Dark Euphoria
The Neo-Gothic Narrative of Millennial Technoculture

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B.A. Creative Arts, B.A. (Hons)

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... and here we twiddle in a world of computer glitz,

as the winds rise

and the seas rise

and the debts rise

and the terrorists rise

and the nukes tick.


Front cover image: Mitch Goodwin (2011) Panel #7 from the Dark Euphoria series (Goodwin, 2011)
This is a project in two parts. The text presented here is the major component. This exegetical document provides the theoretical context for a series of media art works that were produced between 2011 and 2012 in response as much as in parallel to this analysis. The creative work, the online media assemblage Dark Euphoria: Unclassified Media (archived at http://darkeuphoria.info), should be seen in a non-traditional sense – a research-led practice component – contextualised by the broader theoretical narrative.

Together, these two components produce a visual communication analysis of historical events, cultural artefacts and media art and the artists who produce them to reveal the nature, attraction and power of the dark euphoric temperament inherent in millennial technoculture. It is important to note however that this is a particular type of exegetical response not a reflective exegesis. This is not an analysis of my practice – the history or technique – rather this is an analysis of the context that informs that practice. Yet this text does include a discussion of several of my key works in relation to specific issues unpacked by the broader thesis and also in relation to the work by other media artists who explore similar territory.

This text explores the recent history of western technoculture and the corporate and political myth making associated with network technology, techno-futurist marketing, consumer electronics and mass media production. It questions how the image constructs of corporate advertising – especially those which promote communication technologies and services – have perpetuated the glossy myth of a technological Utopia, commonly associated with notions of western progress. Using advances in machine intelligence, ubiquitous computing, and personal communication apparatus to facilitate this narrative these marketeers have blended science fiction fantasy with near future projections to author a false reality. Simultaneously this project responds to the cinematic fictions of filmmakers, media artists and visual communication designers who have summoned a far more dystopian vision of our future selves and thereby forging a dark visual aesthetic in contemporary media culture.

The aim of this project then is to answer the following by way of narrative construct, theoretical analysis and creative endeavour: What effect has the 20th century futurist narrative of technological Utopianism (and therefore its neo-gothic Dystopian mirror) had on the emergence of a
new contemporary digital aesthetic and a broader cultural condition at the beginning of the new millennium?

And moreover, what are the origins, means and purposes of the concepts of dark euphoria and gothic high-tech inherent in the narrative of millennial technoculture that informs this emergent aesthetic and the art works that are submitted as part of this thesis?
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Mitch Goodwin
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Thank you internet.

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Also many thanks to the two significant women in my life who at various times over the years endured the weight of this task as much as me, Eve & Elly. 

And to the newest woman in my life, little Maisy - may you safely navigate your way to the other side of the grid.

... 

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... 

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... 

I must also raise a glass to Ryan Daniel for providing me with the precious time away from the classroom to make this happen, a more supportive colleague one would be hard pressed to find. 

And I also owe Sally Breen a bottle of something sophisticated and expensive for her herculean efforts in editing this into shape, line by line, space by space.

... 


Cheers!
00 :: 05 Notes On the Text

This is a thesis in two parts: the narrative exegetical component represented by this text and the online archive of media art works developed for the exhibition *Dark Euphoria: Unclassified Media*. This text was designed to be read in PDF format on a computer or tablet device. There are sufficient images embedded in the text to identify the media artefacts discussed and visually illustrate key points so the text can be read without a direct connection to the web but, the experience is greatly enhanced with internet access.

Numerous art works, media samples and advertising ephemera associated with the analysis have been hyperlinked to an online repository. In most cases I have uploaded copies of this material to a YouTube channel to ensure that these links remain active for the duration. When this was not possible I have endeavoured to use links to content on corporate and organisational websites, commercial YouTube channels or Wikipedia. In such instances it cannot be guaranteed that these links will remain unbroken.

The media art works which form the creative component of this project are also archived online at the exhibition site, *Dark Euphoria: Unclassified Media*. These works are referenced throughout the text and have been strategically placed in the narrative where most appropriate. It would be my preference that readers access these works in the order that they appear in the text so that the context of their creation is fully understood. In most cases these links go to the web page of the specific art work which includes either the art work in full (in the case of video and digital media) or the documentation of that work (where the work includes a physical installation component). Each page includes a brief artist statement and some background information on the development of the work.

While there are numerous hyperlinks scattered throughout the text the most critical ones to follow are those which pertain to my own art works and of other cultural artefacts which feature heavily in the exegetical analysis. Rather than there just being hyperlinks in the body of the text, there are also hyperlinked images positioned as near as possible to the relevant discussion. *These images have been highlighted with an RCA AV connection panel icon superimposed over the image to indicate that these images represent a hyperlink to an online resource.*
Besides this text, the author also explores his thesis in a series of creative works developed for the exhibition *Dark Euphoria: Unclassified Media* which was shown in a physical space in 2012. For the most part the works are digital in nature and are archived online for purposes of analysis with regards to the ideas explored in this text. Below are a list of these works, hyperlinks to their respective web resources and the details of where they appear in this document. The hyperlinks are included here for future reference only. It would be my preference that readers access these works in the order that they appear in the body of the text so that the context of their creation is fully understood.

**Scream 2.0**, 2011, A2 digital inkjet print on metallic gloss paper  
Website link: [http://darkeuphoria.info/the-scream-2-0/](http://darkeuphoria.info/the-scream-2-0/)

Comprised of 649 profile pictures from my Facebook profile’s friends list. These images are used to create a mosaic self-portrait of myself recoiling in at the vastness of the network from which the images were originally sourced. This work appears alongside a discussion of user generated content and media assemblages by artists Evan Roth and Mclean Fahnestock (pages 29-30).

**Glitchaclysm**, 2012, 1min 56sec, 720P video  
Vimeo link: [https://vimeo.com/67447853](https://vimeo.com/67447853)

Sampled screenshots from a content survey for another work in the exhibition. The glitches which appear in this sequence are derived from scrappy interpolation of frames in MPEG4 files. The images are mostly from video samples of disaster films. The work appears in a discussion relating to synaesthesia as explored by the Italian Futurists, Wolfgang Ernst’s ideas around the processes of signal delivery and the signal disruptions of video artist Chris Cunningham (pages 43-44).

**Dark Euphoria**, 2011, a series of A2 digital inkjet print on metallic gloss paper  
Website link: [http://darkeuphoria.info/dark-euphoria/](http://darkeuphoria.info/dark-euphoria/)

These works are dotted throughout the text as emblematic image compositions of my aesthetic response to the notion of dark euphoria. They are also an intervention into the fabric of the digital
image and an attempt to expose what I understand to be the properties of the digitally captured and manipulated photographic image. Several works from this series appear in the discussion pertaining to the light on dark aesthetic and machine visualisation of scientific data (pages 34, 159-161 & 196).

**Primary Propaganda**, 2011, 4min 19sec, 1080P video, four channel video installation
Website link: [http://darkeuphoria.info/primary-propaganda/](http://darkeuphoria.info/primary-propaganda/)
Vimeo link: [https://vimeo.com/41703510](https://vimeo.com/41703510)

This installation is a conceptual exploration of movement across multiple video frames and a response to the exploitation of primary colours to advertise and sell consumer electronics and software services. It is also a personal response to the feeling of alienation that technology and information can evoke in a dense urban environment. This work appears in a discussion about the use of primary colour symbolism in the chromatic painting experiments of Robert Delaunay, the advertisements by Samsung and Sony as well as the corporate iconography of Microsoft and Google (pages 83-86).

**Cyber City Mesh**, 2011, photographic installation, light table, inkjet print of enlarged detail of Arkihabara satellite image, wooden photo frames, inkjet prints on Kodak translucent plastic paper

A “dromoscopic” view of Tokyo’s Electric Town functions as the background surface of this photographic installation. Upon this glossy luminous surface are placed portraits of Tokyo and Sydney commuters. The portraits are printed on translucent paper so they appear to glow upon the surface of the light table. This is a work which responds to – and critiques - the notion of the 21st Century urban citizen as network node and appears in a discussion of manufactured social networks and utopian futures by Nokia, Ericsson and Microsoft and the idea of “context collapse” as proffered by researcher Michael Wesch (pages 128-131).

**Vonnegut’s Fire Fight Fuzz Box**, 2010-2011, 7min 41sec, video installation, PAL video, television, DVD player, assorted plush toys, artillery shell carry cases, leather office chair and TV remote
YouTube link: [http://youtu.be/azoiNzgWEdk](http://youtu.be/azoiNzgWEdk)

A media assemblage (or remix) of content from a media survey conducted during the period 2001-2011 from television, film, web video and video games. The backbone of the construction is an extract from a Kurt Vonnegut lecture on story structure entitled, “The Shape of Stories”. This is intercut with the cat and mouse game between George W. Bush and Osama Bin Laden and the various fantasies and media concoctions that represent that period of history. This appears in the text after the discussion of simulated realities of the video games *Homefront*, *Modern Warfare 3* and *Command & Conquer Generals* (pages 181-182).
**My Endless Dystopian Summer Blockbuster**, 2011, 2min 55sec, 1080P video, two channel projection
Website link: [http://darkeuphoria.info/the-endless-dystopian-summer/](http://darkeuphoria.info/the-endless-dystopian-summer/)
Vimeo link: [https://vimeo.com/42345058](https://vimeo.com/42345058)

Featuring two projections which are designed to face each other at the ends of a gallery space the work is made up of samples from over 70 films which deal with notions of the apocalypse, large scale disaster and systematic failure of machines and network technology. The work is constructed in three parts beginning with 25 split screens and ending with a single full screen close-up of performers witnessing a catastrophic event – or the simulation of that event via computer graphics and data visualisation. The work is used to highlight the prevalence of simulated apocalyptic scenarios in recent Hollywood cinema and the emergence of the supercut as a media art form in contemporary networked culture. This argument is presented alongside an analysis of the works of Christian Marclay, Jeff Desom and Kevin Lee (pages 45 & 185-189).