Figure 54 Promotional photograph by Murray Korman for Salvador Dali's *Dream of Venus* pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair in New York (Korman & Dali, 1939)
Sometimes at night I lie awake in the dark and try to recapture the vision and the sound of The World of Tomorrow. I try to remember how the pastel lighting glowed on Mad Meadow in Flushing: soft greens, orange, yellow and red; blue moon glow on the great Perisphere and on the ghostly soaring Trylon. I think with a sense of sweetened pain of nights when I sat by Flushing River and saw The World of Tomorrow reflected on its onyx surface, in full colour, and upside down...


The riot of colour and the swirling circular shapes of Delaunay’s painting and that of his Futurist interpreters, particularly Boccioni and Carrá, form an important pathway to the representation of software processes, image reproduction and wireless communications in the Cyber City. Understanding the depiction of the physical and the virtual in a way that moves beyond the Cubist play on perspective and representation and becomes a celebration – if not a propaganda tool of technological invention itself – is vital in this context.

If we return to Delaunay’s early sequence of studies of chromatic painting based on M. E. Cevreuil’s theory of simultaneous contrasts, we can see that the dramatic use of primary colours in contrast and in symmetry with shape and movement convey an eerily familiar visual iconography. In Circular Forms, Sun No. 2, from a series of works completed in the summer of 1912 (Ottinger, 2009, p. 215), Delaunay attempts to portray the array of colours he witnessed in his “retinal reactions” upon closing his eyes after staring intently at the midday sun. Here we can see the contrasting polychromatic colours of yellow, red, blue and green set in a circular motion, the planes of colour representative of the prismatic view of the sun’s “disk shaped
blotches” (Sonia Delaunay in Popelard, 2009, pp. 214-215). The study of colour, of light and of movement is central to the Futurist theory of simultaneous expansion, in which light is a “sensation”, its parts a distillation of form and the composition itself a “synthesis of what one remembers and what one sees” (Boccioni et al., 1912). These notions will become important when dissecting the operational metaphors at work in contemporary advertising and technology schematics of software, communication protocols and consumer electronic products nearly a century later when concepts such as “background operations”, “faster than light”, “simultaneous processes” and “time machine” recall these conceptual and sensual theories of colour, space and time.

Delaunay and Boccioni were the primary exponents of this theory of psychophysical simultaneism. Boccioni was by far the more provocative champion of the wider Futurist ethos as articulated in both the text The Exhibitors to the Public (1912) and in person via his well-documented lecture in Paris accompanying the Italian Futurist’s exhibit in 1911. However, his most evocative representations of the Futurist mantra and his most profound explorations of the concept of simultaneism were in his paintings. Simultaneism was a complex idea which owed as much to Einstein’s Special Relativity theory (1905) – in which two events could take place in the same space – as it did to the Cubist experimentations of Picasso and Braque. Boccioni expanded upon this concept further to give dimension and representation to the human consciousness as illustrated by his 1912 composition, Simultaneous Visions (Ottinger, 2009, p. p135). Here he differs from his onetime teacher Balla, who employed repetition to express movement and dynamism (see Figure 56). Instead Boccioni “sought a much more synthetic form, a single image which could express the fusion of the object and its surrounding environment” (Coen, 1988, p. xxx). Simultaneous Visions is the visual representation of this new refinement to the Futurist Manifesto and is an interactive template for the evolution of the movement. The composition features a female figure leaning out of an apartment window; her face as seen from two perspectives, looms large in the image as the sounds and clamour of the street below rise in a twisted verticality which pervades the confines of the room. As one of Boccioni’s first attempts to fully depict the essence of his theory of simultaneity, it is far more evocative of the form than the similar construct, The Street Enters the House from 1911. Simultaneous Visions plays on the idea of the window as a gateway to the inner and outer dimensions of physical space as well as the ferment of consciousness and the inner soul of experience. The fragmentation and intersection of reality is at once cubist in composition but also echoes his earlier explorations of Divisionism.  

21 It is in these shards of the real and the dynamic, the reflected and the simultaneous that we can see similarities with more contemporary media works by Olivier Ratsi such as the Anarchitecture series (Ratsi, 2011) and the Huang Shan series (Ratsi, 2013). Eduoard Salier’s brutally dark urban fragmentation in Massive
emergence of military imagery in the Futurist oeuvre with what appears to be the depiction of a tank (Figure 56 Top Right panel) followed by uniformed personnel (Figure 56 Bottom Right panel) parading through the streets. It provides a salient visual cue of the interconnectedness of military technology and the omen of war which foreshadows much of the ensuing millennia’s techno-cultural narrative. It is important therefore, in the context of this discussion, that the political and social conflict that was manifesting in Europe at the time this work was being produced is also a force at work in the Futurist’s narrative exposition. The stubborn march of imperialism and the rise of nationalism provided an ominous background to the Futurist manifestos in their language, tone and zeal. Much like the spectre of war which loomed large at the World’s Fair in 1939, the fall towards global conflict was rapidly accelerating during this period. In September of 1911 the Italians declared war on the Ottoman Empire and invaded the Ottoman provinces we now know as Libya. The Italo-Turkish War would last until October 1912 and in a symbiotic relationship with the

![Figure 56 Simultaneous Visions (Boccioni, 1911d). Top Right panel detail depicts what appears to be a tank rolling through the street below. Bottom Right panel detail appears to depict army personnel marching in formation.](image)

Futurists’ love of flight and verticality; it was the first conflict to feature aerial reconnaissance by aeroplane and the first recorded aerial bombing of enemy troops. It was also the first recorded

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Attack’s promo clip for *Splitting the Atom* (Salier, 2009), Max Hattler’s “Analogue Futurism” video experiment *AANAATT* (Hattler, 2008) and Sheldon Brown’s pioneering work for the Experimental Game Lab at USCD, *Scalable City* (Brown, 2008) are also important examples.
incident of an enemy plane being shot down in a military conflict. This air war provides an early intimation of the neo-gothic narrative counterpoint to the techno-futurist dreamscape beginning to emerge as a genuine fear of humankind’s mechanical intervention into the skies.

The Futurist’s were above all storytellers, they used their skills to convey meaning and most importantly to demonstrate to the viewer how they saw their world. The virtues of a mechanised future were undoubtedly at the core of many of their works but it was their mastery of re-framing of perception, of exploiting the primary colour palette and manipulating the possibilities of composition that were their signature triumph. The connotation of the window as a framing device for instance is a technique widely used by the Futurists, Boccioni in particular and later Frenchman Robert Delaunay, to persuade a viewer of a work to submit to the perceptual depth of their compositional structures. Exploiting this as a vantage point from which to explore the cross-plane dimensions of space and light is a recurring theme in the Futurist canon. This is evident in Delaunay’s 1912 composition *Simultaneous Windows on the City* (Delaunay, 1912a) which provided the inspiration for the poem by Apollinaire, *The Windows* (1912). A far more abstract endeavour than Boccioni’s piece, Delaunay provides a perceptual depth to the room from which we view the world beyond. The vibrant chromatic colour envelopes the viewer, the perceptible brightness of the urban vista beyond the window’s frame is within our grasp, the soul of the city and the song of its inhabitants spill across the dimensions. Apollinaire describes this world beyond the window frame as both a “gigantic trauma” and a “glittering diamond” in which the window “opens like an orange / comely fruit of light” (Apollinaire, 1912, p. 26).

Indeed the central motifs of the Futurist oeuvre can be seen through this prism of both an enveloping trauma of political upheaval with accumulating military conflict and the glittering objects
Figure 58 Collection of details from Italian and Russian Futurist works grouped thematically in rows by visual references. **First Row L-R:** Electricity and Artificial Light [Boccioni (1911) *The Forces of the Street*, Giacomo Balla (1909) *Street Light*, Natalia Goncharova (1913) *The Electric Light*]. **Second Row L-R:** Flight & Verticality [Delaunay’s *Homage To Bleriot* (1914), *Tour Eiffel* (1911) *Sun, Tower, Airplane* (1913)]. **Third Row L-R:** War and Weapons [Severini’s *Armoured Train in Action* (1913), Plastic Synthesis of the Idea of War (1915) *Gun In Action* (1915)]. **Fourth Row L-R:** Speed and Transportation [Russolo (1912) *Dynamism Of A Car*, Del Marie (1913) *The Port*, Boccioni (1911) *States of Mind I – Farewells*].
of technological change and invention. In essence there was every reason to believe that Europe and indeed the Americas were experiencing deep social and industrial change as the new century severed the future from the past and presented a “dawn of a radiant new day”. Through this prism – through these windows of gold, of accented verticality and fresh perceptions – the likes of Cara, Boccioni, Marinetti and their peers felt the enormity of this brave new vista in which “electricity and telegraphy, steam and aviation” were the glittering new diamonds of human endeavour as science crept into all corners of modern life completely remaking the “mental fabric of the world” (Boccioni, 1911b, p. 231). The Futurists used these brave new icons of industry – electricity, human flight, war, and mass transportation systems – as icons in their work (see Figure 58). They symbolised an obvious break with the past and a vivid evocation of the technological progress which they could pitch to their critics, their artistic contemporaries (in France, Russia and Britain) and the wider public. They achieved this primarily through the colour and form of their visual constructions in which Futurism's ideological agenda was delivered. 

If we are to assume meaning in these images as textual objects then it becomes apparent that the core provocateurs of this form were deeply committed to a wider techno-futurist agenda. Boccioni was enthralled with the verticality of the cityscape, of human flight and the centrepiece of a modern progressive Europe, the Eiffel Tower (see Figure 58 Row Two); Severini captured the symbolism and the energy of war, even embedding textual slogans into the works themselves (see Figure 58 Row Three); while others like Russilo and Balla fetishised electricity and the illuminated streetscape (see Figure 58 Row One). And all the while they trumpeted a separation from the past, demanding that their work, their energy and their focus was on the magnificence of the present, the “genius” of the Italian intellect and vision and the technological future it foretold with little time for those whose work did not “correspond with the pulse of the times” (Boccioni, 1911b, p. 231). The Futurist’s use of colour and symbolism, their interpretation of the Cubist and Divisionist technique and their homage to the Impressionists were all grounded in an effort to propagate a celebration of technological determinism and the future it was in the process of authoring – if not interpreting – for their audiences. This is a clear and instructive precursor to a narrative construct built into a genre of Modernist visual culture that foregrounds both the trauma and the evangelistic ideology proffered by the contemporary techno-futurist narrative a century later. As we will see, these recurring themes and visual motifs replayed themselves throughout the 20th century via visual culture’s central narrative forms: cinema, television, advertising, and news media. Familiar western-centric tropes, with a predominately American voice, lie at the heart of this contemporary Futurist 

22 Futurism of course was not solely a visual movement; it also engendered entirely new forms of poetry, theatre, music and dance.
movement – a corporate-media-technological-collective, if you will – who have used the pairing of technology and visual culture to promote and ultimately market the idea that the gateway to a technological utopia is the consumption of and participation in that narrative construct. Elements of culture, propaganda and technology would move from the periphery of industry, of worldwide conflict, from science and economics and from nation building to the heart of consumer culture. The stuff of contemporary art, of media production and pop culture would become electrified, intelligent, helpful and dangerous. Cultural production and its products would cease to exist as merely aesthetic objects, or icons of historical meaning, but would evolve as consumer products and lifestyles embedded with techno-futurist narratives.

The practices of advertising companies, consumer electronics manufacturers and software publishers – all of whom employ vast numbers of willing, diligent and highly skilled artists and designers to promote and disseminate new technologies and futurist lifestyles – are central players in this narrative. They rely on familiar techniques: the use of colour and symbolic shape as metaphor for the exposition of the human consciousness, symbols and icons for the machinations of network technology and colour, light and animation techniques to evoke concepts such as speed and intelligence. For the most part, these technologies are inherently present in electronic products yet for practicalities of design and usability are mostly unseen and only vaguely understood by the majority of users. In this sense, advertisements by the likes of Microsoft, Google, Adobe, AOL, Nokia, Sony, General Electric, Samsung and others employ sophisticated visual constructions to communicate complicated ideas and to embellish the futurist manifesto of contemporary consumer culture. The corporate branding of the information economy in particular is a strong subscriber to the early Futurist’s oeuvre both in tone and visual construction, while the language evokes these tendencies with a very 21st Century brevity.

Futurist manifestos of the early 1900s – often long, sometimes poetic, raging polemics – are reduced in the new millennia to a one line slogan, a tag line, a sound bite, an animated gif on a website, a slide in a slide projector, an infographic in a corporate video: “Where do you want to go today?” and “Be What’s Next” (Microsoft Corp, 2010) encourages an aspirational Microsoft; “Fly Into the Future” suggests General Electric while assuring us that their “Brilliant Machines Are Transforming the Way We Work” (Akos & Laszlo, 2012); Samsung’s venture into lifestyle design with a device that is a “Life companion” with the ability to “Create the Future” while providing “for a richer, simpler and fuller life” (Cheil, 2013b); while Apple Corp, always with one foot firmly planted in the future, boldly proclaims that “The Future Is Here” (Apple Corp, 2001). Similarly, manufacturers of imaging technologies and communication protocols for the US military employ Futurist hyperbole
to spruik their wares citing themes of speed, futurity and vision: “Accelerating Tomorrow” and “Location. Attitude. Speed” appear on Lockheed Martin’s YouTube channel (Lockheed Martin, 2012) while “Tomorrow’s Technology Today” (Raytheon Company, 2013b), “Defining the Future” (Northrop Grumman, 1994) and “Smarter Solutions for Smarter Visions” (Xilinx, 2013) are a sample of the branding collateral of these large technology manufacturers with lucrative contracts in the defence, transport and civilian security industries.\(^\text{23}\)

However, for the moment, it is the visual iconography that is most pertinent to this relationship with the Futurist aesthetic. Microsoft’s use of the *window* to navigate applications and open up new *vistas* is clearly evident in the design of its logo and the animated sequence of its operating system upon machine start-up (Microsoft Corp, 2001-2012). Here primary contrasting colours are used to symbolise multi-tasking, variations in application usage and the more abstract

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\(^\text{23}\) This is significant as these companies represent products and services with a global reach and large market capital in their respective sectors. Apple is the largest company listed on the US Stock Exchange while Samsung has emerged as Asia’s largest electronics manufacturer. While the likes of Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon Company (along with General Dynamics) represent the top 5 contractors to the US government. Data based on US government reports between 2009 and 2011 (Wikimedia Foundation, 2013). Current figures put their collected contractual value at US$110 billion. Exact figures for profits and contractual figures from 2011 can be found at the SIPRI site (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2013).
functions of the computer’s contemporary iteration as a mobile, multi-function, media production tool. Further to this, the last iteration, Windows 7, features an animated start-up sequence which utilises a swirling array of pin points of coloured lights.\textsuperscript{24} These emerge from the soupy black screen as if issuing from a darkened corner of the universe to form the now familiar Windows logo (Jerome, 2009) albeit steadily pulsating as if to denote the coming to life of the “tiny brains” and the groaning cogs of the machine. The original Windows XP logo of 2001 (see middle image Figure 59), which all subsequent logos have been based, represented the gateway to the “intangible truth of interior worlds” where “XP” denotes “eXPerience” and the discreetly rendered squares of colour – yellow, blue, green and orange – provide the symbolic reference point for the user-machine interface (Coen, 2009). This of course is an extension of the attributes of the two aforementioned paintings from 1912: Robert Delaunay’s composition Simultaneous Windows on the City and Umberto Boccioni’s Simultaneous Visions. Both of these images explore simultaneism in the perceptual depth beyond the window frame while simultaneously reflecting that experience back into the room itself. Here the experience goes beyond the iconography of the Windows logo as the viewer, or in this case the user, is beckoned through the symbolic window to the universe of possibilities beyond: the simultaneity of software multitasking, the viewing and examination of a wide spectrum of visual, textual and aural content and the “limitless” potential to create and design new ideas. All of this via the symbolic Microsoft window and all through the primary colour palette of red, green, blue and yellow pixels. As was the case with the chromatic painting experiments of Delaunay in which the composition of light and shape was as much a science as the tonal mix of the oil paints themselves, here the icon of the window – and therefore the branding of the software company – is an exaggerated representation of the technical process involved in the display and presentation of that image: the RGB colour space.

There have been many interpretations of this concept in Microsoft advertising over the years but it was the launch of Windows XP that was a truly ubiquitous phenomenon; this was pre-mobile, pre-Apple’s device orientated resurgence, pre-Facebook – the dawn of the Web 2.0 internet era. The windows metaphor and the connotations of height, flight and virtuality were still fanciful concepts that had exploitive currency and therefore represented a classic epoch in the late technofuturist narrative. If Paul Virilio’s gaze has been subsumed by the horizon in the second decade of the new millennium, it was still peering upwards in 2001. In the weeks that followed the events of

\textsuperscript{24} While the image making of “lifestyle” products by Apple will be expanded upon further below, it is worth noting that the default screen saver for Apple’s OS X consists of swirling tentacles of bright contrasting colours reminiscent of the aurora borealis. This animation has a metaphorical function similar to Microsoft’s start-up sequence, as the frame of the computer screen transforms from a two dimensional surface to a multi-dimensional space experience.
September 11 Apple introduced the iPod, the device that would literally flip the iUser’s attention inward by providing a revolutionary technology to shut out the encroachment of reality and shut out content outside of their rarefied ecosystem. At the same time Microsoft executives were busying themselves for the release of Windows XP with a video advertisement that emphasised flying, verticality and the magic of invisible technologies (see Figure 61). The XP series of commercials were designed as a genuine attempt to codify the online behaviour of computer users the world over through techno-futurist dreaming – the “edit”, the “mix”, the “share” – coupled with the ability to skip, jump and to ultimately “soar” high above the clouds gazing upon green fields below and new horizons beyond the dust and the ash of Manhattan.

Figure 61 Microsoft commercial for the launch of Windows XP (Microsoft Corp, 2001).
Google too makes use of a similar chromatic palette in the design of its web search tool branding and in particular its web browser *Chrome*. Here the window is the gateway to the world beyond the screen – real, analogous and fictitious – and the *Chrome* logo clearly evokes Delaunay’s experiments with simultaneism and chromatic painting (see Figure 55). The circular structure of the logo provides a compositional link to his series of *Circular Form* studies and extends upon it to include depth and three dimensional space so typical of Web 2.0 iconography (see Figure 60 Bottom Row). To reinforce this notion an in-house production team at Google Japan created a stop animation advert (Google, 2009) for the launch of the *Chrome* browser consisting of wooden blocks which are manipulated by an invisible force to eventually mimic the interface of the browser. Here the palette of the Futurist chromatic colour scheme is most evident as the primary colours represented by building blocks which constitute the abstract notions of search and the broad spectrum of the possible results. Further to this, in May 2010, Google released a promotional video (Google, 2010) dramatically illustrating the relationship between software search technology and the concept of speed. In a sequence of “tests”, the load times of various web pages are measured against the performance of various backyard measurement devices – variously a potato gun, a loud speaker and a simulated lightning strike. Captured with a Canon Phantom v640 High Speed Camera at 2700 frames per second the first sequence of the video depicts a potato gun shooting a potato through a vegetable slicer across the face of an LCD monitor which is simultaneously loading a web page. As if in an

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25 The origins of the Google Chrome logo are an interesting case in point. The *webosphere* has attempted to decode the logo into its various parts by graphically linking the logos various elements with well known and obscure pop cultural moments. The glowing blue orb at the centre of the logo has been attributed to the HAL 9000 computer from the film *2010*, the sequel to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and the composition of the logo has been linked to a webcam, the logo for *Pokemon* *Pokeball*, the 1980s consumer electronics toy *Simon Says* and the logo for an obscure office application *ThinkFree Office 3*. 
attempt to demystify the mathematical complexity of screen response times, internet bandwidth and search algorithm technology the mechanism for firing the potato is a complex arrangement of DIY domestic objects. A salt shaker falls onto the “trigger”, the spark ignites a fuel of vapour, the potato is ejected through a vegetable slicer which sprays the raw potato slices across the face of the screen to finally land in a deep fryer where we presume they will transform into perfectly cooked French Fries, Google style. However, it is the 3rd example in the Google Chrome Speed Test promo video which is truly evocative of the Futurist ethos and the underlying darkness of the technoculture narrative (see Figure 64).

In this sequence a bolt of lightning is generated by a SG10 rotary sparkgap tesla coil, which destroys a small model sailing ship all in the time it takes for a web page to load from a local hard drive. The elements of the video are an intriguing blend of Modernism and nostalgic symbolism. The key prop is a device, a tesla coil, which is so named after a vivid icon of the Futurist oeuvre. The key moment of the clip is the destruction of a model sailing boat as if discarding the past to make way for Boccioni’s The Port from 1911. The video clip appears to be proclaiming a

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26 Nikola Tesla is often cited as one of the fathers of electricity for his work on refining a power system using alternating current (AC). In his time Tesla was often in direct conflict with his former employer and the much more entrepreneurial Thomas Edison who commercially – and historically – tends to overshadow Tesla’s considerable achievements. Tesla’s theoretical work in developing methods of radio transmission are also of some note however they too are overshadowed by the more famous exploits of Guglielmo Marconi. For an incisive account of the race to electrify America and the world, and the exploits of Nikola Tesla, Thomas Edison and George Westinghouse in particular, see Jill Jones text, Empires of Light (Jonnes, 2003). The debate surrounding the validity of both Tesla’s and Edison’s achievements is hotly contested online and a good flame war springing from a post by an online comic and an ensuing article by Forbes columnist Alex Knapp can be found online here.
Futurist manifesto of its own: with analogue destruction comes celebration of the supremacy of mechanical power, mass transport and mass communication. The whole production has an odd mechanical feeling about the visual “experiments” while the closing image of a plastic model sailor singing triumphantly on the shoreline, is surely a nod to the speed and absolute colonisation of the online search industry by the video’s authors, Google. Its simplicity is a complete contradiction to the sophistication of the technology it seeks to illuminate, while the destruction wrought by the electricity is in itself a primary indicator of a darker tendency in the media constructs of this genre.

Figure 65 Still frames from Honda Cog commercial (Bardou-Jacquet, 2003)

Honda, manufacturer of engines, domestic farm machinery, cars, motorbikes and formula one racing cars has also employed the retrograde approach for the marketing of its 2003 Honda Accord in the short film Cog (Bardou-Jacquet, 2003), a promotional spot only ever screened once on British television yet a viral sensation on the web. In this elaborate Rube Goldberg-like construction, parts from a disembodied Accord are used to illustrate the car’s apparent machine intelligence.

27 The band OKGO became an Internet sensation when their video clip, Here It Goes Again, went viral in 2006. Featuring one continuous take of the band performing a tightly choreographed routine on a series of treadmills the video is more comment on the machinations of the music industry than it is on machine technology as such. However the video which they designed with Los Angeles art collective Syn Labs to
Beginning with a transmission bearing rolling along a plank and knocking into another component and thereby setting off a chain reaction of carefully orchestrated events the two minute sequence consists of Honda parts knocking into one another, falling, rolling, tripping switches, igniting batteries and setting off sensors through to the final reveal of the new edition Accord with the tag line, “the Power of Dreams.” The commercial’s subtext seems to proclaim: This technology is here now! This is our utopian promise to you. But rather than explanatory voiceover, the film is silent except for the clinks and taps of the various parts as they come into contact with each other before the final sequence sets off the Accord’s in-car sound system components. Rather, the message is embedded in the image and the “life” that the car’s components appear to conduct of their own accord. Here the “tiny robots” are the sensors which open a window when it is tapped, set off lights on a rear view mirror, set off the window wipers which scurry across the floor when water is squirted onto a moisture sensitive windscreen and finally the keyless remote which automatically shuts the Accord’s hatch. Accepted technologies for sure, but the rationale is the same, there is something hidden and amazing within the design of ‘our’ devices, that is intelligent, that is in control of the functions it commands and is to be trusted to deliver the appropriate response. They also secure life within its proud solid frame and are engineered to ‘anticipate’ and ‘respond’ when required to do so.

These video sequences of the behind the scenes machinations of web search technology and environmental sensors of contemporary car design are reminiscent of other earlier 20th century attempts to illustrate ‘hidden technology’ processes by simplifying the viewer’s understanding of what remains unseen. The art works of Fritz Kahn, a German author and physician, make use of industrial tools and common domestic objects to illustrate the machinations of the human body’s internal organs. In Kahn’s 1926 plate, Man As Industrial Palace, the processes of ingestion, the circulatory system, the respiratory system and the repatriation of nutrients from the digestion of food are represented as mechanised processes of industrial technologies and Fordist factory work ethics (Debschitz & Debschitz, 2009). In Henning Lederer’s 2009 animation of the Man As Industrial Palace (Lederer, 2009), each part of the ingestion process is brought to ‘life’ as man and machine collaborate in the management of mind and body in a claustrophobic assembly line reminiscent of promote their follow-up album reflects this process of mechanisation but also has strong synergies with the visual motifs of the Delaunay’s chromatic painting and his exploration of circular forms. Reminiscent of the Honda Cog commercial, the OKGO clip featured a Rube-Goldberg machine whose components filled an entire warehouse. While the machine by its very nature is an elaborate construction designed to perform a very simple task, the visual construction of the sequence – again in one take – is both a deconstruction of the chromatic colour palette as it is of the interior monologue of the musician as a music industry construct. The technology of music construction and the machinations of the music video as a marketing tool are embedded into the sequence as a visual critique of these processes.
the unseen processes of Modernist industrialisation – machine manufacturing, subterranean mining and textile production. In a twist on *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927) the underclass are internalised cogs in the machine of man as the cyborg of technological triumphalism takes on a clunky mechanical appearance reminiscent not of an approaching future but a rapidly receding past. Office workers pull levers, sort printed data trails and snap photographs to facilitate the functioning of the human brain, elsewhere levers, pulley systems, pumps and steam engines are operated by overall clad factory workers to facilitate the digestion of food, the circulation of blood and the absorption of oxygen into the lungs and blending elements of Kahn’s original sketch and the now familiar particularisation of contemporary image making and data visualisation methodologies.

Thirteen years after Kahn’s famous illustration the 1939 World’s Fair became the mid-century touchstone for the technocultural narrative and the symbolic birth place for consumer culture on a mass industrial scale. Here America’s engagement with the future was writ large, not by government, science or academia, but by the corporation. It is a future branded by cars, domestic efficiency, streamlined mass transportation, designer
cities and invisible technologies. If the Italians had the Futurist movement, America had the Fair. Affectionately known as the World of Tomorrow, “the sounds and visions” as observed by New York Times journalist Meyer Berger were romanticised by designers, architects and politicians. Luminaries such as HG Wells and Einstein were drawn to its beacon of progress and prosperity. It played host to many examples of contemporary image making in relation to new pre-digital technologies shaping modern domestic life. The television, washing machines, fluorescent lighting, air conditioning, nylon, the fax machine, pre-packaged frozen meals and the microwave oven all had their public debut at the 1939 Fair. Grafted onto a gigantic rubbish dump in Flushing Meadows New York, the World’s Fair was a propaganda tool for American industry and was designed to present a template for an American future to a population still picking itself up from the dust bowl of the Great Depression and living with the ominous spectre of Fascism’s march across Europe. The fair was marketed with enticing slogans such as “the world of tomorrow”, the “dawn of a new day” and the “fair of the future” and was designed to exhibit a tangible future via carefully crafted exhibits, public appearances by artists and intellectuals, corporate sponsored promotional films and the physical layout of the site which featured locations such as ‘Democracy’, ‘City of Light’, ‘House of Magic’, ‘Pleasantville’, ‘Liberty Lake’ and ‘Constitution Mall’. All of this provided the attendee with a view of an idyllic – if somewhat homespun – modern and technologically-evolved American future. The fair’s organisers and sponsors were committed to the themes of “scientific rationality, technological progress, modernist aesthetics, (and) industrial design”, a continuation of the Modernist mantras from the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933. “Increasing consumer prosperity and a positive view of corporate capitalism, these fairs both expressed and helped consolidate the emerging cultural logic of 1930s American modernism” (R. Bennett, 2010, p. 177). Only two years away from being drawn into the world’s second ‘great’ war which was already well under way in Europe, the Futurist narrative on display in New York was not a collective push for ideological determinism by a nation state as their Italian counterparts had foreshadowed prior to WWI, but instead the 1939 World’s Fair was a domestic commercial propaganda enterprise on a massive scale. Inward looking rather than outward looking, it provided a weary America with an “escape from the imperfections of present life into an ideal future” (Nye, 1994, p. 204). Funded by large corporations such as Consolidated Edison, General Motors, Chevrolet, AT&T, General Electric and Westinghouse Electrical, the agenda was not merely to display their ingenuity but to interpret “the future to the American public, telling them that the long depression and the danger of war could be overcome and that a utopian future for their children was achievable.” Moreover, “the fair had to address this uneasiness. It could not do so by mere appeals of patriotism, by displays of goods that many people...
had no money to buy, or by the nostalgic evocation of golden yesterdays. It had to offer temporary transcendence” (Nye, 1994, pp. 204-205).

On the surface the fair was an odd mix of politics, technology and fantasy. By design a modernist wonderland built quite literally upon the ashes of the past. The site, now known as Flushing Meadows, was cleared from the old Corona Ash Dumps - the “valley of ashes” described by F. Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1968) itself a tale of renewal and slippery facades. The fair promoted a myriad of cross-genre cross-cultural iconography, developing a form of stage managed marketing and multimedia trickery that would evolve to become a typically American style of product integrated entertainment. The Fair’s pavilions were a pastiche of pop-art and high-art in which Salvador Dali designed a gaudy pavilion for his exhibition, *Visions of Venus* (see Figure 68C), science fiction illustrator Frank R Paul (see Figure 68B) provided early sketches for potential pavilions, the fictional comic book character Superman appeared in person for the first time (see Figure 68J) and then in print via a commemorative World’s Fair DC Comic with fellow super heroes Batman and Robin (see Figure 68K). A key attraction in the Westinghouse Corporation’s pavilion was the 7ft 120kg automaton Electro the Moto Man and his companion Sparko the Moto Dog (see Figure 68L). Electro was a mechanical device, he could not perform tasks or act independently, his gigantic frame concealing the gears and pulleys that enabled him to move, an air bellow that mimicked breathing and a 78-rpm record player that allowed him to utter some 700 phrases. According to the New York Public Library, Electro was capable of performing “dozens of mechanical tricks including walking, talking, smoking a cigarette, and counting on his fingers” (New York Public Library, 2011).

Elsewhere the carefully stage managed exhibits, such as the *House of Magic* produced demonstrations of electricity, magnetism and radio waves that melted, fried, cooked, suspended and powered various objects and devices but was more sleight of hand than real science. This “apparent magic heightened the appeal of the technological sublime, investing the corporation with supernatural powers” (Nye, 1994, p. 216). And the sales pitch worked. The 1939 World’s Fair set in train vast commercial industry populated by new domestic appliances that would become household staples, new supply chain networks to support their distribution, sales and repairs, transportation industries for cargo and people, new content streams for television networks and an all pervasive advertising industry to keep the whole system turning over. This continues today in an albeit more sophisticated form that preaches social harmony through technology, new interactions delivered by super devices with super functions, new content through tailored channels with tailored stars, new ways of learning, new ways of seeing the world, new lifestyles and better future. As Bruce Sterling noted, “you can’t believe the possibilities, it’s like anything is possible” (Sterling, 2009). This is the conceit of technoculture, this is the flipside of the dark euphoric fall. And this is
why the distraction of the 1939 World’s Fair put a temporary distance between the American public and the horrors of Europe’s decent into total war.

“Lacking Europe’s more immediate experiences with the darker side of modern technology, the fair’s Americanised modernism tended to fetishize technology as a simple panacea and promote naive machine age fantasies” (R. Bennett, 2010, p. 184). However, in keeping with Apollinaire’s Futurist schematic of the traumatic and the fantastic, the 1939 fair blended an ironic tapestry of technological dreaming and sinister foreboding. Appearances by noted celebrities and cultural icons were played out against the backdrop of an encroaching war – one that America seemed destined to join – and the creeping dawn of the nuclear age. “One by one the foreign pavilions erected by European governments began to represent nations that, for all practical purposes, no longer existed: Austria, Belgium, France, and Poland, among others; each nation’s collapse ringing like a death knell in the ears of the American public” (Mauro, 2011). The future it seemed was both a cultural commodity and an unnerving glance back into the past, a dark euphoric moment codified in the cast of historical figures who were on hand to enthrall the crowds. The fair was opened by President FD Roosevelt author of the New Deal and present was science fiction author HG Wells who had penned the dystopian speculative fiction novel, *The Shape of Things To Come* six years previously. By his side, Albert Einstein who had fled Germany in 1933 was - haunted by the evolving horror in Europe and wrestling with the moral consequences of bringing into the realm of the possible the world’s first atomic bomb. Einstein in particular was heavily involved in the fair, giving speeches, opening pavilions and visiting the site regularly. But the gradual closing of the European pavilions, the obvious contradictory nature of the fair’s utopian idealism and the escalating horrors abroad were taking their toll. When asked to provide a message to be included in the Westinghouse Time Capsule, he wrote: “Anyone who thinks about the future must live in fear and terror” (Mauro, 2011). It was within the grounds of Flushing Meadows, New York that the seeds for the dark euphoric moment were indeed first sown.

The iconography of the fair was a techno-cultural construction and echoed familiar Futurist tropes and adapted them for a particular brand of American progress. Man’s dominance over the human form and its obsession with verticality and human flight were evident in the design of the central icons of the fair, the Trylon and Perisphere, and the extensive advertising ephemera (see Figure 68A) which emphasised these structures in much the same way as the Eiffel Tower had been

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28 His opening speech at the Palestine Pavilion was delivered against the backdrop of the unfolding horrors in Europe and the ongoing tensions between the British and the Palestinian Jews, he spoke in anger when he read: “The World’s Fair is in a way a reflection of mankind. But it projects the world of men like a wishful dream. Only the creative forces are on show, none of the sinister and destructive ones which today more than ever jeopardize the happiness, the very existence of civilized harmony” (Mauro, 2011).
aestheticized by the Futurists decades earlier. Internally the exhibit halls were designed along sleek modernist lines, featuring multimedia elements such as projections, lighting and sound and were designed to be viewed from above (see Figure 68D & E). This perspective was chosen to simulate the view from an aeroplane – a new startling technology most Americans had yet to experience in the post-Depression era and a perspective from which they certainly would not have seen the American landscape. By implementing such tactics, the fair’s industrial designers “synthesised the three major forms of the technological sublime: the dynamic, the geometric, and the electric” (Nye, 1994, p. 203). As Dan Howland notes in Wired magazine, “You have to understand that the audience had never even considered a future like this. There wasn’t an interstate freeway system in 1939. Not many people owned a car. They staggered out of the fair like a cargo cult and built an imperfect version of this incredible vision.” (Baker, 2007) A uniformity of urban planning reminiscent of La Cobusier’s Plan Voisin, Paris from 1925 was evidently in mind of the designers of the Futurama: The Magic City of Progress and Democracity dioramas in which large ordered structures, wide gently curved freeways and gleaming towers emerge from the greenbelts of the rolling landscape to serve the citizens of the future. 29 Author Robert Bennett has noted that these displays, while ingeniously constructed echo an

... ecumenical range of European and American modernist precedents, including the decentralised, open spaces of Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre City; the towering skyscrapers depicted in Hugh Ferris’s architectural renderings in the Metropolis of Tomorrow (Ferriss, 1986); and the cinematic science fiction fantasies of Fritz Lang’s Metropolis (Lang, 1927) or David Butler’s Just Imagine (Butler, 1930), a comedic, musical revision of Lang’s dystopian film (R. Bennett, 2010, p. 183).

This link with science fiction was explicit, it was the lusty allure that permitted the audience to see beyond the rational interpretation of the extravagant image constructions before them and instead, unencumbered by the toil of the recent past and the reality of the darkened hour that was almost upon them, and gaze deeply into the glittering diamond of the America of the future. The 1939 iteration of the World’s Fair was a coordinated endeavour between corporate America and the governments of the day. This was a distinct departure from previous fairs in which cultural groups, national emissaries and industry lobbyists were central to the politics and coordination of how fairs

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29 It should be noted that the World’s Fair’s modernist designs for urban planning and city developments were adopted for some sites in the United States following the template of 1939 such as Levittown in Hicksville, New York (1947) and Stuyvesant Town in New York city (1948). Such developments have since proven to be incompatible with the needs of their inhabitants and there has been much criticism of the psychological and social impact of such Modernist designs. For more on this see Jane Jacob’s The Death and Life of Great American Cities (Jacobs, 1961) Robert Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture (Venturi, 1966) and Carol Hagan’s thesis on the subject, Visions of the city at the 1939 New York World’s Fair (Hagan, 2000).
would look, where pavilions were placed and what they were permitted to exhibit. Instead the project was spearheaded by industrial designers and engineers who were charged with the task of producing a cohesive and persuasive “transcendence”. And this would not be demonstration, education was seen as a distraction, an irrelevance, this was about magic, fantasy and facade. Rather than seeing the engine of a motor vehicle - the pistons, the switching gears, the spark of ignition, the grease and oil - one was given the fantasy of automation, the ubiquity of machine “intelligence”, the slick lines, the shiny duco and the futurist interior panelling. The World’s Fair of 1939 “represented a moment where corporations could deploy the images and themes of science fiction as well as utopian and futurist design as vehicles for promoting a particular model of consumerism which would profoundly shape the post-war era” (Jenkins, 2011). By ignoring the divisions between traditional themes which had been the norm for previous fairs – agriculture, manufacturing, science and art – the designers of the 1939 fair instead melded science and art into a techno-cultural blend of persuasion and propaganda.

At the core of this planning were a group of industrial designers lead by Henry Dreyfuss and Norman Bel Geddes who were charged with the design and production of the dioramas and models for the fair’s centrepiece attractions, Futurama (Bel Geddes) and Democracy (Dreyfuss). In their hands, along with a core group of designers and engineers, what emerged was a stage-managed fantasy built from a futurist hybrid of an Art Deco past and the modernist streamlined aesthetic of the period. With backgrounds in theatrical stage design, advertising and engineering in essence what they produced was a sophisticated and carefully crafted techno-cultural text:

Synthesising these various fields, industrial design gave equal emphasis to product performance, dramatic presentation, and consumer appeal. Employed by both the fair’s organisers and its corporate exhibitors, industrial designers created the startling synthesis of theatre, futuristic design, and technology that became the world’s most popular exhibits. The fair would demonstrate the beneficence of corporate control, from invention through mass production to merchandising, through aesthetically pleasing designs calculated to overwhelm the visitor. (Nye, 1994, p. 210).

Central to this message were the films, To New Horizons produced by General Motors (John Handy, 1940), The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair produced by Westinghouse Electrical (Snody, 1939), The City produced for the American Institute of Planners (Steiner & Van Dyke, 1939), Leave It to Rollo-Oh produced for Chevrolet (Jam Handy, 1939), Pete-Roleum and His Cousins a full-colour stop motion film produced for the Petroleum Industries Exhibition (Losey, 1939), and the first stop motion 3D film, In Tune with Tomorrow produced for the Chrysler Corporation (Norling, 1939).
These were corporate funded promotional films that supplemented and reinforced the ideologies embedded in the elaborate exhibition halls. These films were the bridge between the conceit of the design and the take-home message of the corporate machine whose explicit agenda was the articulation of the futurist narrative to a burgeoning society of American consumers. While the World’s Fairs of the early nineteenth century were based largely on monolithic nationalistic structures, the mechanics of primary industry, and the cultural toil of the fine arts, the 1939 iteration broke utterly with the past and focused on the presentation of the future as a simulation and deconstructed the very complex - and very real – advancements in technology via stage props, set design and visual metaphor. As Stephen Heller observes in his text Design literacy: “It was a masterpiece of showmanship, the epitome of stagecraft – real-life Land of Oz indelibly etched in the memories of those who attended and in the imaginations of those who did not. It was more than a collection of exhibits; it was a wellspring of innovation in corporate identity and promotion” (Heller, 2004, p. 356).

One particular film by car manufacturer Chevrolet, Leave It to Roll-Oh (Jam Handy, 1939), is an archetype of the form featuring miniaturised robots to illustrate the seemingly ‘magical’ process of domestic appliances and the mechanical operations of a motor car. The key visual metaphors employed in this instance, the “tiny robots”, are deployed in a domestic scenario involving an unsuspecting housewife surrounded by the “thinking” technology embedded into her environment designed by the corporation to enhance her productivity and happiness. This is a clever futurist concoction designed to explain away complexity with simplistic scenarios and robotic avatars. Like Kahn’s illustration, mechanical analogies and machine thinking are used to illustrate invisible processes, however in this instance, with an added layer of “intelligence”. After the first sequence, in which a maintenance man belittles the young housewife for failing to grasp the meaning of the script’s concocted techno-babble, we are introduced to her offsider,
Roll-Oh the robot. Roll-Oh is an awkward sci-fi creation, although he seems infinitely more capable than the plodding Electro as he helps the hapless housewife fulfil her domestic duties – receiving unsolicited roses from the postman, helping to set the dinner table, lighting candles and opening cans of food. Sci-fi futurist dreaming to be sure, however Roll-Oh quickly fades from view and we are then presented with the real magic of our technological present – invisible “robots” and “tiny brains”. The narrator’s condescending tone of voice shifts to a more earnest and enthralled delivery as he describes the “the amazing machines and gadgets that almost seem to think for themselves”. As the housewife prepares a meal on the stove the narrator extols the appliances’ virtues: “the tiny clockwork brains and heat regulators on our kitchen stoves apparently do almost everything except read the cookbook.” A toaster is referred to as a “thinking machine” that keeps “golden brown slices of toast from turning into slabs of charcoal”. The scene shifts to the workplace where we see a worker loading a printing press to which the narrator enthuses, “no robot machine has ever been accused of being careless or absent minded at work. Here a robot that never sleeps nor winks or looks out the window stands guard over the men who work at this giant press.” This manner of description continues across a sequence of work sites, office buildings and school scenarios in which the “thinking machines” watch over us for our protection, and it would seem, our efficiency. However the most telling moment in the promotional film is the deconstruction of the “tiny robots” busy at work deep inside the engine of the Chevrolet, the film’s producer:

Don’t look now, but this motor car is simply full of robots! ... One little robot, a very small but intelligent brain, sits up the back of the engine in the voltage regulator and keeps close tabs on the generator to see that the generator keeps up enough current to keep the battery fully charged - but not too full! And still another deep thinker rides way up in front; its job is to keep water from cooling off in the radiator until the engine has warmed up to a good working temperature ... driving wouldn’t be half so much fun if we didn’t have that phantom crew of intelligent robots to help us. Every day in our homes and offices as well as in our motor cars, hundreds of these little robots are doing more things for us than we realise, taking care of the routine tasks and leaving us free to live and work and play in greater ease and comfort and safety!” (Jam Handy, 1939).

This last phrase defines the context of future labour, an economic safe zone in which participation provides the wealth to purchase the future lifestyle that the depression years had rendered unimaginable. In many ways this is a pre-emption of the mid-century analogy of the human brain as computer while in the same instance it is a fictitious glorification of the technologies of the early Modernist period so celebrated by the Futurists. Here the true wonder and excitement

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30 In the printed transcriptions of J.Z. Young’s 1950 Reith Lectures, Doubt and Uncertainty in Science, Young makes the direct comparison between the human brain as a system of processing signals in much the same
of technology, of physics and of engineering is sacrificed in order to promote a product and amaze an audience with futuristic symbolism. Caught between the visible and the invisible, the past and the future, the illustrations of Kahn and Google’s *Chrome Speed Test* also represent retrospective articulations of technology with a strong Futurist bent. For Kahn the imagery is evocative of an earlier period of machine operation – buckets, pulleys, pipes, tubes and overly elaborate engines – that simulate the mechanisation of the human organ. While Google employ a shotgun – surely a primitive technology – a large loud speaker cone, an old leather boot and the dramatic use of an electrical current to symbolise computational speed and machine intelligence. Each example is a fitting counterpart to the quest for miniaturisation and invisibility peddled by the industrial designers and marketing teams of the 1939 World’s Fair.

Taken together these approaches to selling the future and the marketing of a machine aesthetic are illustrative of a wider techno-cultural narrative that relies on the use of exaggerated visual forms, performative showmanship and sloganeering and the inventive use of high-end visual effects to represent the processes of mostly invisible yet increasingly more complex digital technologies. Sometimes this is retroactive as in the case of the *Google Chrome* video aesthetic but mostly it is the surface of the diamond that we are shown first in a deliberate effort to obscure the machinations of the technology in favour of the aesthetic pleasure of the futurist buy-in. We trust that it works. We believe that the technology is performing “miracles”. This notion of trust and technological suprematism is inherent in the corporate identity constructs of Chevrolet, Microsoft, the Honda Corporation and Google but it is also true of a range of contemporary electronic manufacturers and telecommunication service providers who employ similarly sophisticated techniques which imitate contemporary science fiction tropes to market the future as a lifestyle. The obvious message here is that it is not necessary for the consumer to really understand the technology within the object but to be emboldened by what the external fantasy promises: the way that the ‘modern’ computer processes information: “All animals that show good learning powers have large numbers of short nerve-cells in their brain. We do not know what the system employed for storage may be, but it seems to depend on the presence of great numbers of cells. The latest mechanical calculator in America has 23 000 valves. But the cortex of the human brain has nearly 15 000 000 000 cells. A computer with so many parts is beyond the dreams of the engineer. A huge building would be needed to house so many valves and all the water of Niagara would not be enough to work and cool them. Yet all that such a machine can do, and much more, goes on gently, gently in every human head, using very little energy and generating hardly any heat”. (Young, 1950)

Obviously the eventual advent of the transistor and the discovery of silicon as a conducting property aided in the dramatic militarisation of the computer and the consequent gains in speed and processing power without excessive loads of heat. Such conditions have brought the modern microchip into ubiquitous use on a comparative scale to the imaginative propositions of Young and Kahn in which technology is embedded into fabric, skin and disposable everyday objects – the collective computerisation of the modern world – and combinations of systems (AV receivers, magnetic storage, CPUs, WiFi transmitters, IO devices) which mimic the social and problem solving mechanics of the human body.
software without the clutter of the code, the branding of the future without the anxieties of the past and especially the trauma of the present.

My new media work *Primary Propaganda* was a direct response to this trend utilizing similar touchstones of colour symbolism, organic movement, liquid energy and urban space. The piece was a video installation comprised four 1080P video sequences of crowd movements in two of Tokyo’s busiest public spaces – the Tokyo airport subway station and the Shibuya pedestrian crossing. These sequences are intercut with the imagery of four different coloured balloons moving right to left across the screens. The fragile primary objects move with the gentle motion of the waves lapping upon the shore. From one screen to the next the balloons change colour sequentially – yellow, red, green and blue – intercutting the Tokyo imagery. For the RGB signal is in our DNA. Red, green and blue drift gently through the Cyber City populace. The addition of the yellow fits out the primary colour spectrum and together they are symbolic of a century of techno-futurist manifestos. The movement of the crowds and the movement of the waves are in gentle symmetry, the balloons representative of the essential colour properties of the most simple image constructions as they tilt and tip and sway across the surface. The same primary colours which are exalted in the tech advertising of Samsung and Sony, the same essential colour properties represented in the logos of Microsoft windows operating software and Google’s Chrome web browser, the same iconography

![Figure 70 A sequential series of screenshots from each of the 4 channels from the installation Primary Propaganda (Goodwin, 2011e).](image)
the Futurists used in their chromatic colour experimentations a century earlier. A one hundred year symbiosis of technological image making.

Produced in the wake of the Japanese tsunami of March 2011, the imagery from Shibuya Crossing and the Tokyo airport subway juxtaposed with the imagery of the balloons luting towards the camera on a gentle wave has particular significance. For me the inclusion was also an attempt to capture the vulnerability and melancholia of a personal moment – a Gold Coast afternoon shared with a close friend sitting on a wide open beach – a six pack of beer, some cigarettes, more silence than words – as he contemplated a future without his parents – one recently deceased, another terminally ill; an awful book-end to an awful year. We watched in silence as a red balloon, most likely escaped from a livelier occasion some hundreds of meters, perhaps kilometres south entered the frame of our vision, buffeted by an on-shore breeze hugging the lip of the waves, skipping between the shadows of the high rise towers and then up the beach and away. A profound moment shared but never acknowledged.
While some of the core themes of the piece are influenced by personal and historical experience, the ambition of Primary Propaganda is to signify an aesthetic tone that is derived from the advertising strategies for technology devices and services. The key reference here is the series of Sony Bravia commercials produced between 2005 and 2007. The first film in the series, the iconic ‘Bouncy Balls’ advert featuring a multitude of rubber balls bouncing down a street in San Francisco is the most obvious compositional touchstone here. This was a motif they would repeat with the ‘Paint’ advert in 2006, ‘Pyramid’ in 2007 and later that year, ‘Play Doh Rabbits’, a stop motion film in which 189 2ft play doh rabbits hop through New York city to the tune of She’s a Rainbow by the Rolling Stones, the couplet, “She shoots her colours all around. Like a sunset going down” is most telling in this context (Jagger & Richards, 1967). The Play Doh Rabbits ad features a large wall of Play Doh water marauding through the city square eventually giving rise to a gigantic rabbit from under which spills a sea of primary coloured cube-like objects which progressively morph into a carpet of rainbow coloured pixels for the commercial’s aerial finale (see Figure 71). This a stunning confluence of the destructive forces of nature, in this case a tsunami, pixels like building blocks of screen fidelity and a giant kitsch rabbit so emblematic of kawaii quality in Japanese culture. Of course, this suite of Sony commercials is designed specifically to signify colour fidelity and image clarity of their Bravia line of televisions – trying to make the invisible visible. So rather than showing the device itself they employ abstract objects, skilfully getting around the fact that the majority of people watching the commercial will be doing so on a television screen with inferior image reproduction to the device they are promoting.

The aim of my piece Primary Propaganda however, was to employ a much more subtle and contemplative technique. Like that afternoon on the beach. Like the quite hours before and after the Japanese tsunami of March 2011. There is something very neo-gothic at work here, events take place in full view, in daylight and by banks of neon, yet beneath the surface there is anxiety and apprehension, for the past and the imminent future. In stark contrast to the frenetic movement and electricity of one of the most densely populated cities in the world, the waves lap – rather than crash – against the shore. While the coloured balloons – themselves awkward symbols of both the great accident of the earth’s shifting crust and the promise of the technological sublime – flow gently towards the shoreline. These gentle, soft and fragile objects return to the shelter of land’s end like a life boat, a fallen capsule, a damaged vessel. The placement of the screens in sequence is designed

31 Kawaii in Japanese means “cute” or “lovable”. Evidence of this can be found in the Pokémon animated series and game universe, the use of rabbit iconography in the Akihabara district (Electric Town) in Tokyo and the Narita prefecture’s council road works which use plastic pink rabbits for their safety barriers.
to give a sense of the separation between the urban locations so that the balloons would be appear to be passing through each environment, as if moving from one scene to the next. 32

The lilting movement of the balloons in *Primary Propaganda*, and the overall contemplative, melancholic tone of the piece is also heavily influenced by the plastic bag sequence from Sam Mendez’ *American Beauty* (Mendes, 2000). The plastic bag, although empty and nondescript, ushers in a transferral of the dreams and aspirations of the two young viewers. Yet this shape shifting seemingly innocuous object dancing amidst the swirling winter leaves also signifies the futility of their journey and the inevitably of the horrific fate which lies ahead. The anxiety and awkwardness of youth hangs perilously in the air. The discarded white plastic shopping bag, “the most beautiful thing I have ever seen”, is also the most perfect articulation of the past-present-future endlessness - suburban middle class hegemony floating inside a television screen. This is modern western cinema’s truly gothic high-tech moment, when the raw screen fidelity of digital video meets the concrete and the plastic and the winter leaves. While Thomas Newman’s brittle piano score – which can be considered as a companion piece to his follow-up theme for the equally dark TV series *Six Feet Under* – haunts this slow deliberate unravelling of the American Dream.

An alternative edit of the composition was also designed in which each video sequence are reduced to 480x320 and placed side by side but within the parameters of a single 1080P video frame similar to Chris Cunningham’s work for Gil Scott-Heron’s, *New York Is Killing Me*.

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32 An alternative edit of the composition was also designed in which each video sequence are reduced to 480x320 and placed side by side but within the parameters of a single 1080P video frame similar to Chris Cunningham’s work for Gil Scott-Heron’s, *New York Is Killing Me*. 86
In symbolic terms we first encountered the notion of the light on dark aesthetic early in this chapter. And the notion of the invisible made visible in the branding of the information economy is a metaphor which will crop up repeatedly in this discussion, especially as I explore the wares of marketers, directors and artists who seek to reveal the machinations of the techno-futurist obsession. The appropriation of meaning and the simplification of language, the hypnotic animation of shape and symbol, the distortion of time via the manipulation of the photographic image and the persistent use of electricity as metaphor – are all tricks to sell the machine-like fantasy people are increasingly adopting as a cloak against the trauma of the real. So much so that one could be tempted into thinking that the omnipresent darkness – the canvas upon which all video and digital media is first cast – was never there at all. And like the World’s Fair of 1939, the parade of light and colour is a powerful distraction against even the most foreboding of realities.

I will reveal in the coming chapter how a broad range of production techniques, visual design methodologies and motion graphic tools are employed by designers to create electrical simulations. The mediums of advertising and broader visual culture frame this technological ruse through the windows of the television, the cinema screen, the web browser and the mobile device, themselves ritualising our relationship via repetition and physical engagement with the interface. This is a simulated engagement. An experience that might be digital but demands the mechanics of physics, it preaches touch but it is not necessarily felt, it glows but it does not necessarily shine. Software publishers and device manufacturers know this; they are the inheritors of a century of technological integration. They know our relationship with a machine vision of the world has been evolving steadily, that the darkness is to be avoided, the anxiety marginalised to the fringes where the neon ceases to exist. And as Balla and Depero wrote in the Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe in 1915:

(we) seek to realise this total fusion in order to reconstruct the universe by making it more joyful, in other words by an integral re-creation. We will give skeleton and flesh to the invisible, the impalpable, the imponderable and the imperceptible. We will find abstract equivalents for all the forms and elements of the universe, and then we will combine them according to the caprice of our inspiration, to shape plastic complexes which we will set in motion (Balla & Depero, 1915, p. 197).

And so “glittering diamonds” become a fluid plastic construct, the present reorganised as a most fantastic future narrative. The complexities of our times become imponderable; meaning beyond the image frame is obscured. In this reorganised space the first threads of the gothic high-tech conceit of the present-future space begin to appear.
In the following chapter I will demonstrate a more complex expression of these themes through the advertising collateral of DHL, Samsung, IBM and Comcast. I will also reveal the most elaborate expression of electrification as simulation, the liquid blue electric with deep analysis of Tron and A.I. Artificial Intelligence. These digital objects represent the site at which the anxiety of the neo-gothic experience begins to run alongside the futurist fictions of millennial technoculture. In this space the previously inanimate blackness of the canvas begins to express itself as the atmosphere of the dark euphoric fall.

Figure 75 Two frames from the informational video Google Chrome Privacy - Browsers, Privacy and You (Google Inc., 2010)

Google

404. That’s an error.
The requested URL /~ri9/full/~3/0ha8mJwhni8/what-tv-series-did-you-begrudgingly-finish-even-though-1641632961 was not found on this server. That’s all we know.

Figure 76 Screenshot of Google 404 Error page, captured on the 12th March 2014 (Google Inc., 2014)