch anymore. This
a m b i g u o u s
c o n t i n g e n c y of
glitch depends on
its constantly
m u t a t i n g
materiality; the
glitch exists as an
unstable assemblage
in   which   the
materiality   is
influenced by on the one
hand the construction,
operation and content of the
apparatus (the medium) and on
the other hand the work, the
writer, and the interpretation by
the reader and/or user (the
meaning) influence its materiality.
Thus, the materiality of the glitch
art is not (just) the machine the work
appears on, but a constantly changing
construct that depend on the interactions
between text, social, aesthetical and
economic dynamics and of course the point
of view from which the different actors make
meaning.

S t u d y
what is outside of knowledge, start with glitch studies. Glitch theory is what you can just get away with!

Just like Foucault stated that there can be no reason without madness, Gombrich wrote that order does not exist without chaos and Virilio described that there is no technological progression without its inherent accident, I am of the opinion that flow cannot be understood without interruption or functioning without glitching. This is why there is a need for glitch studies.

Glitch studies attempts to balance nonsense and knowledge. It searches for the unfamiliar while at the same time it tries to de-familiarize the familiar. This studies can show what is acceptable behavior and what is outside of acceptance or the norm. To capture and explain a glitch is a necessary evil that enables the generation of new modes of thought and action. When these become normalized, glitch studies changes its focus or topic of study to find the current outsider of a new technology or discourse. Glitch studies is a lost truth, it is a vision that destroys itself by its own choice of oblivion. The best ideas are dangerous because they generate awareness. Glitch studies is what you can just get away with.

Some people see glitches only as a technological thing, while others perceive them as a social construction. I think it is useless to place one perspective above the other. Glitch studies needs to take place in between, both, neither and beyond.

There needs to be more research in the art of artifacts. For the future, I would like to argue for the development of a historiography of the glitch and the writing of a theory around critical trans-media aesthetics, which might also include the artistic use of other digital artifacts.

[Order]   ><<<><<>><<>><<><<>>><<>><><><<>><<<>><<<>><<><><><><>><<[Chaos]

█████

Reception
               Flow   Break
Holodeck   Transparent Immediacy   Obscure
               Cultivated/Normal   Abnormal
               perfect   imperfect

Categorisation of noise
               Encoding / Decoding   Encoding / Decoding Artifacts
               Compression   Compression Artifacts
               Feedback   Feedback Artifacts
               Functional   "design" Glitch   "true" Glitch

        Determinism   Chance

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//As presented / performed at

- Blip Festival, New York, US. 18-12'09.
I performed parts of the manifesto during my Little-Scale visual set:
http://www.youtube.com/rosamenkman#p/a/f/0/SXbSvQjyauM

- Media Playgrounds, Montevideo, Amsterdam, NL. 12-12'09.
Goto80 and I performed 5 points of the manifesto on live television:
http://www.montevideo.nl/nl/agenda/detail_agenda.php?id=556&archief=

- Pixxelpoint Festival, Nova Gorica, SL. 05-12'09. Regular lecture.
http://www.pixxelpoint.org/onceuponatimeinthewest-e.html

- Video Vortex Conference, Atomium, Brussels, BE. 20-11'09. Regular lecture.
http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/videovortex/video-vortex-v