Figure 162 A composite image made from several infrared snapshots of northern Baltic Sea by NASA’s Landsat 7 on April 19, 2003. "Ethereal swirls of grease ice appear turquoise against the midnight blue of the northern Baltic Sea near the Aland Islands (red) between Finland and Sweden. An early stage of sea-ice formation, grease ice consists of a viscous mix of tiny ice crystals and resembles an oil slick on the ocean’s surface. Wind and currents constantly shape and reshape grease ice into surreal, ghostly patterns." (Mason & NASA, 2010)
02 :: 03 Digitizing Dystopia

If movies are a reflection of the national psyche — at least as interpreted by Hollywood — we’re all expecting a hideous future.

- Dennis Overbye, writing in the *New York Times, Apocalypse and Other Love Stories* (Overbye, 2013)

This proliferation of computer technology promises liberation, but, Kroker and Weinstein say, it will actually produce a twisted future. Ruled by what they call "the will to virtuality," we want more and more to upload ourselves into the great Net in the sky, to shed our weak fleshly bodies for the hard perfection of wiring and machinery. They think we want - literally - to become data.


As image resolution increases both in the ability to capture and the ability to display the digital moving image, artists are pushing the simulation of the physical world and its fantasy counterpart to ever greater heights of realism. Evidence abounds of the proliferation of exquisitely rendered realities. *Bokeh aesthetics*, is a recent reality fetish of digital video photography (DSLR) where the subject of the image is cast in an ultra shallow depth of field while the background is mottled in an extremely soft-focus curtain of usually mottled light. Rather than a specific amount of focus blur, the bokeh aesthetic refers to the character of the blur (see Figure 163). The technique of such stylised imagery becomes the message of the film rather than the content itself. A distinctly referential procedure is going on here where the machine becomes part of the subject of the film. Often, as in the example here (see Figure 164), the machine is explicitly represented in a showcase of the feature set of a recently (or soon to be) released camera model. The highly stylised production methodology incorporates techniques such as over-active use of travelling focus, ultra-wide cinematic framing and subtle incremental camera movement. These videos typically blend such production techniques with a strong “cinematic look” irrespective of the banality of the objects variously located in the film maker’s immediate surrounds: the sidewalk, the train station, the
bedroom or as in the case of Florian Cramer’s cited example, by German film maker Pilpop, a grubby Berlin bathroom (Pilpop, 2011). This approach distracts the viewer from the blandness of the subject onto the technical process of the machine. A variation of this technique is also evident in Xavier Chassaing’s *Scintillation* (Chassaing, 2009) a short film made of 35 000 sequential still images, produced under conditions Chassaing calls “classic dogma” cinema, or in a more contemporary context, classic DIY maker philosophy (Saunders, 2009). Cassaing had zero budget, a small DSLR, a laptop, a small projector and a tiny apartment with some heritage era surfaces and textures. The piece, constructed much like a stop motion animation, uses the technical foundations of the bokeh aesthetic to produce what Cramer refers to as “Bokeh Porn”. The obvious technical references here are the seductively blurred background, the extremely narrow depth of field, and the slow precise shifts in focus coupled with motion-controlled camera movements across surfaces and objects. Here the design and texture of the objects become the film’s core novum as they are consumed by the rich
intimate fidelity of the image acquisition process as the lens drifts across wood, plaster and velvet (see Figures 165 & 166). The video piece culminates in a series of sequences in which projection mapping is utilised to accentuate the shape and form of the photographed objects in a vibrant evocation of the light on dark luminescent aesthetic. A strong sense of nostalgic faux naturalism is evidenced in the classical appreciation of colour, in the warmth of incandescent light, the post produced film stock effects and an intimate condensed composition. “Bokeh is part of a revival of analogue aesthetics which can also be seen in iPhone photo applications such as Hipstamatic. It is a living image that has an organic quality to it” (Cramer, 2011). Elsewhere independently made short films reject the camera as acquisition device altogether in favour of the simulation of reality via 3D animation software technology. These artists seek a simulated reality indistinguishable from ‘the real’ in the same way as a Visual Effects Supervisor on a major film production hopes his or her CGI components are indistinguishable from the conventionally photographed scenes and the complementary digital assets of other compositors. Alex Roman’s The Third and the Seventh (Roman, 2009) and Above Everything Else (Roman & The Mushroom Company, 2011), Mathieu Gerard’s Steel Life (Gerard, 2009), Brian Sorenson’s Load (Sorenson, 2013) and Christopher Dull’s Mondblume (Dull, 2010) are all 100% CGI constructions and exemplars of the form. Largely the work of artists working independently or in very small collaborative teams they originate outside the typical studio funded enterprise. Each film maker openly rejects the notion of the camera as a rarefied film making device while simultaneously accentuating the techniques of classic cinematography through their compositional style and over-exaggerated use of various focal techniques and 3D lighting effects. The digital object becomes a highly fetishized image construction. These images exist, not for the communication of meaning or the translation of data, but for their demonstration of the artist’s ability to author digital media simulations which adhere to a desire for such objects to possess “life-like clarity” and “photorealistic” effects. This heightened sense of reality is exemplified in Roman’s The Third and the Seventh a synthetic construction which adheres to the parameters of the bokeh aesthetic in a 3D animated context. It is also a nostalgia piece. The

52 For more information on the production process for Scintillation see a review at Motionographer, that also includes an interview with Xavier Cassaing. His personal web portfolio also features further explorations in this style especially Just Another Flower which features a far more refined implementation of the luminescent projection mapping aesthetic.

53 See Florian Cramer’s wonderful presentation, Bokeh Porn Poetics at the Institute of Network Cultures, Video Vortex 6.

54 The language which is used in this domain is a mix of post-production terminology relevant to the film and gaming industries as well as the DIY graphic and motion design community online (see PSDTuts+ and Digital Tutors). In saying this, terminology such as “lifelike rendering” and “faithful colour reproduction” are also commonly used by manufacturers of digital cameras and smart phones (see Panasonic’s mini site for the Lumix GX1 mini DSLR).
film assembles signifiers of early-modernist authorship including calligraphy, Polaroid prints, analogue film making ephemera, physical notions of the archive and classical museum architecture, and the careful replication of manual analogue in-camera effects (see Figure 167). This subjectivity and Roman’s animation techniques are an attempt to compose a digital truth using nostalgia as its legitimising characteristic – truth based on a shared analogue history of information retrieval and storage. The film opens in an almost identical fashion to Chassaing’s opening shot in *Scintillation* utilising a very narrow depth of field, but rather than a single close-up attention shifts from the metal nib of a calligraphy pen to a gradual pull-focus onto an ink well in the background (see first image in Figure 167). This shift is used again and again to accentuate detail rather than to provide narrative or visual context. This is a common cinematic device designed to draw the viewer to a specific prop, object or plot point; however in this regime the technique is the basis for the overall animation’s logic and thereby gives the film – and its images – a coherent realism. David O’Reilly, an award winning animator\(^{55}\) observes in *Objects* magazine that what makes “these worlds believable, is simply how coherent they are; how all the elements tie together under a set of rules which govern them consistently... Together they create a feedback-loop which reaffirms that what we are looking at is true. The human eye wants this aesthetic harmony” (O’Reilly, 2009). Roman evokes a strong nostalgic feel as the camera technology which provides cue points for the optical properties of some of the imagery actually appears throughout the film. And still the shift in focus, the

---

\(^{55}\) O’Reilly won the Golden Bear at the 2009 Berlinale for his short film, *Please Say Something*. His [website](#) is also a fountain of riches.
subtle camera moves persist as the film takes on mystical properties – exploring fictional concert halls, libraries and museum spaces adorned with rich textiles, walls of books, picture frames and decorative glass and marble surfaces. It is a nostalgic reading of the modern to the same degree that Mathieu Gerard’s *Steel Life* is a completely millennial construction of the aesthetics of the techno-cultural narrative. Gerard’s film is an allegory for the act of animating the inanimate – or perhaps more explicitly, the confluence of nature and machine. Images of liquid metal, of dreamy undulating waves, of perfectly formed machine parts, of electric blue energy giving life to thin spindly amoeba like tendrils of steel as motion, texture and light synergise in the artist’s command of the form. From above, in a gothic glimpse of the end times, a fiery otherworldly object descends upon a fictional cityscape not unlike New York and from below a liquid mercury-like substance is drawn magnetically upwards, a splash of the liquid electric, the unfurling of a steel flower all of which appear to signal a galactic rebirth. This is the gothic-high tech sublime of new media arts production: the natural world recast by a highly refined dark metal aesthetic. The practice brings into question the origin – the essence – of the cybernetic dream by fetishising the properties of its construction while replicating the often repeated euphoria of the never-ending end-times with images of collapsing galaxies, collapsing cities and falling skies (see Figure 168). While *The Third and the Seventh* and *Steel Life* may lack a conventional narrative, it taps into the deeper anxiety and sense of loss that pervades the network by questioning its architecture and articulating our uncertainty for the world via the aesthetics of a hyper real simulation.

**Figure 168** Still frames from Mathieu Gerard’s *Steel Life* (Gerard, 2009)
These films, whether via DSLR imagery or 3D animation, are not only exemplars of the bokeh form but, more explicitly, evidence of a strict control of technique that coheres in a quest to demonstrate truth through the simulation of the real. It is the coherence of aesthetics and the repetition of technique that is indicative of a much broader techno-cultural narrative construct in the millennial period. We can see this across all art forms, not just DIY film and animation, but also major pop cultural spaces such as video gaming, music video clips, advertising, television program packaging and feature film production. The desire to emphasise the clarity of the 3D animated image in the telling of a story, the promotion of a product or the design of new worlds is also heavily contextualised with the framing of these digital objects. In the context of video games, notions of truth and realism are important if the game player is to accept the conceit of the virtual experience. There is also a wider technological theme embedded in gaming which fetishizes the specifications of PC gaming rigs: the physical appearance of the machine, the language and iconography of component manufacturers, the design of the internal components themselves, and the discourse of the myriad of websites which perform benchmarking tests and then debate the

![Figure 169 Still Frames from the trailer to the game Wolfenstein: The New Order (Machine Games & Bethesda, 2013)](image)
resulting statistics with parochial venom. These are all cultural markers of an industry which demands that the coherence of its simulated logic operates on both sides of the screen. The twin parables of the millennial age – a networked machine reality and a science fiction virtuality – socialised by our intimate relations with our devices - is played out in this space where Hollywood dreaming meets personal technological suprematism.

Machine Games is a new German Swedish game design start-up which has resurrected the classic first person shooter (FPS) title, *Wolfenstein*. The first promo clip for their new version of the game, *Wolfenstein: The New Order* mimics the bokeh aesthetic styling of *The Bathroom* and *Scintillation* but in this instance the fetishized objects are far more sinister icons of the early Futurist aesthetic. These objects, observed in intimate focus, are the machine heads of industrial tools as they exactingly carve out the “W” logo of the game’s namesake. However, in the refracted light from an unseen source we see the ghostly image of the Eiffel Tower reflected across the steel polished surface and then crippled by a telling blow, as the foreboding voiceover intones: “They set the world on fire. But it wasn’t a war anymore - it was a remaking.” (Machine Games & Bethesda, 2013). And then, in a brief dip to black amid a flurry of sparks and molten iron, we realise that we are in fact witnessing the construction of a Nazi robot armada. All hell will no doubt break loose from these HAL--esque red-eyed mecha as we glimpse upon the cold black steel of their hulking frames the reflections of a fiery apocalyptic future - images of a burning Statue of Liberty and a crumbling Empire State building. The subtext is obvious: the *Virtual Fascist Third Reich borg army is at the gates, and you commander, you had best be ready!* (see Figure 169). A similar tactic is used in a series of promotional spots for Electronic Arts and Dice Games’ *Battlefield 4* in which we see the inner cogs and shafts of a heavy, foreboding machine – shallow focus, macro lens, a greasy machine oil intimacy – only broken when we pull out to reveal the game series’ now familiar instruments of war: the helicopter, the battle tank and the submarine (see Figure 170). But what is most surprising is that in each clip this imagery quickly dissolves to reveal an explicit bokeh reference as the backdrop to the title graphic shimmers with the glittering mottled orbs of some distant out of focus light source (see bottom image in Figure 170). Is this what the battle space looks like in the new millennia? Is this the new real? Will the future of armed conflict remain safely cloistered away on the other side of the screen, sweetly out of focus like Christmas lights in the shopfront window across the street?

---

56 This is also true of the gaming console realm, although to a lesser extent in terms of the machines themselves which remain essentially unchanged through a 5-8 year product life-cycle. Additionally, their internal components are for the most part proprietary and do not permit upgrades or much by the way of variation. However recent launch announcements for both the new *Playstation 4* and the *Xbox One* do present fascinating case studies of how manufacturers frame notions of the real.
In March 2011 Kaos Studios released *Homefront*, the central premise of which is that North Korea has managed to occupy large parts of the American continent including its major cities through an alliance with South Korea and Japan. Tightly edited combinations of historical news footage, kinetic typography, bespoke video sequences and fictionalised versions of iconic landmarks are utilised to set up the game’s premise. Similar material is used in the construction of the promotional video spots for the game pitching to potential defenders of the homeland with the slogan, “Home is where the war is” (Kaos Studios & THQ Inc, 2010). In one particular video, *The World of Homefront*, the game’s publisher THQ Inc. promotes the game’s narrative premise as something that could be real, that the game experience is a plausible rendition of the geo-political conditions in the real world.⁵⁷ Interviews are conducted with the artists, animators and engineers of the game in faux 60 Minutes-styled set pieces, using now familiar “guerrilla journalism” tropes – distressed vision from hand held cameras, the erratic change of focus, the crackle of video interference, the buzz of the analogue – all in an effort to heighten the sense of the real for a product.

---

⁵⁷ There was much controversy and online furore around the promotion and eventual release of *Homefront* in 2011 as its marketing campaign began amidst the crisis of the sinking of the Korean naval vessel ROKS Cheonan in March 2010 and the exchange of missile fire on the Korean Peninsular in November of that year. For more background on the media scrutiny of *Homefront* and the response from Kaos Studios see Christian Gaca’s interview with former CIA Operative and Kaos employee Tae Kim at *Gamereactor* (Gaca, 2010).
that is essentially a fantasy. The *Homefront* promo video is a sophisticated textual mix of paranoia, conspiracy theory and dystopian fiction.\(^{58}\) The video opens with stock footage from an actual press conference involving then US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in Tokyo on May 20 2010 where she announces that the sinking of the South Korean war ship, ROKS Cheonan, in the Japan Sea in March of 2010 was the work of a North Korean midget submarine\(^{59}\). The video then describes a future power shift in global politics as the North Koreans gather enormous technological power by joining in an unlikely federation with the South and eventually Japan thereby creating the “North Korean Federation”. Conversely the United States teeters on the edge of economic collapse. Tae Kim, Kaos Studio’s “CIA Story Consultant” appears explaining how “historically, there are multiple examples of the sudden rise and fall of mighty empires – Ancient Greece, Mongolia and Japan”. The video then poses the question: “Is the United States the next great power to fall?” (Kaos Studios & THQ Inc, 2010).

David Votypka  
(Creative Director)  
It’s the decline of the USA due to internal factors and the global geopolitical situation. And there’s a war in the Middle East; Saudi Arabia and Iran are involved and that disrupts oil supplies.

Zach Wilson  
(Sr. Level Designer)  
The United States great weakness is its “just in time economy”. Your local supermarket has three days’ worth of stocks on the shelves. If something gets in the way and disrupts

---

\(^{58}\) This intertextual narrative approach is similar to EA Games’ positioning of its *Command & Conquer: Generals* series (EA Pacific, 2003) which involved “allied forces” routing a rogue terrorist faction, “The Global Liberation Army” in a near-future Middle East (see Figure 173). The game was released on February 11 2003 only weeks before the invasion of Iraq by American and coalition forces and in a similar narrative construct to these unfolding events its release featured video inserts of “embedded journalists”, units of “suicide bombers” and “chemical trucks” and options to deploy “low grade nuclear weapons”. *Generals* was the fantasy of reality delivered by a highly stylised yet coherently formed 3D simulation and operated in an intertextual meta-verse in which the drums of war were being beaten by a complicit media on a heightened war footing following the events of 9/11. The promotion and ambiguous construction of the television series *Homefront* follows a similar pattern, the opening title sequence is worth comparing.

\(^{59}\) For more information on the actual incident see the archive of the BBC Asia-Pacific news service’s analysis of the independent report.
that – that’s it for our country. Our country is on the razor’s edge!

The video then spends some time describing the emergence of the “North Korean Federation” and how their technological supremacy is established. The screen is divided into segments showing protestors and riot police on the streets of London, the burning of effigies and rallies outside mosques in the Middle East, stock footage of Condoleezza Rice at a Saudi diplomatic press conference, the tumble of the Times Square stock market ticker, the rationing of food and water, and a peculiar POV shot from a frantic shopping trolley scurrying mindlessly through a supermarket. We are then confronted with various apocalyptic images of burning sunsets casting their ominous orange glow across traffic jams, oil rigs and nuclear power stations. An odd hokum mix of mediated realities concocted to support the foreboding sense of dread and semi-plausible present-future reality that the interviewees are so committed to constructing:

Tae Kim
(CIA Story Consultant)
North Korea is able to invade the United States through its well prepared military strikes that involves an EMP strike.

Zach Wilson
(Sr. Level Designer)
EMP is an electromagnetic pulse, it sends out a particular type of energy that blankets the
earth and what that does is it deactivates modern electronics ...

SCREEN fades to black, SOUND of computer BLEEP and then SILENCE. CUE soulful theme MUSIC.

David Votypka
(Creative Director)
You see things that aren’t supposed to be happening. This little town main street and it’s got Ma and Pa shops, and bakeries and banks but there’s soldiers and there’s barbed wire. And that is the genesis of where this phrase - “the familiar becomes alien” - comes from.

Voiceover Montage
We want to show America – but twisted / War in the back suburbs, war in the elementary school playgrounds / baseball fields, high schools / Golden Gate Bridge becomes a battle field - that’s pretty darn alien if you ask me.

Zach Wilson
(Sr. Level Designer)
It takes seeing an enemy hurting innocent people in front of you to make you understand why you are doing the things that you are doing.

CUT TO over the shoulder POV of soldier executing civilians face down in a mass grave.

David Votypka
(Creative Director)
This is your backyard, this is literally the home front.

The development of Homefront, between 2008 and 2011, was a slow and problematic affair as Kaos
Studios went through two key management restructures while the designers – ex-game modders from *Battlefield 1942* - struggled to deliver their vision of this “twist on reality” beneath the autocratic umbrella of game publisher THQ Inc.\(^6\) However *Homefront* went on to sell 2.6 million units across three platforms (PC, Xbox and Playstation) and debuted in both the UK and the US at number one on the gaming sales charts (Thorsen, 2011). The viral marketing campaign which began with the suite of video trailers and the *World of Homefront* video exposé in early 2010 culminated with a transmedia campaign that included a novel based on the game’s premise, *Homefront: The Voice of Freedom* (Milius & Benson, 2011) written by film director John Milius and the author of the “adult Bond” novels Raymond Benson and a soundtrack of heavy metal bands covering songs by U2, Deep Purple, Metallica and Credence Clearwater Revival entitled *Homefront: Songs For the Resistance* (Harwood & Various Artists, 2011). The game’s architecture\(^6\) has been acclaimed by participants for the sense of realism that the rendering of an occupied America evokes when one is fully engaged in the game’s virtual environments, the wider meta-verse feeds the desired reality of the transmedia spectacle. It then becomes possible, to finally be subsumed into this convincing dystopian mash-up of historical events, speculative fiction, 3D animation and recycled media samples. Surely the iconography and propaganda material broadcast by

---

\(^6\) Despite the relative success of *Homefront*, Kaos Studios would not produce another game and their publisher THQ would eventually fold in 2012. For more information on *Homefront*’s troubled development see Rob Zacny’s account, *Death March: The Long, Tortured Journey of Homefront* at *Polygon* (Zacny, 2012).

\(^6\) For an indexed reference list of game reviews for *Homefront* see the index at Game Rankings.
the real North Korean regime and the recorded, preserved and re-distributed imagery of the United States more controversial missteps in the War On Terror play to this as well (see Figures 174-176). The recent propaganda film that emerged from North Korea published on the Uriminzokkiri YouTube channel on February 5, 2013 is a boldly aggressive and sometimes sentimental construction equal to anything going on in the Homefront universe. The short film depicts a young North Korean boy, asleep next to his video camera which is sprinkled with a flourish of Disney-esque magic dust, as he dreams of North Korea’s overseas conquests against the “oppressors” (Uriminzokkiri, 2013). Through the lens of camera we see a burning American flag, a nuclear strike on New York City and the conquest of space by North Korean ballistic missiles. The destruction of New York City is lifted from sampled footage from the Activision game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 and is accompanied by the text: “Somewhere in the United States, black clouds of smoke are billowing. It seems that the nest of wickedness is ablaze with the fire started by itself” (Phillips, 2013). The film features a Space Shuttle-type craft which zips back and forth across the screen as we see images of smiling North Korean women, a triumphant “reunited” Korea and a serene sunset illuminates – post America - planet earth. All of which is accompanied by a karaoke lounge style rendition of the Live Aid theme from 1985, We Are the World (see Figure 177). But what makes this so compelling as gothic high-tech assemblage is that the producers have used video game aesthetics and broadcast media production techniques coupled with a particularly cringe worthy brand of music accompaniment to communicate a nation state’s threat of nuclear annihilation upon another nation state on a public YouTube channel.
The *Homefront* meta-verse, the United States’ language of the War on Terror and the ongoing propaganda exercises by North Korea are complex textual constructions compromised of fragments of digital objects which evoke reality and fantasy in equal measure. This collective intertextual cultural construction articulates an agenda across a variety of media technologies and a variety of cultural mediums, as Evan Calder Williams observes:

> These films, these books, mass cultural phenomena and subcultural obsessions, are the closest articulation we can get of the structures of totality underpinning this. Not a mirror but a busy prism. In the distortions of this restless cognitive mapping, we get closer to not just the texture of an age, but the support structure on which it is stretched and formed (E. C. Williams, 2011, p. 157).

One of the defining properties of network culture is the emergence of the remix as a method of rapidly distilling archived material in a new context. An often jarring but contextually provocative re-animation of the database is possible when remix techniques are employed to re-order linear time based media. Yet when this approach is taken to an aesthetic and conceptual level the methodology of the remix can be applied to a range of media styles and design strategies. Databases, image banks, design templates, lighting plans and content archives can be repurposed to tell new stories. History and existing fictions can be adapted, manipulated and reused to persuasive effect. This is evident in the corporate narratives of Microsoft’s *Future Vision*, the *Life Companion* marketing strategy for the Samsung Galaxy S4 and entertainment fantasies of *Star Wars*, *Command & Conquer* and *Homefront*. Large media conglomerates with multiple arms of media production and publishing are the remix houses of the future, companies such as News LTD, Sony, Time Warner and even government funded entities such as the BBC are essentially massive archives of

---

*Figure 177* Still frames from the North Korean propaganda film from February 2013 (*Uriminzokkiri*, 2013)
potential remix material. With considerable databases of footage and commentary they are placed at the very forefront of a sophisticated new world of network remixing – and rerouting – of content. This is millennial technoculture’s brave new world: reality and fantasy remixed as pervasive digital objects, folding back on history and opening up old content into new image loops of revenue.

My video installation, *Vonnegut’s Fire Fight Fuzz Box* (Goodwin, 2011f), was the result of a media survey of imagery collected primarily between 2001 and 2011. [The two exceptions being *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Wise, 1951) and a recently discovered 1903 print of *Alice In Wonderland* (Hepworth, 1903)]. These digital objects were grafted from the web as YouTube clips, torrent streams and extracted from the commercial DVDs of games and films. The assemblage featured a Kurt Vonnegut YouTube clip entitled “The Shape of Stories”, a video thesis on storytelling from 2005 which forms the structural backbone of the assemblage and the allegorical link between Alice’s disappearance down the rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland* and George Bush’s quest to pursue Osama Bin Laden down the rabbit hole of Tora Bora in Afghanistan (Vonnegut, 2005).\(^\text{62}\) The accompanying samples were assembled in reaction to – and in concert with – the political and

\(^{62}\) For a full transcript of Vonnegut’s 2005 lecture see “Kurt Vonnegut at the Blackboard” at *Lapham’s Quarterly website*. The original video extract can be found [here](#).
economic mediated remix which has reverberated down the echo chamber since 9/11 – the original technological “accident”. The governing aesthetic here is the search for a sense of what is real from the din of fabricated realities and recontextualised cultural snapshots. The primacy and ubiquity of the moment as document have heightened the power of 9/11 as permanence, as the all pervasive visual icon of our time; often repeated (but seldom in real time) the greasy wheel for the slippages of time between past-present-future. What other examples from history could have been given the same immortality with the presence of so many image recording devices? As Paul Virilio observes:

> Overexposure is the live broadcast, it is real-time replacing the past, present and future. A society that heedlessly privileges the present necessarily privileges the accident... So somewhere the end of the future and the end of the past, in our societies of immediacy, of ubiquity, of instantaneity, are necessarily the advent of the accident (Virilio, 1994, p. 109).

Kurt Vonnegut’s erudite expose on storytelling technique becomes this space of overwhelming immediacy and multi-layered image loops. Using his lecture to sweep up the ominous signs of the millennial rush towards never-ending conflict, the remix is domesticated by its size, its child-like installation design and the intermittent flashes of analogue screen noise. These images are not specific to the remix, they are everywhere: they are on the TV screen on the diner counter at a truck stop in New Mexico, above the dart board just along the wall from the cigarette machine in a dive bar in Boston, in the sand-whipped desert of the real on the outskirts of Kabul, in the Bluetooth Razor mouse of a suburban gaming rig in Parramatta, and in the image banks of the 24 hour news room in Hong Kong. The iconic image loops which form the database for Vonnegut’s _Fire Fight Fuzz Box_ are replayed again and again and again. This is a remix that reflects the macro accidents of popular culture’s more lurid offerings, like _Homefront_ and North Korean propaganda, and tosses them up into a supremely gothic high-tech slipstream: Osama Bin Laden flipping through his hard drive of pre-recorded television programs / the Zeppelins of the Imperial Chinese forces descending on New York in _Command & Conquer: Generals_ / the commander of the special forces tapping out the route to a hidden terrorist cell in _Battlefield 2_ / the Wikileaks video of a US Apache Attack helicopter gunning down civilians in Iraq / the soldiers from _The Night That The Earth Stood Still_ armed with rifles and braced with tanks and armoured vehicles backing away in fear as we cut to the ghastly lurid visage of a gyrating 5 year old Eden Wood, aka Cutie Patootie / and finally, like a rabbit caught in the headlights, the expression on George Bush’s face as he reads a picture book to a classroom of children on the morning of September 11 (see Figure 179).
The recently emergent form, the supercut, is an extension to the remix and the mash-up method in which large amounts of video content are collected on a particular theme or specific visual or audio motif and assembled in one continuous stream of video. There are numerous examples of the supercut on the web, however few if any are as ambitious and technically accomplished as Christian Marclay’s *The Clock* (Marclay, 2010). Winner of the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 2011, *The Clock* is the most celebrated supercut, a 24 hour film featuring image sequences from feature films dating back seventy years that involve a watch, clock or some other time keeping device. These “fragments” are assembled in sequence with the time depicted on the screen matching the time of day where *The Clock* is being screened. While Marclay’s is a strictly linear construction, video artist Jeff Desom uses the video frame to create a real time video tableau across the channels of video. Desom assembled a masterful 20 minute large scale reconstruction of Jimmy Stewart’s character L.B. Jeffries’ point of view from *Rear Window* in the composite remix *Rear Window Loop* (Desom, 2010). The image sequences lifted from the film depict the various goings on in the courtyard and apartment buildings across from Jeffries’ own apartment these are then assembled seamlessly into a
This vast single 2400x550px video image of course removes much of the film’s subtext of mystery and paranoia, rather the film becomes an observation of inner urban life. The shift in focus, the change in lighting and the subtle movements of the supporting cast create a powerful ensemble performance. Desom uses motion control effects and subtle image blending and colour correction tools to manage the variations in perspective and the gradual shifts in light and environmental conditions. More in keeping with the user generated tradition of the web supercut, Kevin B. Lee’s *The Spielberg Face* (K. B. Lee, 2011), is an elegant and profound reversal of the gaze in contemporary cinema. Spielberg, who can control an audience through his direction of performance rather than the set pieces his more bombastic films are renowned for, uses the human face at the most crucial of moments rather than focusing explicitly on the action itself. As Matt Patches from *Ugo* observes: “When a character looks up and catches something unexpected, that’s the face. When a character watches something otherworldly take place in front of their eyes, that’s the face. When a character stares outward, mouth slightly agape and has a revelation that will change them forever, that’s the face” (Patches, 2011). The Spielberg face first emerged fully formed in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Spielberg, 1977) in which Spielberg very rarely showed the aliens or the space craft of the film’s title, instead exploiting the performances of his cast. Lees observes in the narration to his video essay, “this is about Spielberg discovering the full power of the face,” and exploring “the perpetual wonder of seeing things new” (Haglund, 2011). This is also cinema as metaphor for the dark euphoric moment - the gasp before the crush of gravity, the ecstasy.

---

63 There is a 3 minute “making” of sequence on Desom’s [website](#) which won the Vimeo Remix award in 2012. The full version of the *Rear Window Loop* is a three channel work which requires a three projector setup. This version was screened at the Sydney Film Festival in June 2013.
before the fall, the lurch for the past as the future disappears: “eyes open staring in wordless wonder in a moment where time stands still” (K. B. Lee, 2011).

The centrepiece for my exhibition *Dark Euphoria: Unclassified Media* was a video assemblage – or essay film - *My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster* (Goodwin, 2011d). Structured in three separate acts, the film contains both supercut and video tableau aesthetics. Adopting the “Spielberg face” motif, the assemblage’s framing device is the dramatic cinematic close-up. The briefest of instances when a human context is placed at the centre of an impending catastrophe, the close-up is cinema’s link between the screen and audience member. The film explores the nature of techno-futurist tendencies in dystopian / post-apocalyptic millennial cinema by juxtaposing the depiction of imminent technological disaster against the intimacy of the human expression of fear and anxiety.64 There is certainly darkness here in the various climactic scenes of destruction, but also a very real mistrust – and an almost disbelief – in technological progress. The content of *My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster* is sampled from over 70 films across two genres of feature film production: apocalyptic cinema (impending, post and ongoing) and the cinema of paranoia (in which fear and trepidation is built around the use of technology, primarily the computer and the internet).65 In both genres there exists the fear of the unknown or the unseen. The protagonist’s motivations and physical form are only revealed when it is invariably too late. The main themes are familiar cataclysmic tropes – threats of nuclear annihilation, resource depletion, financial collapse, alien invasion (both species and inter-planetary object), viral contagion (often of ancient and mysterious origin) and perhaps the two strongest anxieties of the contemporary era – climate collapse and the walking dead. The technological paranoia of computer technology also has its distinct forms – software code (either as evil virtual entity, virus or proprietary malfunction), artificial intelligence (networked system, robot or avatar) and notions of the internet and the

64 A period I have mapped from John Carpenter’s *Escape From New York* (Carpenter, 1981) as being the first modern post-apocalyptic / post-society film which evokes the outlaw and frontier tropes of the dark wasteland, up to the Hughes Brothers’ similarly anarchist post-apocalyptic tale, *The Book of Eli* (A. Hughes & Hughes, 2010). These are rough-edged dystopian narratives and bare some connection in their themes and art direction but also are evocative of the times in which they were produced which are distinctly late millennial. Of course earlier examples do exist but would otherwise distort the time frame. These films include the *Planet of the Apes* (Schaffner, 1968), *Farenheit 451* (Truffaut, 1966) and *Logan’s Run* (M. Anderson, 1976) which definitely echo the anxiety of the techno-futurist narrative but are more focused on the immediate threat of the Cold War and environmental destruction. The exception from this period of course would be Godard’s *Alphaville* (Godard, 1965) Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968) and George Lucas’ *THX 1138* (Lucas, 1971) each of which have narratives which play directly to the anxieties surrounding technology and society and it is for this reason that although they are outside of the parameters of my media survey sample nonetheless still appear in *My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster*.

65 During this period the only exceptions to this are *Deep Impact* (Leder, 1988) and *Armageddon* (Bay, 1998) which play to the external threat of a rogue asteroid and have little do with the earthly challenges proposed by their contemporaries. Both however do provide explicit renderings of the end times and, perhaps due to the very nature of that cataclysm, the most dramatic of CGI visualisations.
network (global nefarious organism, viral carrier, anti-western menace, the playground of hackers and terrorists, panopticon). *My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster* by the way of an assemblage of these themes delivers a meta-narrative composition of the end times as orchestrated by the devices and the network technology that links them all together.

The aim of this assemblage and the logic of the parameters for the sampled films is to emphasise the use of data visualization, high-end digital animation and compositing - machine vision. Just as Vonnegut’s *Firefight Fuzzbox* delivers a mash-up critique of the war machine, mainstream TV image constructs and game design, *My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster* is a reflection on the darker anxieties in millennial society about end of world scenarios and of global technological malfunction. The assemblage is presented in three acts which are divided by both structure and content:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Split Screens</th>
<th>Media Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act I</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Netploitation cinema samples (keyboards, mouse clicks, various peripherals, screen glow, lines of code, etc);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act II</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Data visualisations, instrumentation and new media reports depicting the parameters of a catastrophe (screens within screens);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act III</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Horrified characters looking off screen in disbelief, often at screens depicting catastrophic data or news reporting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 *My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster* split screen structure. How this was implemented in the gallery space can be seen in the exhibition documentation [here](#).

There in fact two versions of this structure, a different version for each end of the gallery space, with Act II and III containing similarly themed but different content. The intention being, that when projected to the full size of the gallery wall the close-ups of the characters in Act III would appear to be looking directly at each other across the gallery space in silent horror. The use of the screen and all its variants as narrative device in the design and the delivery of the gothic high-tech apocalypse is what *My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster* seeks to emphasise by using the parameter of the
screen as a linking device. Given what we have explored so far in this text and what will follow in the coming chapters, it is important to note how these visual devices are not only used in this context but the similarity of the design and implementation of such devices by corporations and government organisations to communicate their agenda.

At the centre of this is the ubiquitous screen which, as Paul Virilio has noted, has become the primary site for “temporal compression” – an always-on accelerated reality in which flesh becomes a complicit component of the media interface, operating alongside and through the black mirror of its facade: “the carnal centre of presence extends to the telepresence in the real-time world delivered by the instantaneity of a ubiquity that has now gone global” (Virilio, 2007, p. 20). We have become the phantom limb of the great technological fantasy of the image loop while our minds are buffering packets of data and frames of video before the next leap into the image stream comes online. The message is clear: in the end the system wins via our dutiful submission. There is a “political economic relationship” between the digital object and the economy it serves, as Vincent Mosco writes in The Digital Sublime, this
relationship formulated “the bridge between the culture and the political economy of cyberspace. These two processes provided the foundation for the technological sublime that grew out of the ‘magic places’ like Silicon Valley and Silicon Alley and the grounding for the belief that we are entering the end of history, geography and politics” (Mosco, 2004, p. 154). This ending – as simulation – is the preserve of millennial technoculture, it is relentlessly present but not immediately available for scrutiny and the cinematic image has become the link between a digitised truth of that presence and our interpretation of what that truth might require. The question would have to be asked then, would the reality of the catastrophic moment – THE END – be rendered as a scene more real than real? As in a car accident, would we be controlled by time or would we see the horror in enough detail to shield our eyes from the shards of glass and steel? As our telepresent realities accelerate, will the end be delivered via ever higher and higher grades of image acquisition and transmission? This is the “over exposure” of the present reality, this is the repetition of highly evolved animations of the end times, this is the site where these techno-cultural fantasies gather – on the network, in the remix, fragmented, duplicated and homogenised as optical megascopy. The screen has evolved to become the interface for the guided missile, the machine gun pilot, the infrared telescope, the bar code reader, the 3D printer and the news camera. But it is also the author of darkness – the delivery device of diabolical statistics, the radar scope for plotting asteroids and earthly disasters, the graph of impending financial doom, the CCTV footage of rape, murder and the grainy black and white drudgery of everyday life. Therefore in this construction of My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster, the screen delivers the tension between the impending apocalyptic moment (or technological accident) and the widescreen fantasy of its occurrence. Somewhere amidst all of this is the audience – the audience who exists in a similar passage of space and time yet whose endless dystopic moment makes the fantasy of the end of the world a thing of mass appeal. Meanwhile the tragedy of life moves on and the prophecy of scientists – the mega-end times – is an ever-present background hum, a softly spoken promise of distant horrors, a slightly uncomfortable lump in the back of one’s throat.

Evan Calder Williams echoes Mosco’s observations that this trend speaks to deeper concerns of not only human relationships but to political systems and economic structures. Often such dystopian films commence with the central protagonists adrift amidst the post-apocalyptic moment and end as they experience a process of hopeless dehumanisation via seemingly irrational moments of savagery and anarchy in order to survive or, as mostly is the case, ultimately perish. As if the very act of societal collapse demands that we return to a more unstructured, immoral and anarchic age closer to our beastly ancestry, negating our recent technological and philosophical sophistication which facilitated the collapse in the first place.
We face a globe in which whole portions are designated obsolete, forcibly shuffled off the world historical stage. A world in which sections are designated not of this world. None of this is accidental, and we can’t afford to buy that. We’re out of time, running up against infinite limits of resource and profit, while we are equally stuck in histories that don’t belong. The point is never to apologise or accept, neither to reconcile nor to compromise, only to take up whatever obstacles we can find and sharpen their edges. For the world isn’t flat, despite what capitalism and its apologists like to tell themselves and us. It never has been. It never worked that way, always depended on the casting to the deep whole populations and spaces of life. We inherit and occupy the material sites of this casting off: it cannot be otherwise. The first step towards our launching differently, both from this point in history and in casting off the weight of a monstrous world order, is to take fully on the burden of an apocalyptic world and structure of history (E. C. Williams, 2011, p. 238).

In a similar vein to Slavoj Žižek’s essay Desert of the Real, written in the aftermath of 9/11, the dystopian films of My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster articulate an exaggerated simulation of the very real apocalypse which is happening all around us – nuclear weapons are real, climate change is real, avian flu is real, corrupt political systems are real, the robotic war machine is real, the reorganisation of global financial markets (aka the end of growth) is real, but as Žižek and Wikileaks attest, the predominant ideological status quo is a falsehood. As Žižek noted, and also to some extent Saskia Sassen, America and the West is willing into reality the fatalistic fantasy of a totalising destruction. September 11, it would seem, is the new template, “The shattering impact of the bombings can only be accounted for against the background of the borderline which today separates

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

*Figure 188* Still frame from video channel one of *My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster* (Goodwin, 2011d)
the digitalized First World from the Third World "desert of the Real." It is the awareness that we live in an insulated artificial universe which generates the notion that some ominous agent is threatening us all the time with total destruction" (Žižek, 2001). And it isn’t this the ultimate diversionary tactic? The very thing under threat is the system that the ideological construct seeks to preserve. What the apocalyptic vein of “worst case scenario” cinema and television articulates is a hyper-real-visualisation of reality as not only mass entertainment but also as memory with substance – and perhaps most provocatively a bleak virtual future based on a very real and very recent historical trauma - a simulacra of the end times.

Virtual Reality simply generalizes this procedure of offering a product deprived of its substance: it provides reality itself deprived of its substance, of the hard resistant kernel of the Real – just as decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes like real coffee without being real coffee, Virtual Reality is experienced as reality without being so. What happens at the end of this process of visualization, however, is that we begin to experience ‘real reality’ itself as a virtual entity. For the great majority of the public, the WTC explosions were events on the TV screen, and when we watched the oft-repeated shot of the frightened people running towards the camera ahead of the giant cloud of dust from the collapsing tower, was not the framing of the shot itself reminiscent of spectacular shots in catastrophe movies, a special effect which outdid all others, since – as Jeremy Bentham knew – reality is the best appearance of itself? (Žižek, 2001)

The ‘triumph of the real’ is the power of certain realities – verified statistics, understood truths, hard lessons, exponential growth of evidence – to go beyond the powers of dogma, conspiracy, partisan political rhetoric, to foment a deeper anxiety within the contemporary gothic temperament. However, the representation of the real via a simulation perhaps represents the true power in this dialogue as words and statistics are foregone for familiar dramatic visual reconstructions. Whether that be via animated graphics, charts and graphs in the media, high resolution photo media constructions, digital illustrations/interpretations/composited data of the unseen or large scale SFX sequences in fictitious narratives (see Figure 189). These serve two opposing functions – awe at the creative and technical abilities of the producers of such content but also a slight unease with regards to the “realities” that such visualisations are actually communicating. Heightened visualisation via digital media is then both aesthetically pleasurable and subjectively quite horrifying. In the broader context of the media these realities only exist as digital representations via screens and in the shared anxiety of what such information represents. If you look for them many are playing out right now on many levels - top order anxieties about the nature of existence namely death and the finiteness of the human presence in the universe; societal anxieties about the fragile social compact of western democracy, lapses in social order, the collapse of a relationship; anxieties about invisible organisms
and viral infections; existential anxieties about identity, sexuality and fate; and the big picture trauma of the groaning earth, the falling stars, the rising seas and the angry skies. In setting up the near-future, background atmosphere of the twenty-teens Bruce Sterling gave credence to such anxieties by dourly stating: “The actual objective situation looks more like this: No money, scarcity, financial collapse, collapsed states, general precarity, an energy crisis, low intensity global warfare, and a rapidly advancing climate crisis... That’s what the next decade actually looks like. And you’re going to live there... We’re not going to go back to the year 1950. The clock is ticking, the pages are going to fall off the calendar. In a decade it’s going to be 2019, we’ll be ten years older, you’ll be ten years older, these are all solid things” (Sterling, 2009).

Popular culture then becomes a mechanism to represent and highlight these anxieties through data visualisations, infographics, 3D animations, big data sets and set-piece special effects in epic cinema constructions. We see with the machine and it sees us. The most fantastic elements of this vision feed an apprehension about what the reality of the future might be. The simultaneity of a techno-futurist promise and its inverse reality drives the narrative of simulated apocalypse into dangerous self-destructive territory. The experience of being exposed to the repeating fantasy of the apocalypse accumulates the qualities of a dark gothic assemblage. It becomes real, it becomes permanent. It becomes a secret desire in the darkest corners of our cinematic dreaming. Do we in fact yearn for the ultimate cinema of the techno-futurist dreamscape: 9/11 2.0? Does this yearning have a nostalgic sub text, a retro-filtered desire for a more transparent mechanical aesthetic? Or are such Steampunk fantasies just a big bold wish for the mechanical era of Fritz Kahn’s illustrated universe in which pulleys and levers and cogs are the technologies which operate the weapons of

![Image 1](image1.png)  ![Image 2](image2.png)  ![Image 3](image3.png)  ![Image 4](image4.png)

**Figure 189** *My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster* (Goodwin, 2011d)
war and global conflict? Do we desire a cinematically more visible conflict coated in oxide, dripping with sepia tones & viewed through the algorithm of a Hipstamatic filter from a time that pre-dates the invisibility of network technology in which the clean clinical algorithms of computer code, the silence of the drone strike and the stealth of the virtual warrior makes war seem entirely unreal? Does the 21st Century dream of the horrors of the past when armed conflict was big picture stuff, with vast potholed landscapes of rumbling tanks and limping infantry, where statistics accumulated in mass graves and aerial dogfights and bloody beach front assaults were the play things of cigar chomping generals? Is this what all these cinematic renderings of dystopian, rough-tech, outlander colonies represent – humanity’s rise from the ashes of technological failure, willing into the not so perfect future a tangible sense of catastrophe?

Yet here we are, broken pixels and extravagant renderings of the universe archived in the video vault, side by side. The output data of machine vision is constructed from the chromatic colour palette in the form of brain scans, storm cells, Martian landscapes, metabolic activity and economic data. The very real interventions of the machine in the realm of new media arts and the very stylised renderings of the real in astronomy and physics research products of the same colour palette, written in the same language, born of the same stuff. Peering into the black mirror it’s hard to tell which video file contains more ‘truth’. But perhaps we’re not looking in the right places. The inability to see the future belies the highly skilled and immensely refined processes of 3D animation and the algorithms of the most complex data simulations. There is little difference between these exhaustive computational tasks and the rendering of realism in popular cultural forms such as Steel Life and The Third and Seventh or the wide screen Hollywood fantasies of Avatar (Cameron, 2009) and Rise of the Planet of the Apes (Wyatt, 2011). In each an attempt is made to articulate the future as an extension of our natural world in a realistic manner albeit sometimes with an altogether more fantastic premise. These may be simulations but they can be cross-checked with our understanding of physics: motion, gravity and natural and synthetic textures. These entirely digital constructions are designed to make data alive with detailed compositional techniques that play to our understanding of visual semantics and what constitutes the physics of light and perspective (archetypes of the form). Similarly the constructions of Microsoft, Nokia and Ericsson are stylised visions of the future designed by a team of human marketeers in service to the ability of the machine. They are, if nothing else, frustrating distractions, tormenting the present-future stasis with their seductive, just out of reach plausibility but it is the resignation to their ultimate unattainability that lingers longest. Herein lies the seeds of the broken promise. The simulation is as real as we have known anything to be, the image as fine and detailed as technology has been able to provide and yet our interpretation
of what this all means is broken by the unreality of the pixels themselves. We cannot possibly know the future. And this is the rub: “Right now, today, we can’t see the thing, at all, that’s going to be the most important 100 years from now” (Caltech & Mead, 2010). That holds for next month, next year and the decades that follow. The techno-cultural narrative is built on the conceit of the light on dark aesthetic because beneath the surface, the simulation is motoring along on the metaphorical cogs and wheels of Chevrolet, Google, Fritz Kahn and Thomas Edison - purveyors of the magic show of early and late modernity.

So while we have permitted the machine to become the most intimate of interrogators (of systems, infrastructures and ourselves) we are increasingly moving away from an understanding of that machine. As Sherry Turkle observes, “from the earliest days, simulation seduced” (Turkle, 2009, p. 70). Not by engaging with the operation of its origins but instead the visualisation of that operation – focusing our attention to the perfection of its reproducibility, drawing our eyes to its surface, to the appearance of meaning and to the gloss of its polished synthetic form. People are increasingly disconnected from the internal machinations of the devices they own, from the origins of the goods they buy and the science and engineering behind the services they subscribe to. The future is happening everywhere, but without us. In an era of profound data accumulation the iUser is incapable of rationalising the vast sums of information available. Instead we have been taught digital shorthand, not by our education system, or even by our parents or co-workers but by the manufacturers of the icons of the contemporary futurist ideal. In a frightening extension of Manuel Castell’s “society of information” we have not plugged into the information, we have plugged into a branded device that prescribes the information for you. The gateway to information is preloaded with the distractions, pay-walls, targeted advertising – systemic pathways to a “social media” fantasy. In the CyberCity what separates the iUser from that information – and from each other – is the aesthetics of the distraction, of the one-click search with the one-line answer, of remote socialisation, of black mirror identity and the constant reassurance of appealing interface design and satisfying futuristic ergonomics. Think about the packaging of an Apple device – the clean lines and sparse branding, the sharp folds of the card, the snappy plastic inlays, the cling wrap, the embedded modernist logic of its profit margins – made in China, designed in California, dug up in the Congo – etched into every box. The promise of the device is inherently present in the white space of its packaging. It screams at you: “I am a blank slate!” Only the user’s subscription to Apple’s services will turn this shiny sleek promise of the future into an object of function and value. Sadly it is also demonstrative of what Jarod Lanier refers to as “lock in” (Lanier, 2011, p. 8), its usefulness is limited to its relationship to a specific library of content, available to a specific identity and accessed only through a device chain of a particular corporate ecosystem. These are the caveats placed on culture
by proprietary software design and commercial investment in patents and licensing. Real cultural value that can be shared, recycled and re-evaluated at will is rapidly disappearing. The clash of the social values of culture and the limitations of the digital economy is an ongoing dilemma. The danger is that corporations and the associations which lobby on their behalf are far from creating new economic models but clinging to old ones under the veneer of packaging, software design and streamlined modes of access. As the concluding line from a report commissioned by General Electric in 1925 states: “Psychologists tell us that the subconscious mind rejects the untrue and unbeautiful” (General Electric Company, 1925). It is this rejection of the “unbeautiful”, a resistance to confirm or deny the “untrue” that has a deeper meaning in this context of the dark euphoric simulation. Product licensing, format dependency and proprietary applications aside, what this disconnect between the promise of the future and its less than perfect reality achieves is an expectation that all future narratives are false. The neo-gothic anxiety emerges when the well-produced, finely-tuned message is discovered to be in fact wrong. Instead what we would prefer is to merely look away; to not know. The techno-cultural narrative insists that we accept the simulation over the real. This then becomes the anxiety of seeing but not knowing, of sensing the weight of an idea but not feeling any resistance, of falling without finding the bottom.

/////  

In this chapter we have seen how the network amplifies the multiplicity of meaning in image making by repetition, re-contextualisation and the reconfiguring the medium itself. This is achieved most energetically and most wilfully in the form of the remix and the supercut, techniques of collage and assemblage which attempt to break through the flood of information by underlining meaning and piping digital objects through new pathways and placing them in unexpected places. Largely an internet phenomenon, this act of networked redistribution is a reworking of Castell’s space of flows – via editing, layering and rerouting meaning, the very substance of the flow is being altered. This is network creep, this is the quest of the remix to draw attention and achieve some form of permanence through the prism of the hyper-simulated archive. The digital aesthetic is dominated by the iUser’s active participation in the life of the media object and the manipulation of the context and perspective of the object’s positioning in that archive.

In the following section we will see how this gothic anxiety goes beyond the simple visual communication strategies of technology marketing, media content design and the homespun futurist logic of companies like Microsoft and General Motors. Having already established the aesthetics of the liquid electric and the light on dark subtext in a wide cross section of moving image content I will
now focus on the broader social and political connotations of dark euphoria and gothic high-tech in other cultural forms such as PC gaming, independent cinema and historical documentation. I will demonstrate how the techno-cultural narrative also extends to government, the military, NASA and corporate aerospace industry. Further to this, with reference to the work of media artists such as James Bridle and Trevor Paglen, I will demonstrate how this narrative is composed within an ever more sophisticated climate of surveillance, automation and machine observation. Bruce Sterling’s figurative description of the act of falling at supersonic speed back towards an absent Earth will be charted across a century haunted by rapidly accelerating technological change. This will take in the anxiety of vertiginous space and manned flight from the Futurists to King Kong, from the Challenger Disaster to the iconic imagery of September 11. Most critically we will examine the transition of these artefacts from the act of their documentation to the image loop of their digital reconstruction and redistribution. To see these patterns emerge so starkly in the simulation of terror is to appreciate the endless state of repetition that the neo-gothic narrative engenders. I propose that the reaction to this collective technological accident has resulted in a rejection of the 20th Century’s fabled quest for the stars fed by a deep, creeping fear of the sky. Moreover, to recognise these signs is to see the dark euphoric moment’s DNA embedded in the image loop of the present-future space of flows.