



# WORLD - BUILDING WARNINGS

Depth in Creative Art to Consider Societal Paths

**KANE WRIGHT**

Master of Fine Arts Thesis Project

Liberty University  
School of Communication & the Arts  
Department of Studio and Digital Arts

# SIGNATURES

SIGNATURE OMITTED FOR PRIVACY

**David Meyer MFA, Chair**

SIGNATURE OMITTED FOR PRIVACY

**Joseph Wright MFA, First Reader**

SIGNATURE OMITTED FOR PRIVACY

**Joshua Wilson MFA, MFA, Second Reader, Thesis Advisor**

SIGNATURE OMITTED FOR PRIVACY

**Todd Smith MFA, Department Chair**

## DISCLAIMER

*The personal, religious, philosophical, or political positions found this project are solely that of the student, and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the committee or Liberty University.*

# CONTENTS

<b>Title</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Chapter 3: Design Process</b>	<b>62</b>
Signature Page	2	<b>Project Plan</b>	<b>62</b>
Table of Contents	3	Initial Plan	62
		Visual Research	63
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Composition Construction</b>	<b>65</b>
Abstract / Personal Motivations	4	First Iteration	65
Research Problem	5	Alternative Composition	68
Objectives	5	Advertisements & Logos	70
Research Question	5	Background Scene	74
Knowledge Gap	6	Foreground Scene	76
Significance	6	Atmospherics & Animation	79
		Final Iterations	82
<b>Chapter 2: Research</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Chapter 4: Visual Solution</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Research Rationale</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Final Solution</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Research Methods</b>	<b>7</b>	Introduction	84
<b>Summary of Findings</b>	<b>8</b>	Terragen Corporation	86
<b>Visual Communication Theory</b>	<b>8</b>	Neuronet	90
Sticky Ideas	9	F.I.V.R.	94
The Science Behind Visuals	11	Neuronet Shield	95
Semiotics	14	Idol News	96
Colour Theory	17	Minerva	100
Lighting	20	Volkrane Industries	104
<b>Constructing Imaginary Worlds</b>	<b>21</b>	Mantis Security	108
Defining The World	21	LOOT.R	112
Designing The World	24	Full Scene	116
Narrative Theory	26		
<b>Why Do Artists Often Fail?</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion</b>	<b>126</b>
Failure to Visually Communicate	29	<b>“Your World, Your Hands”</b>	<b>126</b>
Failure to Visually Create	30		
Product of Circumstance	31	<b>Special Thanks</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Tackling Social Commentary</b>	<b>32</b>		
Government Paternalism	32	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>130</b>
Free Speech	34	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Case Studies &amp; Visual Analyses</b>	<b>36</b>		
Blade Runner	37		
Lord of The Rings	44		
Dune	50		
<b>Research Conclusion</b>	<b>59</b>		

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## ABSTRACT

**Addressing the issue of artists often failing to visually communicate through world-building concepts, this paper seeks to inform a design piece demonstrating the potential effectiveness of a message communicated through visual world-building in a manner that minimises audience disengagement and maximises articulate artistic communication.**

Questions arise as to what dangers a future society may face that could be worth using as a framework to address this communication problem, whether techniques surrounding visual world-building can be successful in this task, and where artists go astray in their own attempts.

Research conducted suggests that psychology, culture, and semiotics play an important role in effective visual communication, where harmony must be achieved between aesthetic engagement and message-bearing signifiers. Artists fail when the scales are tipped too far one way or the other, or when they either play it too safe within established stereotypes or venture too far into new conceptual ideas that audiences have no foundation to connect with. Focus on technical skill rather than visual communication in education hinders artistic success, but a visual solution is possible to demonstrate ways in which inter-disciplinary communication and awareness can address limitations.

## PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS

My personal motivations for this project is related to one of my ambitions to world-build into a novel to be eventually published. As a designer, understanding how to effectively visually communicate is just as important as verbally communicating, and by learning from both I should have a much better overall creative understanding behind the techniques of audience engagement and message delivery. Knowing how and why artists fail and how to mitigate this is a valuable asset for both myself and others in the creative process.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

**Visual world-builders often fail to construct believable yet digestible fictional worlds when commenting on complex societal issues resulting in audience disengagement.**

## OBJECTIVES

Whilst world-building might usually be regarded as an additional exercise to compliment a structured narrative, understanding and developing effective visual world-building can lead to incredibly in-depth discussion and engaging thought regarding works of fiction, which has an enduring impact that can last decades longer than purely informational pieces to captivate audiences worldwide.

By creating a design piece that relies upon the richness afforded by effective visual world-building techniques demonstrated and backed by research and analysis, it would propose a solution and understanding behind why artists often fail at this task, and how to remedy it so that artistic expression can continue to captivate debate on important issues.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

**The future is a scary unknown, and it's easy to excitedly paddle down a river full of promise only to realise there's a waterfall at the end.**

What dangers could potentially await a future society?

Can visual world-building serve as a warning to dissuade us from sailing the wrong river before it's too late?

Why do so many artists fail at visually communicating engaging and meaningful messages?

Can methods of visual communication be employed to enhance the success of such a project?

## KNOWLEDGE GAP

**It is something intuitively known in the creative industries and beyond that not everyone has the capacity for success.** Despite the lack of a true statistical assessment within the field of visual world-building and storytelling, it can be extrapolated by examining every single career and creative endeavour undertaken throughout the world. Those successful in their chosen field are a relative minority compared the vast ocean of artists over the entire creative spectrum who never become recognised or produce memorable work.

Even when a group of students from the same school all undertake the same education, it would be highly unlikely that every student would be able to impact the world with a profoundly enduring visual idea, even those who have promising concepts. Unfortunately, most of this assessment is anecdotal evidence despite being a thought and understanding with significant awareness in the field. As such, this notable knowledge gap presents an unusual circumstance where the issue seems widespread and well understood yet not academically verified.

## SIGNIFICANCE

When it comes to warning audiences about future consequences for societal actions (or any lesson or “moral of the story” to be imparted) disengagement is common in a world of endlessly scrolling media, instant-gratification and reduced attention spans. Waves upon waves of negativity and disinformation lead people to quickly disconnect and disregard thoughtful considerations in favour of personal comforts whether or not it is beneficial.

With the world seemingly growing more inflammatory and divisive than ever, a need for genuine engagement and discussion about our future is necessary when communication is increasingly failing. Understanding why effective visual world-building can captivate decades of audiences into endless discussion and collaboration could pose a solution for the threat to information and communication.

# CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH

## RESEARCH RATIONALE

**Visual storytellers and world-builders have a greater influence on the success of a message than is often thought.** With all the focus placed on narrative excellence rather than design execution, stories and created worlds run the risk of failure from many factors ranging from disengaging audiences to losing the impact of the message they aim to convey. By researching the countless techniques existing artists in various media formats employ, along with scientific understanding of how the human eye and conscious/subconscious thought perceive and process visual information, message-laden creative work can be produced with rigorous academic backing beyond personal subjective interpretations.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The research compiled assesses the scope of this failure of visual communication, addressing whether such failure is a common issue and what research currently exists on the topic. Further examination is placed on understanding the depth of knowledge that currently exists in world-building and communication theory, extrapolating this into a visual context.

From there the research review, case studies and visual analyses seeks to understand why some artists go astray in their attempts at effective communication, along with an examination of notable current societal issues as a framework for the creative project demonstration to test an effective solution with the theories assessed.





## VISUAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

### STICKY IDEAS

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### VISUAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

An idea, no matter how enduring or profound simply cannot spread without effective communication. Assessing the various theories behind the visual aspects of this communication is essential to understanding the scientific mechanisms behind the success and failure of message-driven creative visual concepts.

*“What makes urban legends so compelling? Why do some chemistry lessons work better than others? Why does virtually every society circulate a set of proverbs? Why do some political ideas circulate widely while others fall short?” (Heath 12)*

The concept of *sticky ideas* as defined by Chip and Dan Heath establishes the theory that some ideas are inherently more enduring and contagious than others, based on a devised checklist that postulates some ideas are so successful due to these factors; *simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credentialed backing, emotional cues and storytelling hooks* (Heath 15).

Heath’s notion of **simplicity** postulates that longer messages can be difficult to remember, though stripped down text is not the solution either. Rather, framing an idea like a proverb can make a simple and concise statement rich with nuance and complexity, with a famous example being that of *The Golden Rule* (Heath 16). In visual terms, the messages conveyed must be concise and memorable yet complex with additional meaning and consideration.

**Unexpectedness** in sticky ideas involves the use of surprise and the unexpected as a means of attracting attention, though the Heath brothers add that surprise does not last, as such the unexpected nature of the idea must also “generate interest and curiosity” (Heath 16). A shocking visual or a composition with additional elements to pique attention would therefore be effective.

**Concreteness** is defined as avoiding the ambiguity of vague statements that run the risk of being lost or misinterpreted, as “speaking concretely is the only way to ensure that our idea will mean the same thing to everyone in our audience” (Heath 16). It is defined in concrete terms, translating complex issues into definite forms that can be extrapolated later. In visual terms it is much like stripping away the multiple meanings artists usually infer in their work and making their message singular and consistent.

# VISUAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

## THE SCIENCE BEHIND VISUALS

*"The nature of beauty and why it affects us so deeply is mysterious. Why do qualities so elusive to define (like a sunset or a half-opened rose) affect us so powerfully? This is an important question to consider in visual communication."* (Smith 3)

**Credentialed backing** of an idea is less so about the academic statistics and verification of such when it comes to sticky ideas that resonate with an audience, but rather defined as a concept that allows viewers of the material to test its credibility themselves from simple observation (Heath 17). In visual terms successful parody is an example of credentialed backing, as it highlights truths and issues that whilst exaggerated are concepts that everyday people witness and verify.

**Emotional cues** are a powerful tool. A visual of an abused animal or perhaps a little less distressingly a lonely individual sat on a bench can create powerful and memorable emotions that reinforce the memory of the idea that such things must be prevented. *"Research shows that people are more likely to make a charitable gift to a single needy individual than to an entire impoverished region. We are wired to feel things for people, not for abstractions."* (Heath 17)

Lastly, **storytelling hooks** are understandably vital to bring a visual world-building concept with a narrative message to a captivating state with a viewing audience. *"Research shows that mentally rehearsing a situation helps us perform better when we encounter that situation in the physical environment. Similarly, hearing stories acts as a kind of mental flight simulator, preparing us to respond more quickly and effectively"* (Heath 18). When it comes to imparting awareness and discussion of concepts such as societal issues, a visual story that prepares minds for such a future threat would be a highly effective means of communication.

**Combining all these elements of sticky ideas and translating these theories into visual communication would assist in ensuring that any project solution would have a significantly higher chance of highlighting messages in an enduring and engaging manner. Visual communication is simply one form of communication which has the capacity to borrow principles from other mediums in successful application.**

**Visual communication has existed since the early days of mankind, with cave paintings depicting the actions of hunter-gatherers as a means of storytelling.** Why some visual imagery can have such a profound impact can be hard to define, although of interesting note is optical stimuli largely holds neither a logical nor conscious response at first impression. *"In light of current neurological research, for example, we can no longer assume that a person's response to visual images will be conscious, or logical. Rather, neurological research reveals that visuals may be processed and form the basis of future action without passing through consciousness at all. Developmentally, too, we know that children and teenagers reason primarily through emotions, and are therefore highly susceptible to emotional appeals through visuals in the way they think and act."* (Smith 45)

This links heavily with the emotional cues the Heath brothers discuss in *Made to Stick* (Heath 17), suggesting that the majority of the population do not fully grow out of the instinctual response an emotional appeal can hold in visual imagery. Further, this subconscious awareness can likely have a profound impact on the success of visual storytelling and world-building, as a brilliant narrative visually depicted with the wrong instinctual emotional connections would negatively impact its success.

Emotional connections to media are further reinforced by repetitive exposure with consistent connotations, enshrining these associations within our subconscious as a reference-point for future reactions (Smith 59). Much like being burnt by fire over and over again would create a fear of flames, how we respond to visual stimuli is defined by the repetitive exposure of the world around us, and forms a basis for how successful visual communication should delve into these instinctual responses to achieve its stated goal.



Of significance to both ensuring the influence of the message in visual projects as well as highlighting notably dangerous behaviour, research suggests that the emotional response elicited by fictional media is perceived by the brain to be just as legitimate as real personal encounters (Smith 47). Therefore it can be extrapolated that using visual storytelling as a platform to impact personal responses is an effective and powerful tool for influence if implemented correctly, not only as the project solution but as credentialed demonstration of the dangers of controlled media (see **TACKLING SOCIAL COMMENTARY**).

Beyond emotional responses, visual communication holds further psychological reactions based on the context and connections of elements presented. Even two unrelated visual concepts displayed one after another can change their individual meaning to add further symbolism, as Ken Smith elaborates an example whereby *“shots can combine the colliding images of homeless people sleeping on park benches with those of elegantly dressed people rushing through the same park section to an open-air concert, which conjures up quite readily the meta-message of social injustice”* (Smith 379).

Visual positioning also plays an important role in viewer perceptions, whereby the location of two individuals in a scene can create two entirely different associations even without additional visual confirmation. *“When we look at an image in which two people appear in the middle of the frame, we tend to perceive them as comfortable....On the other hand, placing people near the edges of the frame creates the impression of tension between them. This effect is the result of frame magnetism, the visual illusion created when the nearer an object is to the edge of a rectangular frame, the stronger it seems that the object is being pulled toward that edge.”* (McGeough 24)

The simplicity of lines in visual imagery can assist in intended connotations when combined with additional reinforcement. To summarise Ryan McGeough’s assessment, horizontal lines lead our attention across the page, evoking a sense of solidity in the image. Vertical lines however elicit a sensation of energy, though when placed in the centre of a picture they may generate a sense of tension or balance between elements depending on the other themes presented. (McGeough 26)

In *The Essential Guide to Visual Communication*, McGeough further delves into the science behind visual communication with several “gestalt principles” that define psychological associations depending on the presentation of visual features:

- **Similarity** states that viewers of visual imagery identify objects similar in appearance (such as via colour, shape or size) to be that of the same group (McGeough 28). This can hold purpose, for example, when a group of individuals in blue can be assumed to be visually grouped together as a “team” with shared connotations even without verbal confirmation or additional visual cues. A lone person in red would therefore stand out as divergent or unique, even if they were otherwise identically dressed. The same could apply to differences in clothing or height.

- **Proximity** adds to the principle of similarity, suggesting that audiences perceive objects in close proximity to be members of the same group (McGeough 28). In a visual demonstration, a stack of papers on a desk would suggest they are all thematically similar in nature, whereas a single sheet or multiple sheets set aside would be considered different in some way, as part of a separate group.

- **Continuation** describes the psychological compulsion to follow lines within an image from one element to the next, perceiving it as a directional path even without an actual line or curve drawn through the image (McGeough 29). This can be helpful to guide viewers on a set path through a visual to reinforce certain ideas or messages that require an ordered presentation (such as storytelling), like a guided tour using the track the human mind creates for itself. *“What or who a character looks at draws the eyes of the audience and they will want to see what they’re looking at or the reaction of the person they’re looking at.”* (Lancaster 110)

- **Closure** builds upon continuation, whereby the mind will fill the gaps of an incomplete line as long as the separate strokes align themselves within the piece (McGeough 29). This allows typography to be legible even when partially obscured by foreground objects, as the letters will be redrawn complete in human perception as long as enough information remains.

- **Common fate** covers the habit of seeing a collection of objects moving together as part of the same group (McGeough 30). A flock of birds or even a static display of pencils pointing in the same direction would imply they are a collective. Someone depicted as sat in the opposite direction on a bus would signify they are not part of the same ideology.

# VISUAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

## SEMIOTICS

*“Semiotics (or semiology as it used to be known) is sometimes called the study of signs. Signs can be anything that expresses a meaning: a written word, an item of clothing or a tracking shot, for example. Anything that “stands for” something else is a sign.” (Bennett et al. 32)*

**Understanding the various meanings inferred by the study of semiotics and how it relates to specific audiences allows a deeper awareness of artist application, and can perhaps be used as one element to consider success rates of communicating a viable message.**

To elaborate on the prior quotation, Semiotics is a concept whereby *“any object or sound that expresses meaning to the person who hears or sees it may be thought of as a sign”* (Butler 343). To take an example from Jeremy Butler’s *Television: Visual Storytelling and Screen Culture*, a mere shape of a footprint marked in the sand can hold meaning to the viewer as a human presence (Butler 345). Such inferred meanings can be found throughout media, such as the arbitrarily shaped love heart holding connotations of love and affection despite it merely being a shape with no associated explanation.

However, not all shapes and signs have universal meaning. Whilst the directional arrow has the largest scope of understanding in connection to the spears fashioned by our collective ancestors, cultural associations differ around the world and change over time. *“If you don’t know that the red rose stands for the county of Lancashire, the signifier will not reveal this meaning however hard you look at it”* (Bennett et al. 35). The red rose itself has entirely different meanings for the rest of the world, but within Lancashire in England it signifies the county itself. Its historical connotations derive from the Wars of the Roses, a fight for the English crown between primarily the *House of York* (using a white rose to represent them) and the *House of Lancaster* (under the banner of a red rose). With cultural awareness of this history it changes the way the sign of a rose is perceived within that context.

As for changing over time, even audiences within cultures and locales that have not relocated or suffered dramatic events are affected by developing techniques and trends. From studying and experiencing early television and film production it becomes apparent that the perceived strangeness of their structure to modern audiences is due to differences in approach that can have a disconcerting effect (Bennett et al. 38). A designer creating visuals to represent past events must be mindful to balance historical accuracy with modern associations to avoid losing meaning and familiarity, or educate the audience about the differences in context.

Another example is that of corporate symbols, established less through historical or cultural associations but through brand awareness and successful marketing. *“A corporate signifier such as the Nike swoosh logo is linked to the signified of the Nike corporation and its products by decades of cultural convention and high-powered marketing. If you don’t belong to a society that shares the knowledge of Nike’s meaning, then the swoosh is little more than a blob of ink on a page (or an expensive shoe). A symbolic sign such as this bears no meaning if you are outside its culture, if you have no socially produced context for it. Its meaning is solely cultural, a by-product of ideology.”* (Butler 345)

Further, meanings in semiotics can be difficult to ascertain even in cultural or ideological relevance, as contextual cues can drastically change the inferred message of an object to any number of possible connotations (Bennett et al. 34). As mentioned earlier, in Lancaster a rose depicted on a flag or other nationalistic or historical display would represent one of the noble houses depending on its colour, whereas framed within the context of a lingerie store would change its meaning to that of the amorous despite no change in the object observed. Such considerations are especially important in visual world-building and storytelling, as both understanding the connotations behind objects depicted as well as ensuring the contextual cues are appropriate for the message is essential, no matter the technical skill provided.

Context of the visuals presented can also be perceived differently not just by the way such objects are framed, but that of the influence of the viewing audience. *“Watching television alone is a different experience from watching with friends or family members, and these differences may well influence the ways in which we interact with the text.”* (Bennett et al. 29) Whilst still very much theoretical, watching a visual narrative with a romantic partner could lead to the viewer placing more emphasis on loving emotional connections and drawing parallels between their own relationship even as an unintentional by-product of the presented visuals.



# VISUAL COMMUNICATION THEORY

## COLOUR THEORY

Contrastingly, watching with parents may lead to a viewer placing avoidance on such amorous content displayed, focusing instead on entertainment rather than romance. These principles could be applied equally to graphic design, illustration and motion graphics as they all fit within visual mediums observed by audiences. A poster highlighting an issue or conveying a message will no doubt be perceived differently not only depending on the location it is presented but the group a viewer is experiencing the content with.

Within the scope of semiotics is another concept described as myths. Myths are described as powerful signifiers beyond individual messages, linked together with a variety of associated meanings (Bennett et al. 39). *"Myths concern shared beliefs and explanations; we are not particularly interested in whether these beliefs are true or false. Our culture supplies us with numerous myths to explain the world to us."* (Bennett et al. 42) Religious, spiritual, and strong cultural stories all weave together in mythological signifiers that can foreshadow and build upon a visual narrative to link a whole array of associated meanings to what is presented. Essentially a "super-signifier", they can tell an entire story and link it with the rest of the visuals just by their presence alone.

Take for example a visual depicting an average man sat on a bench that just so happens to have bushes on either side loosely shaped like wings due to the curve of their branches. A lamp hangs overhead to illuminate the bench, casting a glow down upon the man from the ring of LED diodes that provide the lamp's light. Suddenly the man is framed within the semiotic myths described by Christianity as presented largely in western cultures. A whole string of meanings are therefore attached to the figure rather than one symbolic connotation, further developed by the context of the situation around him. Viewers do not even need to be Christian to understand this message in western cultures, as it is enshrined in the shared awareness of their culture and the meaning is unchanged despite potential theological differences.

In order to cement the meanings provided by these visual symbols and associations, a term coined as "anchorage" is essential. *"Barthes devised the term "anchorage" to describe the ways by which readers of texts or parts of texts are directed to particular meanings rather than simply attaching their own connotations. When visual images are supplemented by headlines, captions, slogans or titles, the reader can be steered to a preferred reading."* (Bennett et al. 52) Within the realm of visual storytelling and world-building, a sign framed over a shop could provide anchorage to the contents of the window display and affect their symbolic associations to the viewer. Further, it may not even need to be through the use of verbal clarification, as the previously described historic and contextual cues littered with surrounding visual symbols can manufacture an interconnected semiotic myth that anchors the visual into a preferred meaning.

**The use of colour in visual communication develops beyond simply matching colours together in a visually appealing manner. Much like the semiotic study of symbols inferring meaning to the viewer, colour choices can also hold strong connotations depending on the context they are presented.**

**Red** is described by Patti Bellantoni as holding connotations with power, having the capacity to raise a viewers heart-rate and increase anxiety. A visually loud colour, it can associate with strong emotional connections such as love and anger (Bellantoni 2), as well as the quirk that *"because we tend to see it first, red gives the illusion of advancing towards us"* (Bellantoni 2). Perhaps one of the boldest colours, its associations provide an interesting contrast and therefore designers should be mindful about the context in which it is presented. A woman in a red dress, due to the colour, now has an inferred meaning. Displaying the woman in a red dress in the heat of a battlefield as opposed to the amorous implications of a bedroom will change her meaning.

Even in cultures that have a shared heritage and language perceive colour differently. In England, red is traditionally seen as a symbol of national identity and good moral causes in opposition to the French blue, whereas in the United States this is reversed with blue being associated with the "good guys" and red being the historic first enemy of the fledgling independence movement, the British Empire, as well as the Cold War danger presented by the Soviet Union and others in American history.

*"Blue can be a tranquil pond or a soft blanket of sadness. It is quiet and aloof."*(Bellantoni 83)

**Blue** is naturally the opposite in intentions to red. It is peaceful, passive and introspective, prompting viewers surrounded by the colour to think deeply rather than take brash action, especially with steel blue and dark indigo holding the strongest connection to intellectual pursuits (Bellantoni 83). Building upon this, *"Blue is commonly associated with security, honesty and trustworthiness"* (McGeough 33), like a calm and just King in a peaceful kingdom or a corporation that wishes to inspire a sense of trust and expertise to potential customers.

Surprisingly however, adding elements of other colours to blue can change its meaning quite dramatically. In research conducted by Patti Bellantoni in *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die*, mixing green into blue changes its passive nature and encourages discussion and openness in those within its presence (Bellantoni 83). The richness of the colour can also have a difference, as in film the use of an intense blue can *"signal a cold determination of a father who tries to keep his exuberant son under his control."*(Bellantoni 83).

**Green** is a dichotomous colour, even perhaps moreso than red. To continue Patti Bellantoni's research it can represent both food and danger, life and decay, good natured intent or evil corruption (Bellantoni 160). Green within the context of a meadow holds signifiers of life, the potential for food and the positivity afforded by natural environments. Yet, in the context of villainous imagery it can represent a poisoned apple, a terrible plague or the wickedness of an envious witch.

**Orange** is usually seen as a positive and upbeat colour, a warmth provided by its good nature and comforting predictability (Bellantoni 112). *"Opaque orange was the most upbeat and least dramatic of the colors. There were no flare-ups, no surprises."*(Bellantoni 112) Context like the other colours also defines its meaning more accurately. A glass of orange juice on a beach by the setting sun conveys a joyous sense of warmth and comfort, whereas within the skies of a dystopian megalopolis it bears the heavily oppressive smog and toxicity of pollution.

**Yellow** is a colour that is often misunderstood. Commonly when queried about yellow the typical response is that of sunny happiness and positivity, with *"powerful life energy"* (Bellantoni 42), yet studies suggest that the true psychological effects are contrary to cultural perceptions. *"People in the doldrums believe yellow is light and sunny and will cheer them up. But yellow creates anxiety and makes you more stressed out... In yellow's presence, you'll be more apt to lose your temper."*(Bellantoni 42) This is further compounded by the use of yellow in nature as a signifier for caution and danger like the markings on a wasp. *"Yellow is the color longest remembered and most despised. This is an interesting parallel to the color associated with happiness. Actually, this quality makes yellow a perfect signal for obsession"*(Bellantoni 42)

**Purple** is a mystical, enchanting colour. It is the colour most commonly associated with spirituality in many cultures, linked to paranormal of the afterlife and the magical of the occult (Bellantoni 190). Despite it being usually perceived as a colour of royalty it would be more suited psychologically to that of a temple rather than a throne. As appropriate to the title of Patti Bellantoni's book, within the context of a visual narrative around a particular character it can imply that someone is going to die or be transformed into something else (Bellantoni 190). As with the other colours, contextual cues can make a considerable difference to the meanings conveyed to the viewer. It is rare that a visual composition is going to be entirely one colour, and a visual storytelling or world-building narrative doubly so. Rather **it will be the combination and placement of all of these colours that define their meaning not only by context but by the way they interact with each other in any given scene.**



# VISUAL COMMUNICATION THEORY


## LIGHTING

*“Lighting is the key tool in helping to provide depth in the two-dimensional surface of a screen. If cinematographers simply light actors in the foreground, for example, then they will appear flat in a scene. If they light the background, place actors in the midground, and light a foreground object, then cinematographers sculpt cinematic depth and help add atmosphere to a story.” (Lancaster 150)*

**Whilst predominantly a film theory, use of appropriate lighting within visual storytelling and world-building is vital in depicting depth and nuance within a scene. The harshness or softness of a light source, the direction of light, as well as the saturation of colours provided by the strength of the lighting can all affect the connotations provided by the visuals.**

Hard light is defined by Kurt Lancaster in *Basic Cinematography: A Creative Guide to Visual Storytelling* as effective when depicted in backlight or rim light positions, conveying harsh emotions or the starkness of a situation presented to a character. In combination with strong shadows it also has the effect of increasing drama (Lancaster 168). Soft light however expresses a gentler touch; the warmth, softness and comforting (or romantic) associations of a character or scene (Lancaster 168).

With lighting direction, the use of such can be used to place particular focus on certain elements of a character or scene. *“Underlighting (the light source below the subject) has suggested a rather sinister character in hundreds of horror and suspense television programs. Backlighting may be used to mask a killer’s identity or imply a generally enigmatic situation.” (Butler 227)*



Combining the qualities and connotations of lighting with the previous understanding of colour theory can transform audience’s perceptions of a scene.

*“Let’s visualize a man walking along the edge of a bluff above the ocean beach. In the first scene, he is happy and about to join his wife and children playing on the beach. In the second scene, he is extremely depressed. He has just lost his job, his wife and children have left him, and he feels that the world has come to a stop. We probably visualize the two scenes quite differently. But let’s for a moment assume that we are required to use the identical footage of the man walking in both scenes and generate the difference in feeling simply by changing a few of the contextual aesthetic elements, such as lighting, color, and sound.*

*In the first scene, we could show the bright colors of a sunny day and use the sounds of a gentle surf and laughter of children playing. For the second scene, we do away with colors and render the entire event in black and white. The sky is now covered with dark clouds. The surf is much louder and crashing against the rocks and, instead of the children’s laughter, we hear the penetrating cries of seagulls. Whereas the main action remains exactly the same, the different aesthetic variables provide different contexts for opposite meta-messages—one of a joyful reunion with the children, the other of despair and anguish.” (Smith 367)*

**Between the concepts of symbology provided by semiotics, the scientific understanding of how audiences read imagery psychologically, the use of lighting, colour, and composition, all provide an extensive framework on how to construct a design for successful visual communication. The more of these theoretical elements can be employed in a piece, both the stronger the message is purported to be as well as the enduring “stickiness” of the idea it presents.**

# CONSTRUCTING IMAGINARY WORLDS

*"Sets in fiction television are not just neutral backgrounds to the action; they also signify narrative meaning to the viewer."* (Butler 215)

**With the visual communication theory establishing the multitude of connotations that can be applied from shapes, colours and the execution of such concepts, an effective design solution must also understand the principles behind constructing the imaginary world that the framework of the message resides within. All the effective visual elements available lose purpose without a believable and engaging world with which to draw them from.**

## DEFINING THE WORLD

**Before an artist can start doodling sketches of spacecraft and landscapes, constructing the inner workings of a world and the relations between its respective elements helps enhance the believability and connections of the visuals presented.**

The starting point behind any world-building exercise is to establish the thematic genre of the world being visually described. *"Genre tropes are common and recurring elements of story, attributed to specific genres. For example, the elderly mentor or the chosen one in epic fantasy. The possessed doll or the abandoned asylum in horror. The one true love or the roll in the hay in romance"* (Trevena 8). While genre tropes are usually applied to the content of the narrative itself, genre also defines the setting of the world and its visual appearance. A medieval fantasy like *The Lord of The Rings* is going to have significant differences in visual structure and narrative cues in comparison to dystopian science-fiction like *Blade Runner*. The former world may depict lush forests, striking natural landscapes and locations marked with magical beauty. The latter world is riddled with pollution, cityscapes and the neon lights of corporate advertisements.

Beyond the structure of the landscape itself, consideration must be taken as to the culture and history of the population from which the visual narrative takes place. As Mark Wolf elaborates in *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, *"Invented cultures are one of the infrastructures of imaginary worlds, and are often one of the main things that attracts or repels audiences, since they determine so much of the audience's experience of a world. Invented cultures also provide a tool with which to examine existing cultures by comparison and to explore cultural possibilities. Successful invented cultures may become adopted into real-world cultures, and reflect not only the audience's attitude toward the invented culture, but to their own cultural background as well, as they blur the boundaries between the culture we consider "real" versus that which is invented."* (Wolf 35)

Creating a believable and inspiring culture with the potential for it to be adopted in reality is the precise purpose of visual storytellers wishing to convey warnings about future societal paths. By establishing the dangers in such a culturally believable way, it can inspire audiences to react and respond in the real world with effectiveness greater than any marketing campaign.

History is something that visual world-builders especially overlook, their focus seemingly on their message interwoven in loosely associated visuals that convey a generic genre. But *"that what has come before retains considerable power in the present as it sets the stage for what can be thought, what can be said, what can be done, what can be built."* (Wolf 42) Extrapolating this further, a rich history behind the visuals presented adds further credibility and legitimacy to the works, encouraging viewers to pique their curiosity and learn more about why things are presented the way they are, and what led the world to the stage in which it is being displayed. This credibility links back to *Made to Stick*, one of the fundamental principles for ensuring a message endures in the minds of the population (Heath 15).

With the landscape, culture and history of the world established, the governmental structure of the setting also defines the visual appearance of all three considerations. For a science-fiction dystopia, a corporation may begin to snowball and attain power due to their empire-like drive for acquiring resources and accumulating wealth. *"Empires are often driven by resources. Where certain resources are found determines where they expand to, the type of economy helps determine how they do so, and the climate and geography of the homeland are both factors to consider. Controlling a valuable resource may also give a natural center to the empire."* (Hickson 189)

To demonstrate this research in practical terms, imagine a gigantic corporation has amassed enough control of resources on a shattered planet to have significant and dominant power. How would they maintain this control, and with what tactics would they employ? Angeline Trevena postulates that governmental entities (such as this gigantic corporation) could implement tactics to divide and fracture the population ideologically to pit them against each other. *"When different groups become scapegoats, the blame and anger is focussed on them, rather than being focussed on their rulers. Divide and conquer."* (Trevena 62) Further, they may show and encourage displays of nationalism to bolster loyalty to the corporation and pride in themselves, especially in times of strife or prosperity (Hickson 189).

# CONSTRUCTING IMAGINARY WORLDS

## DESIGNING THE WORLD

*“One of the first key elements is to think of the habitat or environment. In what part of this world are we? Each area has its distinct characteristics and comes with a range of plant life, animal inhabitants, and geology that will become the raw material for creating our own environments and cultures.” (Nelson 145)*

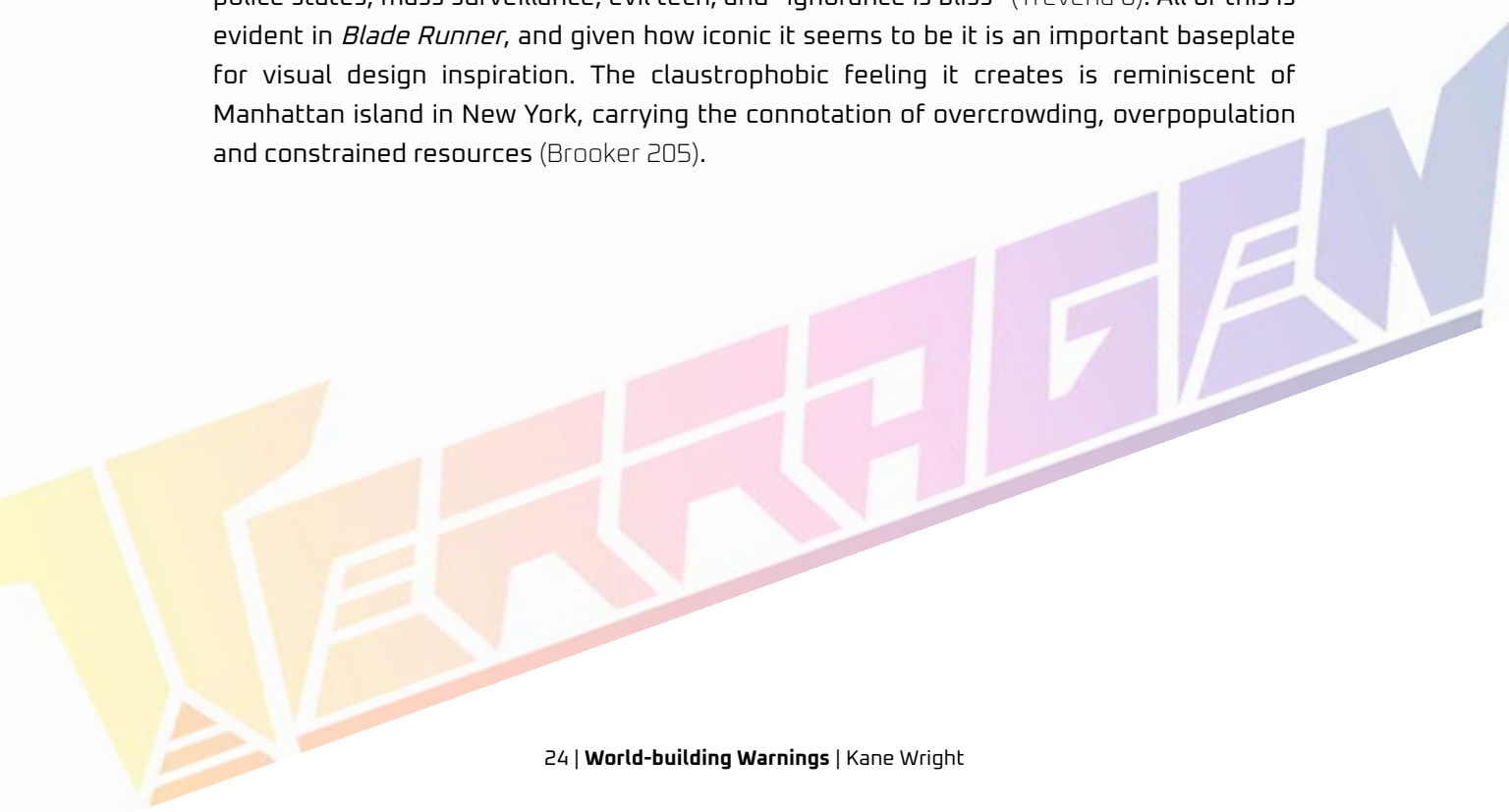
**With the framework of the world established, each individual element of this creation must then be realised in a visual manner for effective communication of the ideas created.** As mentioned earlier with the genre cues of *Blade Runner*, the visual project to this thesis will be of a similar theme framework. *“Blade Runner demands studying because it has become so entrenched as the definitive screen depiction of the nightmare future city. Its imagery has become the standard visual iconography for the science fiction metropolis: super-tall buildings; poorly-lit streets and alleys; smog; rain; heavy industry belching fire into the sky; neon advertisements; overcrowding; ethnically diverse (that is, non-white) crowds; electric punk-inspired costumes and hairstyles; retrofitted buildings of varying architectural styles; scavenged props, and so on.” (Brooker 205)*

Angeline Trevena in *How To Destroy The World* describes some of the common genre tropes that exist in dystopian sci-fi to build upon, including fake utopias, oppressive governments, police states, mass surveillance, evil tech, and “ignorance is bliss” (Trevena 8). All of this is evident in *Blade Runner*, and given how iconic it seems to be it is an important baseplate for visual design inspiration. The claustrophobic feeling it creates is reminiscent of Manhattan island in New York, carrying the connotation of overcrowding, overpopulation and constrained resources (Brooker 205).

Beyond that of the visual aesthetic of the world itself is that of the characters that reside within it. *“In narrative television, costume design is closely allied with set design. Just as props and backgrounds are objective correlatives or icons designed to establish character, so are the clothes a character wears. Costume is one of the first aspects of a character that we notice and upon which we build expectations” (Butler 225)* Such elements all have significant connotations if done correctly, involving everything from their body shape, visual health, clothing choices, personal accessories, facial expression, body language and walking gait (Nelson 91).

Mark Nelson in *Fantasy World-Building: A Guide to Developing Mythic Worlds and Legendary Creatures* further builds upon this by highlighting the extreme extent that design choices and inferred meaning can reflect the world created and the people that reside within it:

*“When I create new fashions, there is much to take into account: shirts, coats, footwear, pants, dresses, jackets, and waistcoats. Next are the levels of your groups: from the wealthy to the poor; guards to dress guards; religious leaders to shamans; military to warriors; workers of all shapes and sizes; and anything else you want to bring to life. Fabric will become a factor. If it is printed, woven, or made from hides, each creates a new type of decoration and workmanship. Woven fabrics can have embedded patterns and symbols, applications of dyes, inks, etc. Other decorations can come in the form of beads, shells, feathers, fur, belts, bags, pouches, buttons, zippers, necklaces, rings, chains, wrist guards, spurs, holsters, knives, hats, eyeglasses, and so on. It becomes a rather complex series of ideas to bring one character to life” (Nelson 629)*





## CONSTRUCTING IMAGINARY WORLDS

### NARRATIVE THEORY

*“When I am watching a movie, there are many ideas running through my head: 1. Entertainment 2. Storytelling and how the camera is being used 3. Body language and the reactions of characters 4. Does the story hold together? 5. Is it believable within the parameters established by the director/editor/writers? Idea: The story can be told partially by a tapestry on the wall and the reaction of the character.” (Nelson 91)*

**It could be argued that the realm of narrative theory is resigned to the field of writers rather than that of visual design, however an effective visual message tells a story through the interconnected signifiers placed within the imagery. By understanding narrative cues to make an effective story this can be translated into a visual form to further enhance the effectiveness of visual communication.**

As Mark Wolf elaborates in *Exploring Imaginary Worlds: Essays on Media, Structure, and Subcreation*, readers of popular stories often find themselves enthralled by mysteries and puzzles, tracing these instincts back to early man’s desire to decipher the enigma of the natural world (Wolf 51). These attempts to understand the existence humankind faces results in the creation and development of countless myths, stories and legends to explain the unexplainable at their time of origin. These stories persist through cultures to the extent that using mythopoeic suspense in narrative works can be a highly effective means where readers are astonished and enchanted by symbolic mythological meaning ingrained in cultural awareness without full lucidity (Wolf 50).

In Mark Wolf’s *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, names are also discussed as having great power, with their meanings carefully chosen to imbue symbolic connections with fictional characters (Wolf 52). The main characters then undergo what is known as *The Hero’s Journey*, “a phrase coined by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* first published in 1949 (see also the revised 1968 edition, and collections: Campbell 1990, 2011). Quickly becoming a catchphrase and new critical idiom, THJ refers to a formula that has inspired and governed the best adventure stories ever written” (Wolf 11). This journey features narrative techniques such as a prologue-hook to engage the reader with cryptic tension building (Hickson 7), and foreshadowing which involves descriptive cues that forewarn of future story events.

*“In Joss Whedon’s Avengers: Age of Ultron, Tony Stark uses the phrase, “Peace in our Time” to describe his latest invention, Ultron—an artificial intelligence capable of policing the whole planet and defending humanity from threats. This phrase is a reference to Neville Chamberlain’s words in 1938, after striking a deal with Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany, that he had achieved “Peace in Our Time.” (Hickson 44)*

**To translate these techniques in a visual medium simply requires taking concepts such as prologue-hooks, foreshadowing and mythopoeic suspense and visualising this narrative with interconnected signifiers that assemble the story without the need for written material, much like tales were once told with neolithic cave paintings.**

## WHY DO ARTISTS OFTEN FAIL?

*"Given the importance of making ideas stick, it's surprising how little attention is paid to the subject. When we get advice on communicating, it often concerns our delivery: "Stand up straight, make eye contact, use appropriate hand gestures. Practice, practice, practice (but don't sound canned)." Sometimes we get advice about structure: "Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em. Tell 'em, then tell 'em what you told 'em." Or "Start by getting their attention—tell a joke or a story.""* (Heath 9)

**Whilst it can be difficult to garner precisely how frequent the failure to visually communicate a captivating idea can be, it can be extrapolated from the previous theory studies why ignorance of such could lead to the reasons behind their failures.**



## WHY DO ARTISTS OFTEN FAIL? FAILURE TO VISUALLY COMMUNICATE

*"One source of concern is the notion that, in a world in which picture-based media are playing an increasingly prominent role, it may be incumbent on the system of formal education to pay more attention to students' abilities to both comprehend and create messages for these media"* (Smith 482)

Within art education, it seems commonplace that much of the effort is placed on developing technical skill and encouraging diverse and elusive interpretations for artwork. It models itself after modern art galleries, where splatterings of paint are considered profound and hold various meanings depending on the individual circumstances of the viewer. *"If you have ever found yourself in an art gallery wondering what a picture means—or put another way, what an artist is trying to say—you have had the experience of the picture-viewer nexus and the act of meaning making."* (Smith 271) As long as the student can successfully defend their creative thought process, however vague and "artsy", it is commonly applauded as successful.

Within the bubble of art professionals and enthusiasts such an assessment may not be incorrect, however not all students remain within the realm of personal interpretive fine art. Once they enter the professional world, the audience is different. It is not a professor with years submerged in artistic culture, rather ordinary people that need clear and relatable messages communicated to them. Art in itself does not magically involve different thought processes. It must be able to connect with the chosen audience like the stripes on a wasp signal an instinctive threat, or the blossoming rose suggesting beauty and romance.

*"Studying all manner of visual communications media, not just those usually classified as art, makes it obvious that all visual communication must utilize the same human perception system as do art objects. There is no separate eye-to-brain connection for the processing of images labelled art."* (Smith 5)

Graphic design and other creative media skill-sets and training certainly do much to prepare for the corporate world of communication, but visual narratives and world-building are oft neglected and shuffled along with the interpretive side of art education. Countless films and other visual narratives are relegated to niche film festivals or lost in the depths of Vimeo or YouTube as the artsy takes precedence over visual communication. *"If it's a good script and the film doesn't work, it usually means filmmakers failed to tell the story visually, relying on surface dialogue rather than embodying the mise-en-scène with subtext, as shaped through blocking."* (Lancaster 40)

## WHY DO ARTISTS OFTEN FAIL? FAILURE TO VISUALLY CREATE

It can be tempting for visual world-builders to deviate from established genres to create something unique, making their mark and defining new visual genres or new takes to existing aesthetic formula. This is risky however, as it runs the risk of alienating audiences that expect certain structures and thematic elements in any given established genre.

*“Because genre formulas and conventions are employed by both the producers and the consumers of television, they can be said to be a common language or code shared by these two communities. And, some genre theorists maintain, this shared code and its implicit shared values make genres particularly important to the study of a society’s belief systems at any one point in time.”* (Butler 339)

Deviating from this cultural understanding is a challenging endeavour, which could also be postulated the reason why new messages can easily be lost.

*“A cliché is an overused, trite, stereotyped phrase or idea which has lost its impact, ingenuity, and originality through excessive use over time. Clichés are something to be avoided in literature. They are something that invite eye-rolls from your readers. They have also been known to cause heavy sighing, groans, bad reviews, and, in the worst cases, an incurable impulse to stop reading.”* (Trevena 7)

There is also the inherent risk of sticking to the formula rather than breaking away from it. Whilst the quote above is in particular relevance to written narratives, such concepts of visual tropes and clichés are overwhelmingly prevalent in visual media. The seductive woman in the red dress, the villain with an unsightly scar, each of these are stereotypical visual concepts that audiences are fully familiar with. If these concepts are executed successfully, it can reinforce the message with tropes easily recognised and understood. If executed poorly however, these clichés are a quick way to disengage audiences as it feels like something they have seen a thousand times before.

**The precarious balance of expanding ideas whilst sprinkling in existing tropes is like trying to manage the success of a kingdom you have created with the *sword of Damocles* hanging by a horse hair above your head. A misstep too far in one direction or the other, and the project immediately begins to lose effectiveness, the message struck through by the falling sword.**

## WHY DO ARTISTS OFTEN FAIL? PRODUCT OF CIRCUMSTANCE

The alternative to the two categories above is that of circumstantial reasons. Perhaps it is the stifling location of the artist that makes their message ineffectual or inaccessible to their audience, regardless of actual merit. Perhaps it is the ignorance of minimal connections and technical expertise afforded to the artist, limiting education, raw artistic ability, and a sense of awareness about appropriate issues of cultural relevance. Perhaps it is simply the wrong time for maximum impact of such visual works, famously attributed to many writers and artists such as Vincent Van Gogh being “before their time”.

**It seems likely, then, that the truth behind the reason why a substantial portion of artists produce ineffective and unstimulating visual communication is a combination of all the factors described in changing levels of significance depending on each individual artist and project.** Whilst circumstantial factors may for the most part be beyond the control of the visual world-builder wishing for their message to be heard, the reasoning and utilisation of all the previous theory discussed in this review may maximise the artist’s chance of success and mitigate risk of failure.





## TACKLING SOCIAL COMMENTARY

**As part of an effective design solution to assess whether the conducted research can create a successful execution of an idea, the notion of tackling societal issues arises as a starting point for the framework behind the message.**

Science Fiction has often been a platform for looking into the future based on concerns from present trends, serving as warnings or philosophical talking points that affect decision-making in the real world. Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* stories include the famous laws of robotics which has influenced how AI and robotics researchers today seek to programme the future advancements of androids. The following research examines two potential issues emerging in present-day society that could have a profound impact if placed in the wrong hands, and serves as a basis for the visual project message.

### GOVERNMENT PATERNALISM

*"Should smoking be banned? Is it right for governments to prosecute those who help the terminally ill to kill themselves? Should individuals be compelled to save for old age? ... All these are examples of what is becoming one of the major social questions of the twenty-first century: should the government save people from themselves?" (Le Grand et al. 11)*

Government paternalism is a concept described as *"the 'interference of a state or an individual with another person against their will,' where that interference is 'defended or motivated by the claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected from harm'"* (Grill et al. 336). Examples listed above such as banning smoking and encouraging saving for old age seem relatively innocent in intent, but there is the age old concept of a slippery slope that can be difficult to crawl back up from. What would happen if these policies continued to the point of excess? How would a future world look where every decision is monitored and controlled for the betterment of the individual? Would it truly make them happy, or would it strip them of their rights to self-determination and freedom of choice? How would they handle being separated from their overlord paternalistic figure?

*"Even if it could be demonstrated that there is a case for saving people from themselves, are there not serious risks involved in allowing the government to be the agent of paternalism? Does this not create a 'nanny state,' invading the autonomy of the individuals concerned and potentially infantilizing them? Or, yet worse, by legitimizing a paternalistic government, are we actually creating a potentially tyrannical state, justifying its intervention in every aspect of our lives?" (Le Grand et al. 11)*

For the sake of issuing warnings, the potential negative consequences of a runaway policy like paternalism would be an interesting concept to explore. A tyrannical government arising from initially benevolent paternalistic laws is always a possibility. Humans are fundamentally flawed and imperfect from the moment of their creation, further bent and shaped in a world that cares little about their development. How can it be guaranteed that each successive government will use these powerful tools for good purposes? Regardless of personal political views or affiliations in any country of origin, it is easy to find many who bemoan the idiocy of the slim majority of the populace voting in a leader the other half find baffling as to their popularity.

With the world's media and social media already having a significant influence on how people perceive their world and form their opinions, what would happen when decision-making is stripped from the individual?

*"The damage to autonomy done by paternalistic intervention not only affects individuals' rights but also could affect any intrinsic motivation they might have to change their behaviour. Excessive nanny-ing by the state of government could infantilize the recipient, thus reducing or even negating entirely the effectiveness of the policy." (Le Grand et al. 112)*

It can be easy to joke that if some people kept their mouths shut the world would be a better place, and there is no doubt that some individuals express opinions based on little evidence or knowledge of the subject matter. If all decisions on a grand scale end up being controlled by the government, this paternalistic trust risks creating a dependency and loyalty where individuals may be incapable of forming their own opinions objectively, lacking the developmental exercise to form such an ability on their own (Grill et al. 141).

Why question the loving *Big Brother*?

## TACKLING SOCIAL COMMENTARY

### FREE SPEECH

*"It is easy for the Christian in a Christian nation, the democrat in a democratic society, the liberal in a liberal polity to imagine that their most cherished commitments are obviously true, but those living across the globe or in a different time might well think the opposite and be just as certain in their own beliefs." (Whittington 41)*

What other danger could theoretically present itself in the future, based on current real-world developments even with the best of intentions like government paternalism? Would controlling the decisions of the populace also extend to controlling their desire to speak freely and exchange ideas?

*"On British and American campuses, a culture of intellectual caution has taken hold. Where once universities were sites of intellectual daring, spaces in which young adults could develop their understanding of the world and their moral autonomy, now they too often resemble kindergartens for grown-ups. They devote almost as much energy to protecting students from 'harmful' ideas as they do to encouraging students to open their eyes to new ways of understanding the world." (Slater 5)*

Readers would no doubt see the familiarity between the concept of paternalism and the dangers posed by this erosion of free speech within academic institutions. Protective good intentions or not, it sets a dangerous precedent in environments that are supposed to encourage intellectual debate and a wider understanding of issues in society. When these sheltering and sensitive ideologies leak out into the world at large, it is easy to see the combined risk of both the erosion of free speech and the rise of an overly paternalistic society when ideas and beliefs are never absolute uniform solutions for every individual's happiness.

One example of this potential misuse is described by Keith Whittington, a professor of politics at Princeton University. A campus protest was sparked by the arrival of an author deemed controversial by students for his supposed opinions expressed. When questioned, protesters admitted they had not actually read anything the author had written, reacting purely on the basis that they were told he was a white nationalist. When psychologists sent anonymous transcript samples to college professors for an opinion on the author's work, they considered his opinions as only moderate on the political spectrum (Whittington 168).

An understanding of history also provides context to the importance of preserving free speech, and the dangers that curtailing it could create. After the *Thirteen Colonies* declared independence from the British Empire and became the United States in 1776, debates and discussions continued to arise about how to build a society better than the one they had rebelled against.

*"The critical lesson learned from those early debates in the years after the founding was that even if we were in agreement that there was bad speech, we should be exceedingly cautious about empowering any official to play the role of the censor in order to identify and suppress that bad speech. In practice, the decisions of how to apply the power to silence speech would be made by fallible individuals, and we could not safely rely on the enlightened officials using the power wisely." (Whittington 31)*

Much like paternalistic decisions, the choice of what speech is bad or good should not be placed in the hands of authority. Regardless of political alignment, religious beliefs, race, gender or cultural influences, fallible people placed in positions of power runs a high risk of corruption.

*"We're seeing the end result of the corrosion of Enlightenment values, of Western societies' abandonment of the ideals of autonomy and subjectivity upon which university life, and democratic life, have been based in the modern period. There is nothing sudden about what's happening on campus today: it has been brewing for decades, under our noses." (Slater 8)*

**How would a visual depiction of such a future world be imagined, when decades of slow development change the world for better or worse? The issues of free speech and paternalism form a fantastic warning message to explore and test the effectiveness of techniques used in visual world-building and communication.**

## CASE STUDIES & VISUAL ANALYSES

From the understanding gained from research on these various related topics, examples of existing visual world-building and communication in media can be analysed and understood.

The effectiveness or failures presented by these studies both backs existing research and provides further insights on what goes wrong and what proves right. The following cases study *Blade Runner* and its sequel *Blade Runner 2049*, *The Lord of The Rings* cinematic trilogy, and the ill-fated *Dune* and the more successful recent visual attempt, *Dune: Part One*.

## BLADE RUNNER CASE STUDY

### PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY

- **Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?** (1968) is a dystopian science-fiction novel written by Philip K. Dick.
- **Blade Runner** (1982) was directed by Ridley Scott, with the screenplay by Hampton Fancher and David Peoples.
- **Blade Runner 2049** (2017) was directed by Denis Villeneuve, with the screenplay by Hampton Fancher and Michael Green.

### PROJECT MOTIVATION/SUMMARY

*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* serves as a narrative warning of a dystopian world where the concept of humanity is slowly being lost, where “replicants” (advanced androids) are suggested to express more emotion at times than the real humans set out to hunt them down. The first *Blade Runner* film sought to take the concept of this story and transform it into a visual interpretation, with *Blade Runner 2049* acting as a much later sequel to expand upon the source material.

### CHALLENGES FACED

The challenge with any literary adaptation into a visual medium is how to translate narrative elements into engaging visual storytelling. This is especially difficult with science-fiction or high fantasy, as “*Science fiction novels or comics need to sell only a few thousand copies to recoup their costs, so experimentalism is not discouraged, but the Hollywood blockbuster must find (or forge) a mass audience*” (Bukatman 17). The resulting constraints and nervousness from investors make experimental and ground-breaking cinema risky and difficult to sell to producers who prefer formulaic safety nets for modest but predictable success.

### PROJECT OUTCOME

*Blade Runner* initially struggled when it first screened in theatres, reportedly underperforming on expected revenue and having mixed opinions from critics. Most of the complaint originated in its perceived slow pace and preference for special effects over developing narrative and characters. However, soon it grew in popularity and became enshrined as a cult classic. So successful was its visual presentation that it defined the archetype of a dystopian cityscape that continues to influence science fiction aesthetics to this day.

Interestingly, the latter sequel *Blade Runner 2049* was also considered a disappointment on commercial revenue despite still earning a comfortable amount, grossing approximately \$260 million against a budget of \$150 million (IMDB). In contrast to the mixed perceptions of the original movie, critics now praised the sequel for its mastery in capturing the original *Blade Runner* aesthetic and thematic elements, although the prominent complaint of being slow-paced still remained.

### CONNECTION TO THESIS PROBLEM

Analysis of all three related media in this circumstance seeks to provide insight into the narrative work and subsequent visual concepts that led to defining an entire genre of dystopian science-fiction.

The question arises as to whether in *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*'s case poor or efficient visuals led not just to aesthetic appreciation but effective communication of a narrative message. What occurs from seeing the recurring complaint of slow-paced development and unlikeable characters leads to postulation that it is the iconic visuals moreso than the story that led to the *Blade Runner* universe's influential legacy. If the actual narrative and characters were lacking, what then did the visuals communicate to audiences?

The answer lies in the world-building itself. The looming buildings, orange haze of pollution and the little side-story cues in the holographic advertisements were all narrative concepts that the visuals layer thick to cover the comparatively weak main story. As a result, it can be comfortably argued that in *Blade Runner*'s case, effective world-building can serve as an effective form of visual communication to act as a warning message for a future world. Even with the entire story of the character Deckard stripped from the movie, the visuals tell their own story without any additional help. It tells of a world ravaged by pollution, dominated by terrifyingly powerful corporations, and pacified by appeals to purpose and pleasure.

*"Blade Runner, with its sumptuously complex urban landscapes, demands to be actively watched; like Stanley Kubrick's 2001, it emphatically returns its spectators to their own actions of perception and cognition. Vision, especially in science fiction cinema, can be a tool of knowledge, but in Blade Runner, the more we see, the more our uncertainty grows. Its world features a profusion of simulations: synthetic animals, giant viewscreens, replicants, memory implants and faked photos are only some of them. Vision is no guarantee of truth, and the film's complexity encourages us to rethink our assumptions about perception by reminding us that, like a memory, vision is more than a given, "natural" process. There is no nature in Blade Runner."* (Bukatman 19)

## BLADE RUNNER VISUAL ANALYSIS

*"Blade Runner demands studying because it has become so entrenched as the definitive screen depiction of the nightmare future city. Its imagery has become the standard visual iconography for the science fiction metropolis: super-tall buildings; poorly-lit streets and alleys; smog; rain; heavy industry belching fire into the sky; neon advertisements; overcrowding; ethnically diverse (that is, non-white) crowds; electric punk-inspired costumes and hairstyles; retrofitted buildings of varying architectural styles; scavenged props, and so on."* (Brooker 205)

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 1. Scott, Ridley. *Blade Runner*. Warner Bros., 1982.**

The screencaps in Fig.1 and Fig. 2 captures the essence of the visual description of the Blade Runner universe. In the first, a flying police car known as a "spinner" flies through a dense and towering metropolis, framed so that the tops and bottoms of most buildings are nowhere to be seen. The hazy fog of the night air is illuminated by the dazzling lights of technology and commercialism, creating a rich world-building atmosphere that sets the scene in an iconic fashion (See Fig.1.).

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 2. Villeneuve, Denis. *Blade Runner 2049*. Warner Bros., 2017.**

These visuals of blues and reds are accompanied by thick orange smog in daylight, creating an atmospheric depth that encourages imagination moreso than explanation (See Fig. 2.). Both films follow a lone man as he traverses through this world of glittering lights and murky obfuscation, with everything visually devoid of anything deemed natural or green.

*"Visually, it is an effective shorthand for a world in which fears of overpopulation and depletion of resources have been realised: by evoking New York's crowding of buildings and people onto Manhattan island, Blade Runner suggests a similar overcrowding onto a constrained planet."* (Brooker 205).

Chances are the visuals depicted in *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* are something almost everyone has witnessed in some form of visual fiction. Be it depicted in comic books, television shows, cinema or conceptual art, the archetypal dystopian city presented in both films presents itself eternally in all the inspired iterations. All of this is derived from Philip K. Dick's musings on whether the eye can be trusted, the fear of losing humanity and *Blade Runner's* claustrophobic dystopian aesthetic.

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 3. Scott, Ridley. *Blade Runner*. Warner Bros., 1982.**

What proves interesting about *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* is how the visuals often imply more about the world than any of the main plot-line narrative. They tell their own story beyond the immediate, from the holographic advertisements about “off-world” (See Fig.1.) to the consistent focus on the eye and what it perceives (See Fig. 3.). A simple advertisement about off-world opportunities implies a whole multitudes of theories and imaginings from a viewer. Where off-world? Has humanity expanded that far? Why then is Earth still so overcrowded? Unlike most visual/narrative interrelations where it seeks to reinforce the story more concretely, the visuals in *Blade Runner* captivate audiences in a different way; by prompting more questions asked than they answer.

This mysterious method of storytelling serves well for the world-building, as well as imparting the philosophical questions prompted by the existence of the various dystopian elements. However, as far as the main narrative is considered the interrelation is much weaker. This is not the fault of the visual ability however, moreso the narrative’s ability in its own skill. A flat storyline with a slow pace cannot be resurrected by enchanting visuals; the visuals in this circumstance will merely distract the viewer even further and divert their attention away from crucial plot development.

*“The brilliance of Blade Runner, like Alien (1979) before it, is located in its visual density. Scott’s “layering” effect produces an inexhaustible complexity, an infinity of surfaces to be encountered and explored, and unlike many contemporary films, Blade Runner refuses to explain itself”* (Bukatman 16).

The rich layering described by Scott Bukatman in *Blade Runner* is one of the foundations of its visual success. Adding element upon element provides such visual depth beyond the immediate narrative of a scene that it captivates audiences and prompts them to ask questions about the surroundings they perceive. The very nature of the unexplained draws people in, like the enduring fascination of ghost stories or murder mysteries. Successful visuals both explain and unexplain, setting the backdrop and connotations to enhance a story whilst also leaving little hints that prompt questions and theories. In essence, its success is dependent on the ability of *Blade Runner* to develop enough visual complexity to “build worlds” (Bukatman 18).

# LORD OF THE RINGS

## CASE STUDY

### PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY

- **The Lord of The Rings** (1954) is a trilogy of fantasy novels expanding upon the fictional world of Middle Earth, written and created by J.R.R. Tolkien.
- **The Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring** (2001) was directed by Peter Jackson, with the screenplay by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson, and Stephen Sinclair.
- **The Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers** (2002) was directed by Peter Jackson, with the screenplay by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson, and Stephen Sinclair.
- **The Lord of The Rings: The Return of the King** (2003) was directed by Peter Jackson, with the screenplay by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson, and Stephen Sinclair.

### PROJECT MOTIVATION/SUMMARY

*The Lord of The Rings* is an expansion upon the fantasy world author J.R.R. Tolkien created as a children's book, *The Hobbit*. Tolkien continued to develop this fantasy world throughout his life, including the collection of mythopoeic tales in *The Silmarillion*. It is one of the most in-depth examples of world-building within creative writing and storytelling, and is littered with numerous subtle references to the author's Christian beliefs.

The movie adaptations of *The Lord of The Rings* originated from Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh's discussions about the possibility of pitching an original fantasy film, but found themselves unable to think of anything that wasn't Tolkien-esque in theme. After several negotiations between studios (and narrowly avoiding being forced to do just a 2 hour long film to cover all three books) New Line's CEO Robert Shaye requested that it be adapted into a trilogy of three films (Thompson 18).

### CHALLENGES FACED

With *Middle Earth's* world itself being incredibly detailed and in-depth, creating a film trilogy that sufficiently explains and frames the narrative story of *The Lord of The Rings* required extensive concept art, prop design, set design, soundtracks and careful script choices to visually present the world in a way that did not need lengthy verbal explanation. Even to the extent of success that the film trilogy had, and even with extended editions being filmed in addition, some book scenes had to be cut to consider the different attitudes of film audiences by comparison to book readers. One notable example of this was the complete removal of the character *Tom Bombadil* and the hobbits excursion into *The Old Forest* and the *Barrow Downs*, the decision taken under the impression that it added little to the narrative flow for visual audiences.

### PROJECT OUTCOME

The three films were considered a huge success, with all three films rated around the 90's out of 100 via aggregated critic and review scores. The films were nominated for 30 Academy Awards in total, winning 17 of those nominations in a record-breaking result.

Out of a budget of approximately \$93,000,000, *The Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring* grossed a staggering \$880,839,846. *The Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers* had a budget of approximately \$94,000,000, grossing \$936,689,735 worldwide. *The Lord of The Rings: The Return of the King* had a similar budget of \$94,000,000 and grossed an incredible \$1,140,682,011 worldwide. The combination of all three record-shattering results make the movie adaptations of *The Lord of The Rings* undoubtedly a groundbreaking and highly influential success (IMDB).

### CONNECTION TO THESIS PROBLEM

Usually when people are faced with the topic of world-building, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Middle Earth* often takes centre-stage in their minds. Not only is it so well known and incredibly detailed, but Tolkien's beliefs resulted in countless messages and "food for thought" embedded in the world he created. Understanding some of these subtle connotations and how the movie adaptations referenced these in a highly visual manner is a perfect source of analysis. While it can be easily argued that a significant chunk of visual communicators fail to impart such incredible success and cultural influence as this trilogy, learning how the design choices led to the concepts Tolkien described being presented in the way they were is highly useful to draw inspiration from.

# LORD OF THE RINGS

## VISUAL ANALYSIS

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 1. Jackson, Peter. *The Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring*. New Line, 2001.**

The visual adaptation of *Middle Earth* as seen in these three films emphasises the beauty of good and the harsh destruction of evil via the way the landscapes and characters are artfully presented to the viewer without the need for accompanying side-text. One scene of particular visual note is that of the passing of the *Elves*, witnessed by the ordinary *hobbits* Sam and Frodo (See Fig. 1). Even without the accompanying dialogue, the visual communication speaks for itself. The otherworldly procession glows with ethereal light, the figures dressed in pure white. Both of these conjure thoughts of the angelic and purest good in such visual of an *Elf*, divine in nature and breathtaking to witness. Yet, the blue also imparts a psychological notion of sorrow, the fact further explained that this procession seeks to sail away from *Middle Earth* and leave it forever. It is a stark reminder in just the colour choices alone that these pure souls grieve for the evil that has stained the land, its scar is something that seemingly cannot be undone.

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 2. Jackson, Peter. *The Lord of The Rings: The Return of the King*. New Line, 2003.**

This visual contrast between good and evil can be seen throughout the three films, one particularly close encounter being that in *The Return of the King* where Gandalf and company is confronted by the *Witch King of Angmar* on a *fellbeast* (See Fig. 2). The sharp pointed teeth, dominating height, aggressive posture of raising the flaming sword in the air whilst donning the black robes and spiked helm all strongly suggest a shape language of villainy. This blackness is contrasted by the soft shapes of the white steed and white staff, even the flowing white hair of the wizard. All of this is a visual message of the fight between good and evil, death and resurrection, hope and despair without a single word uttered, with the shades of grey in the background representative of everything in between. Such visuals are prevalent throughout the trilogy, and do much to reinforce the narrative with strong messages of its own.



"Tolkien's work is deeply rooted in Northern European myth, legend and fairy tale, from the Old Norse material to the Celtic myth and the Arthurian legend, and from the Finnish Kalevala to Victorian popular culture. Indeed, tracing Tolkien's sources in such folkloric material and identifying their creative uses is one of the most fruitful approaches in Tolkien studies. However, Tolkien's own mythology has generated its own folklore." (Bogstad et al. 85)

The books themselves and the world-building material therein have a lasting and profound cultural impact and cultural origin, building upon existing folklore to create an entire fictional world that in turn inspires countless others to create their own. The books influenced both fantasy writers and even role-playing game creators such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, using Tolkien's framework of *elves*, *dwarves*, *wizards*, *halflings* and *dragons* as the essential foundation of any fantasy creation.

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 3. Jackson, Peter. *The Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring*. New Line, 2001.**

However, the books were not the only source of cultural impact. The visual success of *The Lord of The Rings* cinematic trilogy not only enshrined the wordless meanings of various characters and locations through its depictions but also established them as the cemented "true" depiction to audiences (Bogstad et al. 85).

For example, Tolkien himself never stated whether the creature known as a *balrog* that emerges from the depths of the *Mines of Moria* (or *Khazad-dûm* for the well-read) ever had wings, yet in the adaptation of the scene it is depicted as such. Without the lengthy descriptive text afforded by traditional books, film-makers have to find ways to embed this descriptive communication in the visuals alone. Take the visual *balrog* as an example (see Fig. 3). The dark, leathery wings are reminiscent of how audiences would imagine something evil and demonic, especially when shrouded in flame and adorned with pointed horns and a fiery whip. The visual connotations implied are effective visual communication as a result, and essential for any visual world-building attempts at imparting messages to audiences.

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 4. Jackson, Peter. *The Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers*. New Line, 2002.**

With all the success the film adaptations had at captivating audiences with visuals that not only engaged with wonder and excitement but were layered with the same depths of meaning afforded to the derivative text, it is important for the visual world-builder to consider this same depth in design choices. From the way we intuitively react to colours and shapes to the cultural cues that establish a story behind a landscape or character, the success of the trilogy highlights just how important good visuals are at imparting chosen messages. Take the scene above for example (See Fig. 4). Without describing a single thing to explain what is happening, the visuals and the composition of them impart their message. The endless hordes of evil besieging the last refuge of the *Rohirrim* at *Helm's Deep*, turn to face defeat. They are motionless and on the defensive, with the angelic light of dawn bathing the riders as if angels descending from the heavens to strike with speed as they gallop swiftly down the hill. Towering cliffs on either side, the evil has no choice but to be assaulted with force.

# DUNE

## CASE STUDY

### PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY

- **Dune** (1965) is a science-fiction novel and part of a larger series of books, written and created by Frank Herbert.
- **Dune** (1984) was directed by David Lynch, with the screenplay also by David Lynch.
- **Dune: Part One** (2021) was directed by Denis Villeneuve, with the screenplay by Jon Spaihts, Denis Villeneuve, and Eric Roth.

### PROJECT MOTIVATION/SUMMARY

*Dune* was originally a stand-alone science-fiction novel telling the tale of a classic coming-of-age story, where the young Paul Atreides must face his fears and tackle his destiny on a harsh desert world torn between three factions. Since then it has been expanded into what is known as the *Dune Chronicles*, with tales preceding and continuing after the original events of *Dune* take place. It is a well known example of expansive soft science-fiction world-building, with societal depth and political intrigue rather than technological exploration that proves challenging to visually depict in an engaging and cohesive manner.

The objectives of both *Dune* films was to take this source material and develop it into a screenplay to visualise this fictional world. With the novel's success back in the 60s, attempts were made for a film adaptation, passing through numerous directors during the 1970s before David Lynch took the role for the 1984 movie. When Legendary Entertainment obtained the rights to *Dune* in 2016, work began on a two-part adaptation with Denis Villeneuve as director, the first part of such released in 2021 after the COVID-19 pandemic caused delays.

### CHALLENGES FACED

The world of *Dune* is markedly different than the high fantasy of *Middle Earth* or the hard technology-driven science-fiction proposed in *Blade Runner*, or even the more extensively explored techno-philosophy in Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series. Rather, *Dune* is what is regarded as soft science-fiction, a concept where the technological and scientific philosophies explored is set aside in favour of socio-political narratives. In *Dune*, the spaceships and alien worlds are just the framework for this tale of people, rather than the focus. Visually conveying the ideological differences, cultural variations, political distinctions, and the interrelations between these groups is a significant challenge.

### PROJECT OUTCOME

The 1984 visual adaptation of *Dune* was regarded a critical and financial failure, grossing only \$30,925,690 out of an estimated budget of \$40,000,000 (IMDB). It was rated so poorly that one critic even described it as “a real mess, an incomprehensible, ugly, unstructured, pointless excursion into the murkier realms of one of the most confusing screenplays of all time” (Ebert 1).

By contrast, the 2021 *Dune: Part One* is regarded a commercial and critical success grossing more than double the estimated budget of \$165,000,000, earning \$367,091,988 worldwide (IMDB). Its success paves the way for *Dune: Part Two* to be produced and released, after likely hesitancy considering the infamous failure of the 1984 adaptation.

### CONNECTION TO THESIS PROBLEM

Where the previous case study and visual analysis on *Blade Runner/Blade Runner 2049* studied the depth of visual layering and visual world-building that established meaning beyond the verbal narrative, and likewise the study on *The Lord of The Rings* trilogy similarly explored how rich world-building can be visually depicted and linked with powerful semiotics, this study explores the contrast between both *Dune* adaptations. It is a rare and valuable chance to see two visuals based on identical source material, with an identical plot. This allows a reasonable assessment that the visuals themselves in large part determined the success or failure of each movie, and analysis of where the visual communication is at its strongest or weakest can defend the notion that artists sometimes struggle in this form of message-bearing imagery.

## DUNE VISUAL ANALYSIS

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

Fig. 1. Lynch, David. *Dune*. Universal Pictures, 1984.

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

Fig. 2. Villeneuve, Denis. *Dune: Part One*. Legendary Pictures, 2021.

A visual narrative for a visual world-building display must still follow literary cues as well as artistic ones. The story conveyed through the imagery must be cohesive and explanatory in complimentary nature to any scripted dialogue, yet also be easily digestible either consciously or subconsciously based on semiotic suggestions. The aptly named “rule of cool” when used appropriately can also serve to maintain audience engagement in a visual message. Too much of the rule of cool and too little visual storytelling leads to entertainment without imparted meaning. Similarly, too much exposition without enough interest in the visual display leads to audience disengagement.

For an example of intelligent use of the *rule of cool*, a comparison is shown here of the same scene in both the 1984 *Dune* (See Fig. 1.) and the 2021 *Dune: Part One* (See Fig. 2.). Both aircraft are flying through the desert world of *Arrakis*, approaching one of the industrial *harvesters* skimming the surface of the sand for the valuable resource known as *spice melange*.

With the story shared between the two adaptations, the visuals alone in these freeze-frames allow analysis of visual engagement. The 1984 craft is, objectively, unlikely to win any awards for fascinating or beautiful design. It is quite literally a flying cube with short, stubby wings that would serve no aerodynamic purpose. The craft lacks any form of visual machinations that capture interest or explain its function; it merely scoots across the sky. Colour and shape language here would suggest to the audience that between the red hue and pointed blocky appearance the craft belonged to or was associated with the villains, yet *House Atreides* (who own this craft) are not depicted as such in the narrative.

By contrast, the craft in the 2021 adaptation is an elegant and fascinating ornithopter, a type of craft that flies mimicking the movements of a dragonfly. The visual association with the natural world matches the environmental harmony achieved by *House Atreides* on their home planet *Caladan*, painting them in a far more positive light than the industrial and menacing *House Harkonnen*. With the visual message sufficiently conveyed, the rest of the engagement lies squarely within the rule of cool. Watching these ornithopters fly is incredibly intriguing to watch, maintaining audience attention to allow the subconscious mind to ingest all the additional details.

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 3. Lynch, David. *Dune*. Universal Pictures, 1984.**

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 4. Villeneuve, Denis. *Dune: Part One*. Legendary Pictures, 2021.**

Shape language can also be seen in the two depictions of the *hunter seeker*, a tiny remote operated drone capable of administering a lethal injection. It approaches Paul Atreides in both scenes, though the 2021 adaptation conveys a much more sinister shape language and visual interest.

In the 1984 *Dune* (See Fig. 3.), the visual depiction of the *hunter seeker* is full of soft rounded curves, which does not impart any psychological association with a threat. Its visual design is a basic cylinder, with the only sharp point being the needle at the very tip. It has no moving parts, floating calmly through the air in the scene. The shape language is ineffectual, the movement is disengaging, and the design does not afford significant visual intrigue.

In the 2021 *Dune: Part One* (See Fig. 4.), the visual depiction of the *hunter seeker* visually represents that of a mosquito, the associations of which immediately connect the audience to its intended purpose of piercing the skin of its target. The threat is further established by the sharp pointed shape language, with the spiked “fins” gently flexing and moving to add visual interest. As before, the scenes are identical in the narrative, with only the visual depiction differing as a judgement of artistic success.

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

Fig. 5. Lynch, David. *Dune*. Universal Pictures, 1984.

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

Fig. 6. Villeneuve, Denis. *Dune: Part One*. Legendary Pictures, 2021.

Shape language also fails in the scene with the *harvesters* in the 1984 adaptation (See Fig. 5.), industrial machines skimming the sands for the *spice melange*. The soft curves lack the industrial ethos of the machines originally built and operated by the sinister *House Harkonnen*, in contrast to the more appropriate design depicted in *Dune: Part One* (See Fig. 6.).

The shapes afforded and their connotations set aside, both this scene and the next analysed place importance on the value of colour and lighting choices in visual design. In the 1984 *Dune* (See Fig. 1, 5.), any desert scene is overlaid with a harsh burnt orange hue, applied excessively to the detriment of visual appeal. The 2021 adaptation however (See Fig. 2, 6.) has a bright natural look that references the burning clear skies and bleached sand of Arrakis far better without washing out colour use in characters and props.

The use of colour can also be seen in the scene involving *House Harkonnen*. They are the villains of this story, yet the depiction of them is very different between the two adaptations. In the 1984 *Dune*, the villain's "lair" is clad in bright green, the room plain and small without a centralised point of focus (See Fig. 7.). Leading lines do not lead the audience anywhere in particular, the garishly bright colour choice more associated with green-screen CGI in current audiences, as if the effect was forgotten about during production.

By contrast, in *Dune: Part One* the leader of *House Harkonnen* takes a central position in the framing of the scene, elevated as representation of his power and dominance (See Fig. 8.). The room is dark and foreboding, with greys and blacks signifying the industrial and callous brutality associated with their people.

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 7. Lynch, David. *Dune*. Universal Pictures, 1984.**

This image has been removed to comply with copyright.

**Fig. 8. Villeneuve, Denis. *Dune: Part One*. Legendary Pictures, 2021.**

## CONCLUSION

**From the compilation of existing research on these various interrelated issues, several disciplines provide insight into successful techniques, including the extrapolation of why neglecting or misunderstanding these methods can result in failure.**

The concept of *sticky ideas* establishes some foundational rules to follow if a visual world-building exercise has the aim of communicating in an enduring and engaging manner. Simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credentialed backing, emotional cues and storytelling hooks (Heath 15) should be employed wherever possible to make an idea stick in the minds of audiences, with such research suggesting that even great visual ideas could be met with failure if these rules are not considered.

Visual communication itself is hard-wired into our instinctual responses, with scientific research suggesting that visual messages are processed to form future decision making without need for the conscious mind (Smith 45). As such, these visuals must be carefully crafted with great attention paid to emotional responses and connections, gestalt principles (McGeough 28), semiotics, colour theory, lighting, narrative-visual translation and cultural contexts. With so much processed without active awareness, it can be theorised that artists without the knowledge of these concepts and how to apply them may unintentionally be sabotaging their message or even creating a mess of accidental contrasting suggestions.

Beyond the realm of scientific understanding, the technical and creative processes behind constructing imaginary worlds and the visuals associated with them is a considerable task. The world must be defined through its genre and associated thematic tropes, with care given to be both familiar yet different enough to be engaging. Histories, cultures and how these both shape the landscape and framework of how the fictional world operates lends backing to its credibility, as well as providing additional intrigue for fans to delve into additional material.

Translating all of these concepts into visuals involves associating this world's tropes and descriptions into everything from body shapes, visual health, clothing choices, personal accessories, facial expressions, body languages, walking gaits, landscapes, technologies and beyond (Nelson 91). It may even be the case that an artist could implement everything correctly and still find themselves publishing their material in the wrong place at the wrong time, overlooked due to the enormous outpouring of media the internet has provided.

Analyses of two potential future issues reveals how they are interconnected, their ongoing slow development in current society easily capable of being corrupted into a dystopian future. Even policies and cultural attitudes implemented with the best intentions can go astray, as both history and current events demonstrate this. With how these two issues are prevalent in cultural awareness, using these as the foundational test-bed for a visual world-building attempt should effectively demonstrate how the researched techniques can be employed to mitigate failure.

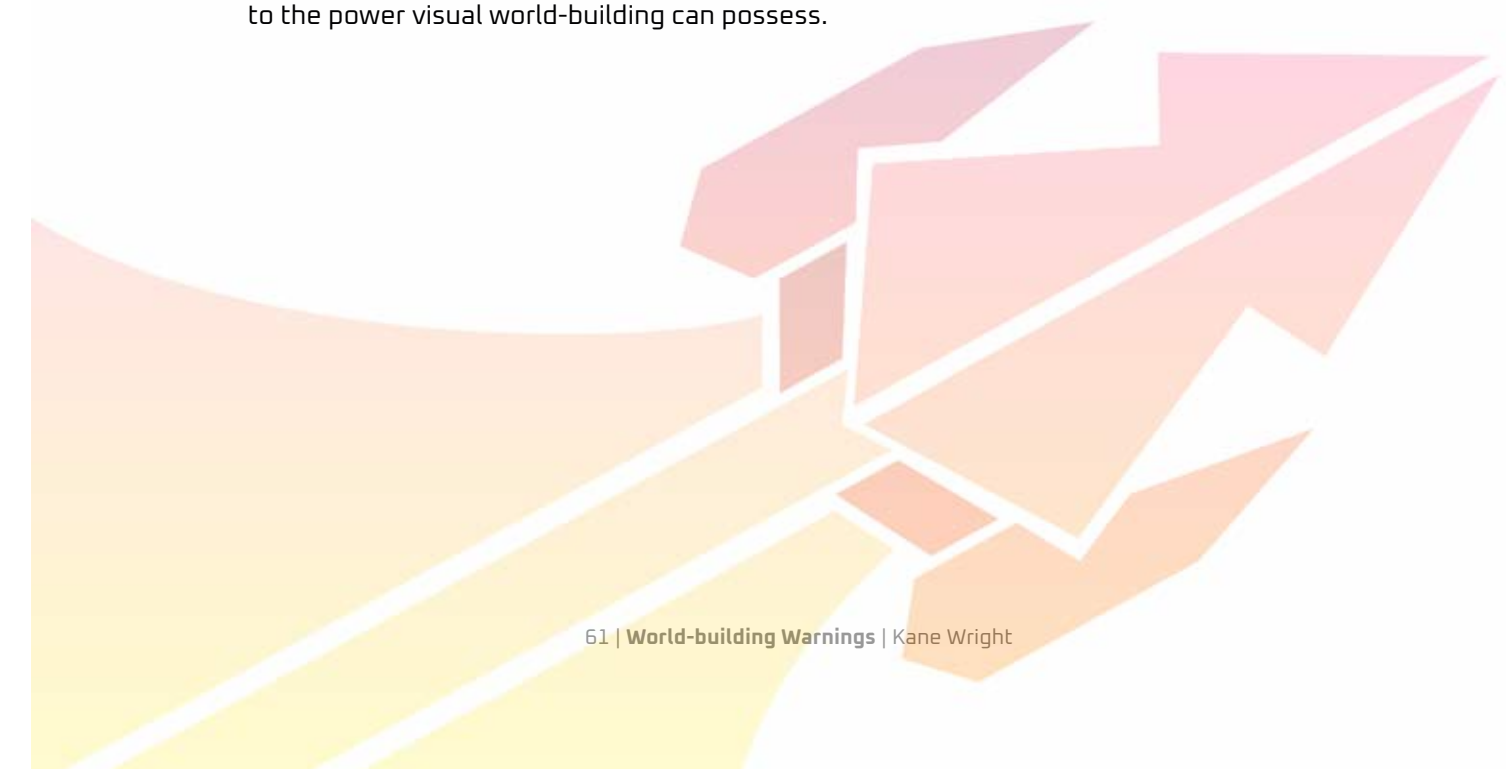
From analysis of *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*, depicting a dystopian world as a visual message of warning will require borrowing some thematic elements from that universe. It has established itself as such an archetype that the combination of its elements are enough to define the genre clearly enough for a message to be imparted on the audience. The concept of visual layering to add much more to the world-building than the surface narrative with a sprinkling of the unexplained helps build discussion of the ideas presented. With a sticky idea, encouraging this talk between others is why it has endured as a cult classic. Warnings should be considered however with the pace. With the thesis project likely unable to make its audience sit down quietly for hours in a movie theatre with no external distraction, keeping the pace quick and engaging will be paramount.

From the analysis of *The Lord of The Rings* cinematic trilogy, it is evident that the success of these films and the extent they captivated audiences with visuals that balanced excitement with the same layering of meaning afforded to the derivative text is a valuable lesson to possess. From the way reactions are instinctively afforded to shapes, colours, cultural cues and lighting, the trilogy demonstrates how these visual elements develop and enhance the story behind any given scene or character presented. The warning of what not to do, as well as the reminder of why visuals are so important can be traced back to the earlier animated attempt in 1978, where the visuals presented were so loosely interpreted from the source material that meaning and narrative cohesion were lost, with the visuals attributing most of the blame rather than the script.

*"The true failure of the film was that it was largely incomprehensible to anyone not already familiar with the books; yet it was so different from the books that familiarity bred contempt with knowledgeable audiences"* (Bogstad et al 7).

From the analysis of the 1984 *Dune* and the more recent adaptation *Dune: Part One*, the comparison between the two *Dune* adaptations reveals just how important visual design and communication can be in determining the success or failure of an artist imparting a message. Both narratives are identical in origin, yet their execution is substantially different.

**Visual engagement, colour, lighting, lines, and shape association all play a vital role in communicating without words in a way that keeps audiences intrigued.** The balance of all these elements is important, with the success and failure of these two films a testament to the power visual world-building can possess.



# CHAPTER 3: DESIGN PROCESS

## PROJECT PLAN INITIAL PLAN

*“Your World, Your Hands”* is a visual world-building exercise that aims to demonstrate a visual solution to the problem of artists failing to communicate messages in world-building concepts. The project plan involves expanding upon the research on visual tropes and case studies with mood boards and related genre imagery. There, concept sketches are created to form a launching platform into a visual solution that ties the collection of ideas together with the intended meanings. As described in the design brief, the design considerations followed three important rules:

- The **function** of each individual element must be created in such a way as to be animated and edited with multiple iterations seamlessly in a layered motion graphics piece.
- The **form** of each element must have a concise visual message that compliments and enhances the visual narrative presented.
- The overall **purpose** of the visual world-building animation is to sustain audience attention, demonstrate effective visual communication with a “sticky” idea, and provide insight into why neglecting or misrepresenting these elements can lead to artists failing in their own messages.

Once the visual direction and aesthetic choices had been established, several iterations of the cumulative composition were proposed until problem-solving and adaptation toward time considerations and technical limitations provided the solution. This chapter details this thought process step-by-step until the completion of the visual project.

## VISUAL RESEARCH

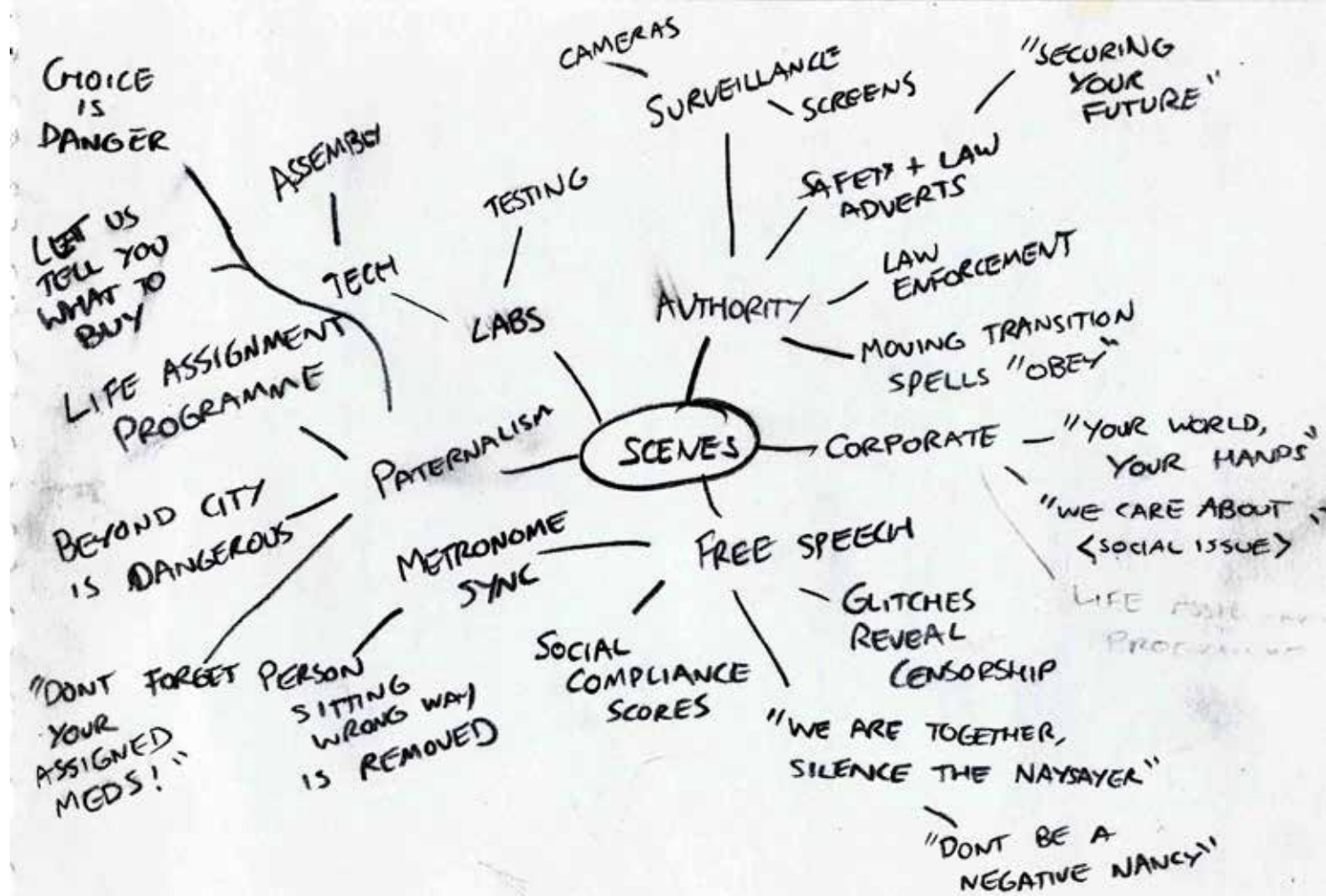
From the understanding of the typical tropes associated with a futuristic high-tech dystopia as seen in other visual narratives, a collection of imagery was collected to examine the overall theme. This theme or themes observed is necessary to imitate or reference in the project in order to prepare audience expectations for the presented visuals.



Fig. 9. AlexAntropov86 et al. *Collection of artworks*. Pixabay, 2022.

Observing this mood board, several themes are easily identifiable. Most *Cyberpunk/Blade Runner* style scenes feature the iconic orange atmospheric haze, along with towering gloomy buildings adorned with glowing neon (See Fig.9.). The colour palette is predominantly reds and blues contrasted with dark shadows.





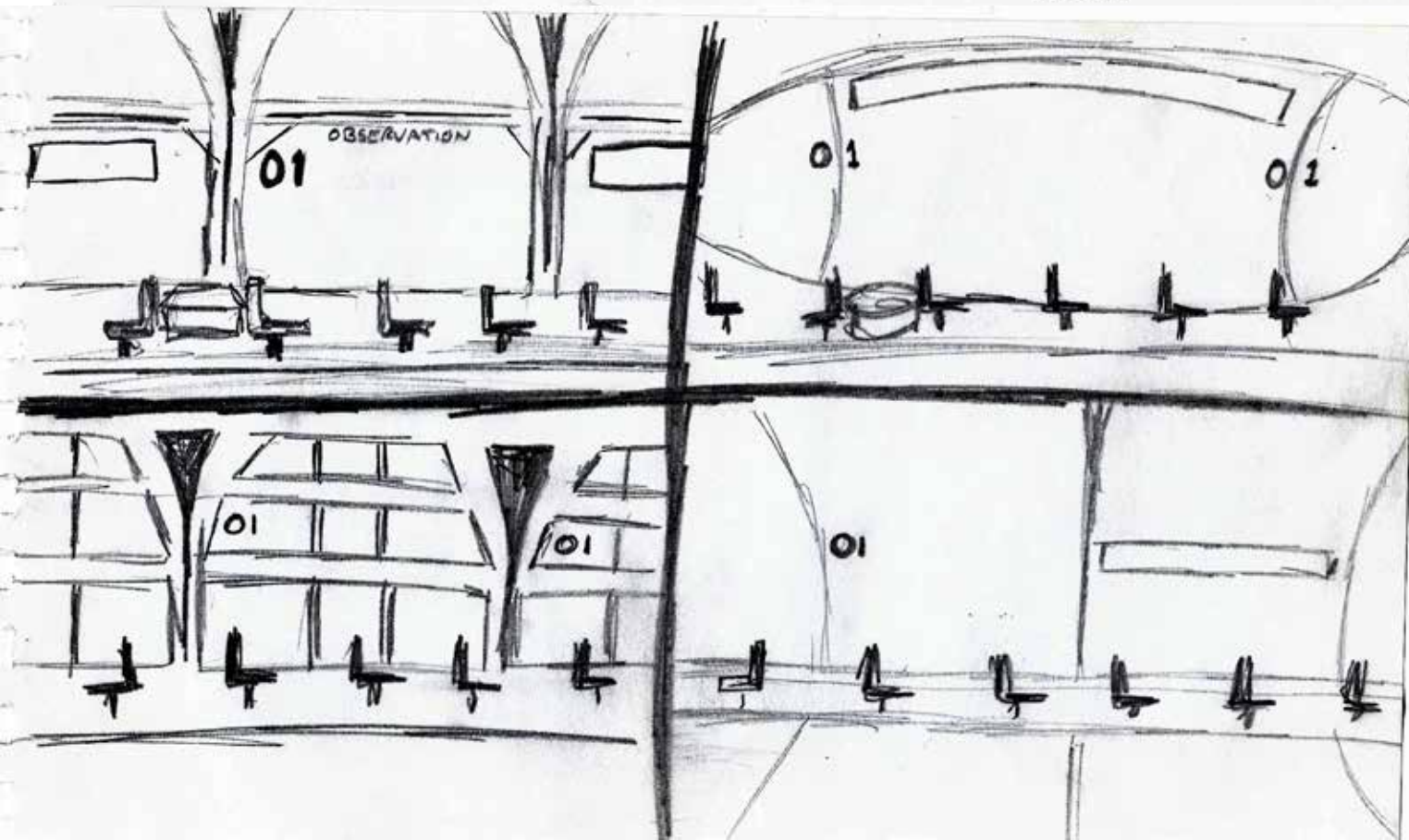
## COMPOSITION CONSTRUCTION FIRST ITERATION

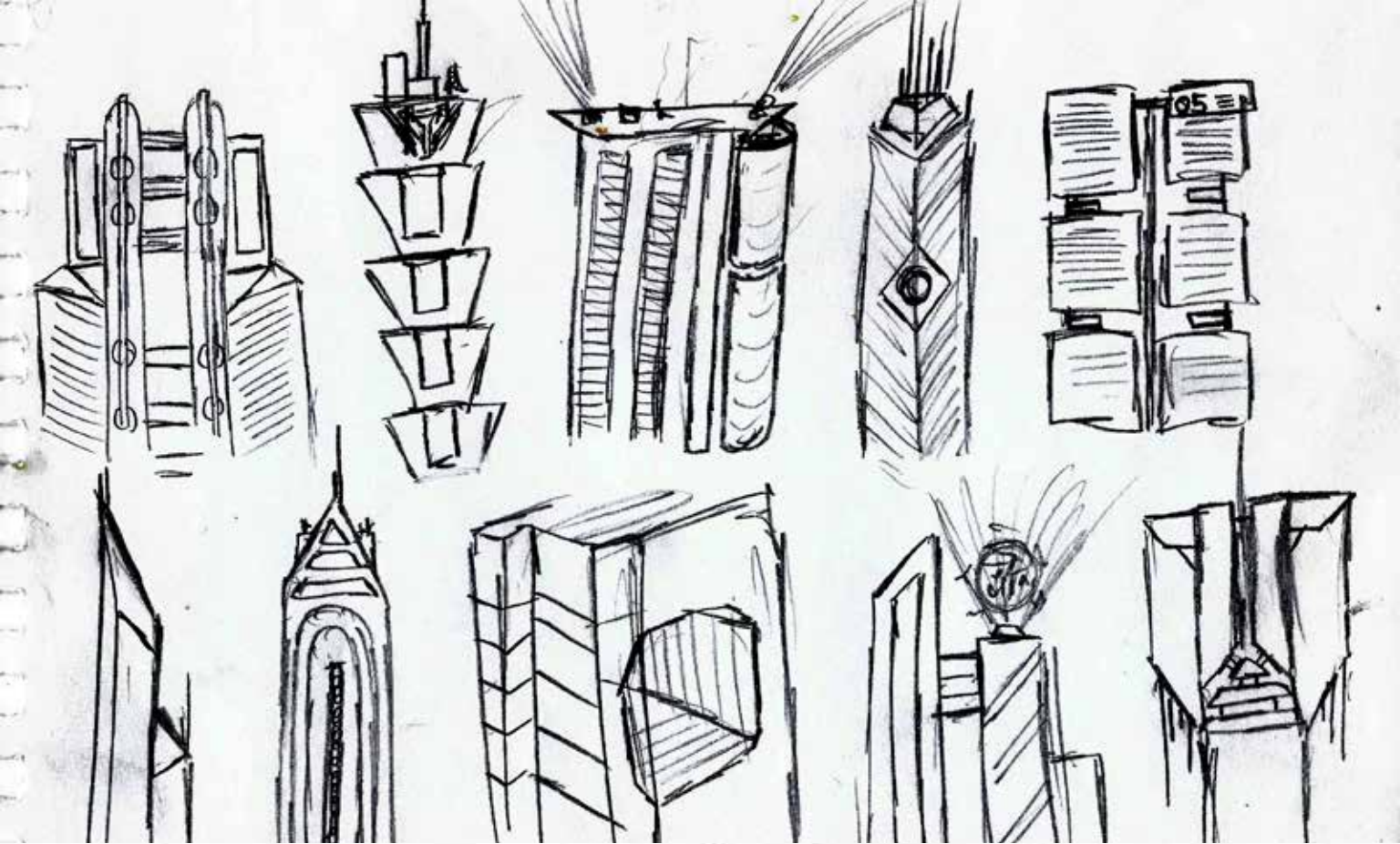
The first iteration of the final visual solution involved some means of traversing through a world where visual narratives could be presented in an ordered sequence. A view from a passenger train, bus or other futuristically themed moving vehicle with large windows would have allowed elements to be introduced in a similar fashion. The initial scope involved three "stages", whereby the external world would transition from one state to another:

- **Scene 1 – "Authority"**: Visual focus on cameras, surveillance, security and totalitarian obedience.
- **Scene 2 – "Corporate"**: Visual focus on consumerism, advertisements and paternalistic governance.
- **Scene 3 – "Punishment"**: Visual focus on dissidents and undesirables being eliminated or suppressed.

Whilst on paper this proposed visual solution seems an impressive option, this first conceptual iteration provides several problems.

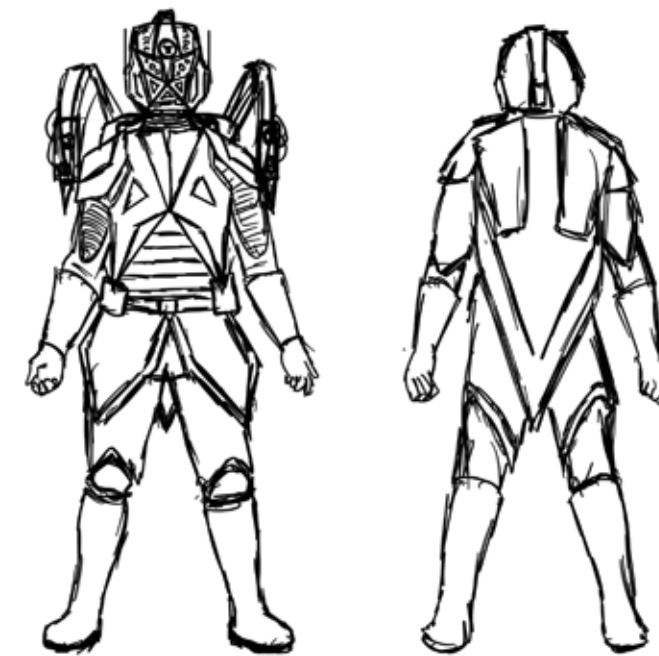
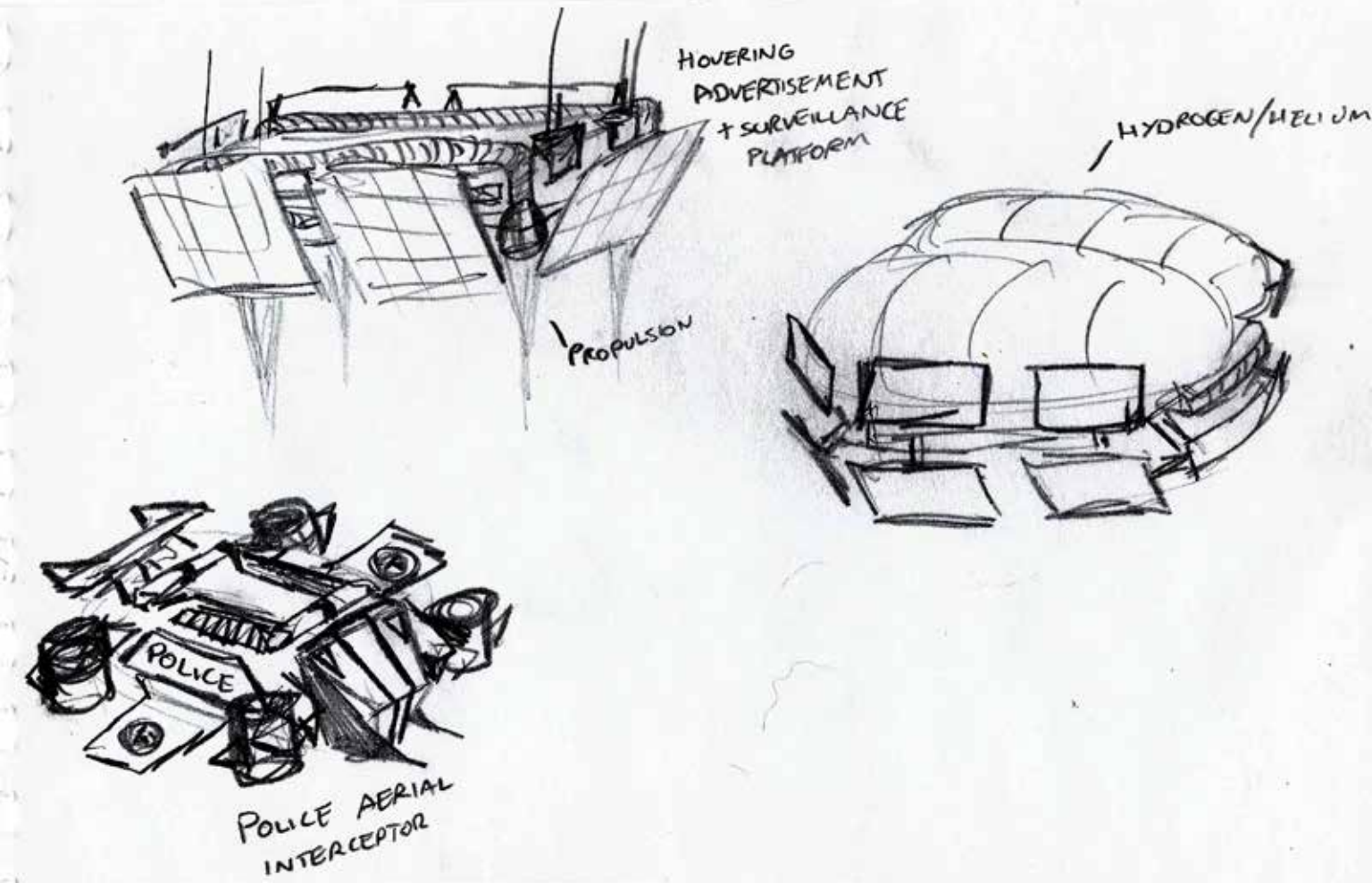
Given the sheer scope of drawing, detailing and animating a futuristic city skyline with continually transitioning elements, advertisements, buildings, vehicles, and other signs of life and immersion of sufficient quality expected this would be a massive undertaking that would not be up to standard given the time restraints of this project. This is further compounded by personal technical ability, as the talent to produce concept art with the speed of professionals is a feat in itself, though in this project it would translate to an incredibly wide canvas consisting of multiple layers for accurate perspective. One very wide canvas alone (whilst still a significant task) would not work, as objects in the foreground would transition much quicker than those in the far distance.





The second problem is the perspectives of the buildings transitioning. Observing a typically three dimensional object from the right of the screen to the left of the screen will change the viewing angle and shape of the object from the viewer's perspective. As this project uses minimal 3D modelling given the limited expertise in this field, painted landscape elements would not look appropriate unless the entire scene was from a limited 2D face-on approach.

The third problem beyond time restraints and technical challenges is that of the visual narrative itself. Creating advertisements for the buildings in a style like *Blade Runner* is certainly possible, but the placement poses an issue. Placing the advertisements in the distance slows their transition speed so that the content can be fully observed, however the diminished size in combination with the movement significantly affects legibility. Placing the advertisements in the foreground where they can be seen in full detail now suffers the fate of a fast transition as it zooms past the scene, acting as subliminal messaging at best.



## COMPOSITION CONSTRUCTION ALTERNATIVE COMPOSITION

A static environment such as this may have risked audience attention, but this is easily remedied by all the visually engaging animated advertisements (now better placed without rapid transitions or poor legibility) and a security shuttle transitioning past the window (to restore some dynamic interest). Time restraints now allow for this primary scene to be far better crafted than a large-scale transient piece to multiple stages, with perspective issues eliminated.

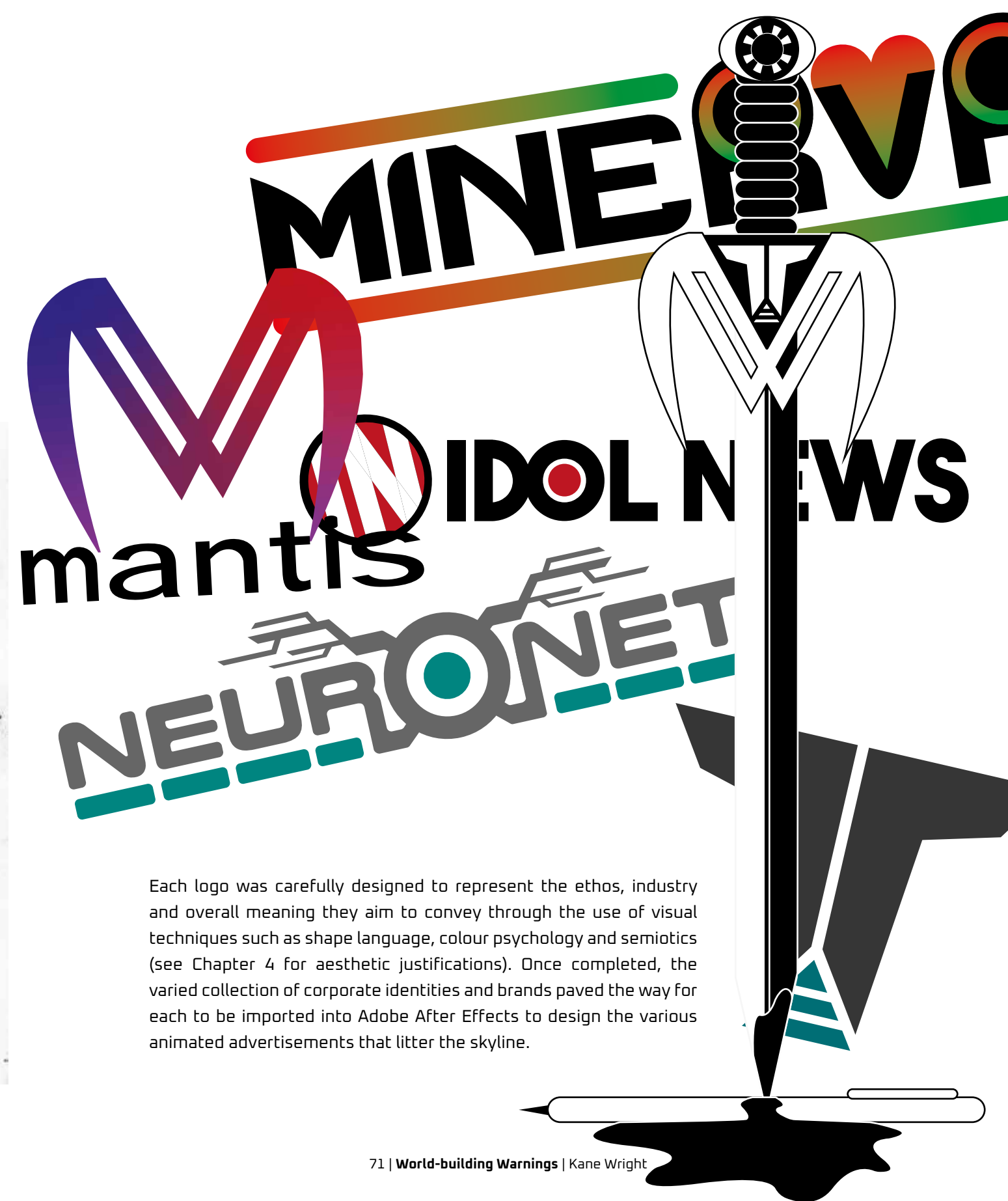
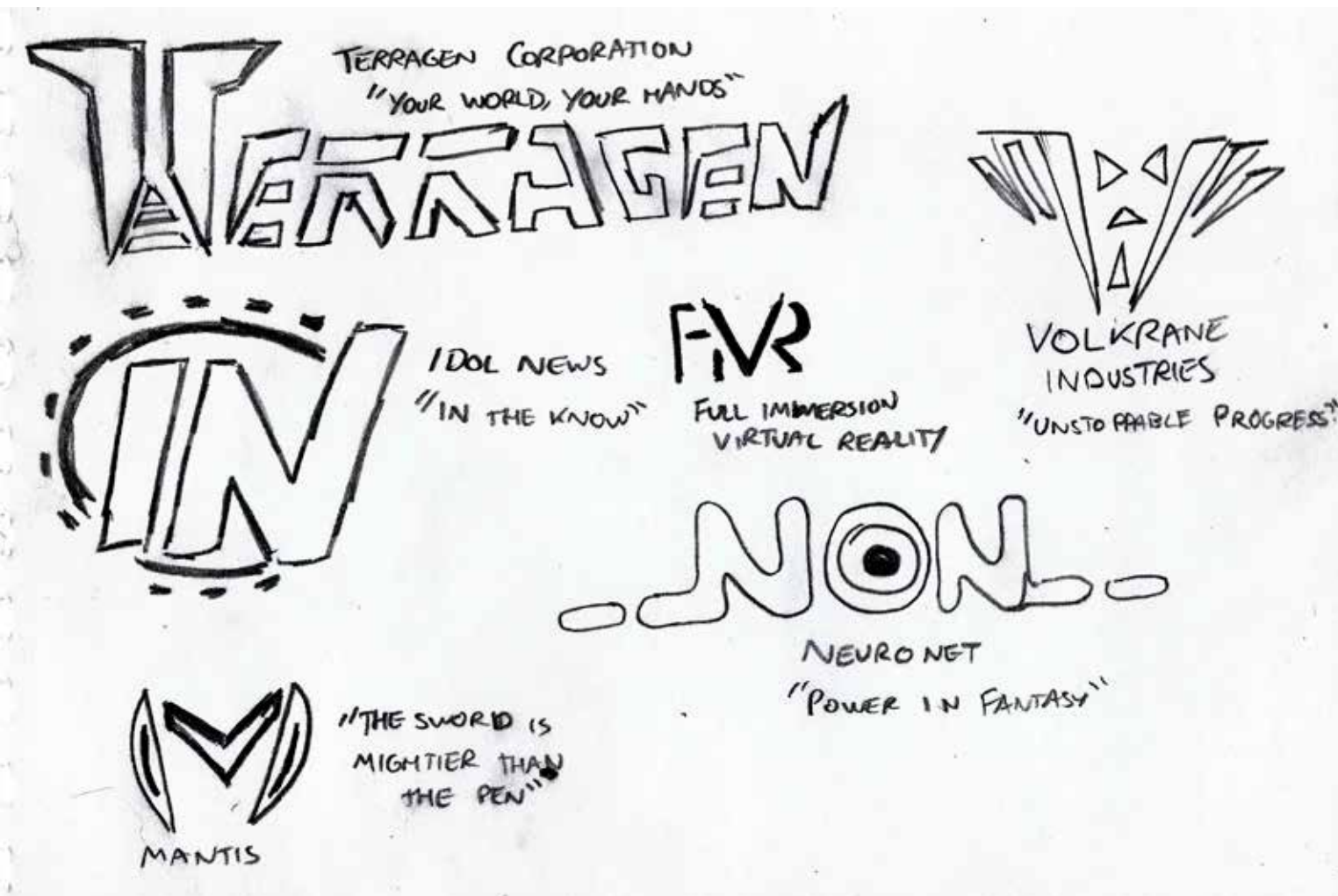
**The alternative composition is from the perspective of a sterile apartment complex, looking out of the window much like the first from transit.** However, the interior and exterior are now static, with the interior focusing on the authoritarian paternalistic governance of the previous scene 1 & 2, and the exterior focusing on the consumerism, paternalism, authority, and disdain for dissidents as a compressed culmination of all previous proposed scenes.

The template featured here has an interesting perspective, elongated to create a sense of adversarial discomfort whilst also allowing half of the composition to be external visuals (shown in white). The dark grey areas are the interior of a section of an apartment, with space in the corner for additional screens or futuristic machinery.

Whilst not as dynamically impressive as the first concept, the alternative composition allows far more visual language and carefully crafted elements to take up compositional space in the scene.

## COMPOSITION CONSTRUCTION ADVERTISEMENTS & LOGOS

Breaking this project down into its various elements, the logos and the advertisements that followed from their creation were all initially sketched. The best iterations were further designed and refined on Adobe Illustrator as scalable vectors, with additional effects added via Adobe Photoshop where appropriate. Care was given in providing four main variations for every final logo iteration, such as the condensed iconography and full length design along with colour variations for lighter or darker backgrounds.

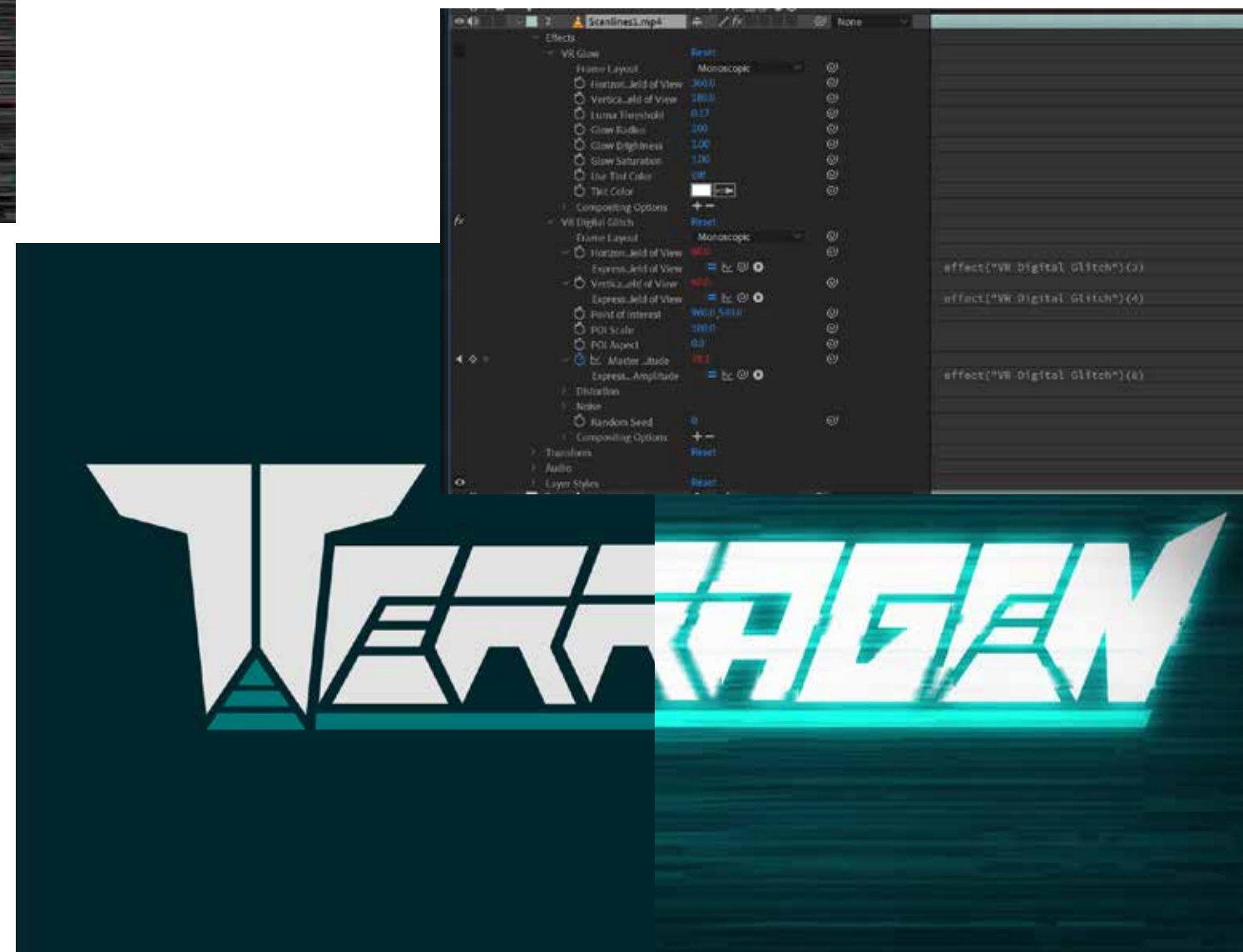


Each logo was carefully designed to represent the ethos, industry and overall meaning they aim to convey through the use of visual techniques such as shape language, colour psychology and semiotics (see Chapter 4 for aesthetic justifications). Once completed, the varied collection of corporate identities and brands paved the way for each to be imported into Adobe After Effects to design the various animated advertisements that litter the skyline.



Now in After Effects, a template had to be created to capture the visual effects and tropes associated with advertisements featured in the cyberpunk genre. Referring back to visual research and the case study on *Blade Runner*, the advertisements often have digital distortion, visible pixels and other artefacts, use of film grain, ambient occlusion and excessive neon-like glow. In order to achieve this, a blank composition was created where effects such as *VR Glow* and *VR Digital Glitch* were added in combination with scanlines to imitate one of the giant advertisement screens sans content.

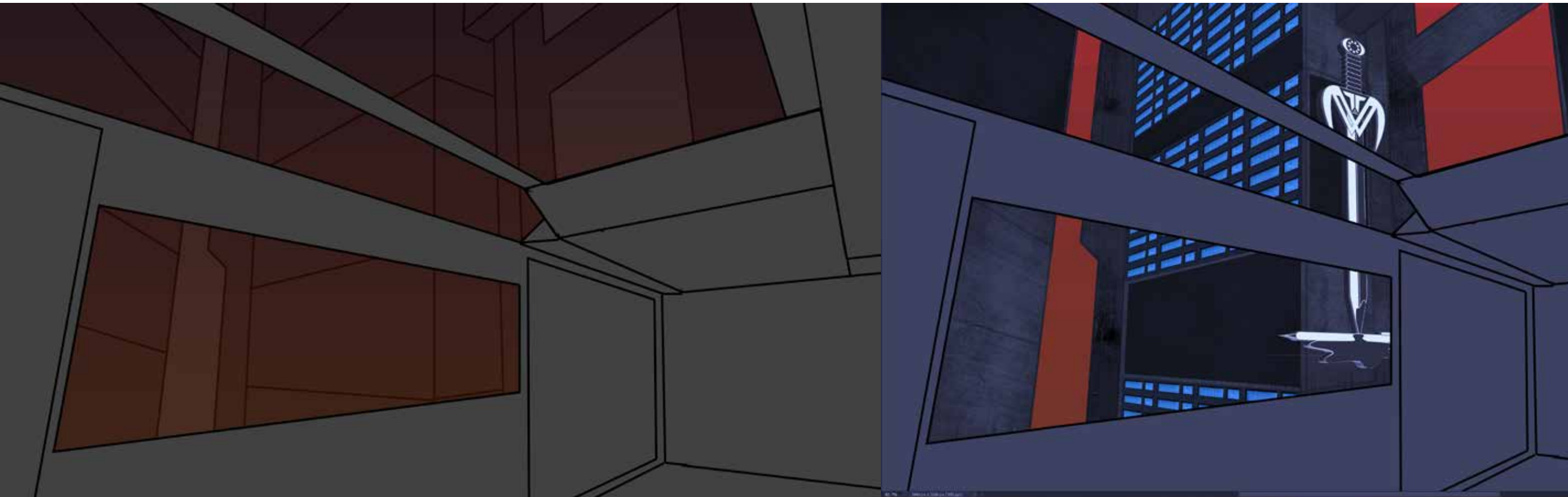
Separately, the animation for each advertisement was created as individual projects and rendered without any distortion effects and reimported back into After Effects to overlay the distortion created earlier on top of the rendered content. This ensured consistency with the settings and allowed a smooth workflow with each completed advertisement in an assembly line. By the time every advertisement was rendered, they were imported again into After Effects one last time to address a slight issue with the digital glitch effect. The glitch effect had rapid distortion and corruption transitions that felt a little too jarring for the final product, though this was remedied by using the *CC Wide Time* effect to blur and smooth the transition from frame to frame. *CC Wide Time* also had the bonus of adding motion blur to the advertisement animations, improving their overall visual feel.



## COMPOSITION CONSTRUCTION BACKGROUND SCENE

With the advertisements completed, work could then begin on the background scene as there were ideas regarding individual placement of the advertisements in the scene and how this would relate to the composition of the background itself. Considering the perspective provided by the rough outline of the initial foreground scene, it made sense to position two major skyscrapers as adjacent buildings, with the rest of the skyline faintly visible in the distance.

The closeness of the two primary structures allowed the best legibility for the advertisements that would be placed upon them. Considering this, the buildings had sections reserved specifically for their placement, using the foreground template as a top layer in Photoshop to switch back and forth in order to see appropriate advertisement positioning for best legibility.



With the advertisement positioning completed, the skyscrapers were painted digitally using textured brushes to imitate metallic and industrial materials. Orange fog was implemented to distinguish distance from the observer's perspective, with the furthest buildings the most buried and faint.

To complete the static scene, a hovering vehicle was painted in front of the skyscrapers to be animated later, as well as a 3D rendering of one of the static advertisement displays to compliment an empty section of wall. The rough edges of the painting were polished and cleaned up, and the painting was divided into clean layers based upon their distance. This would be essential during the animation phase, as the separate layers allow individual tweaking as well as creating a sense of depth in the scene.

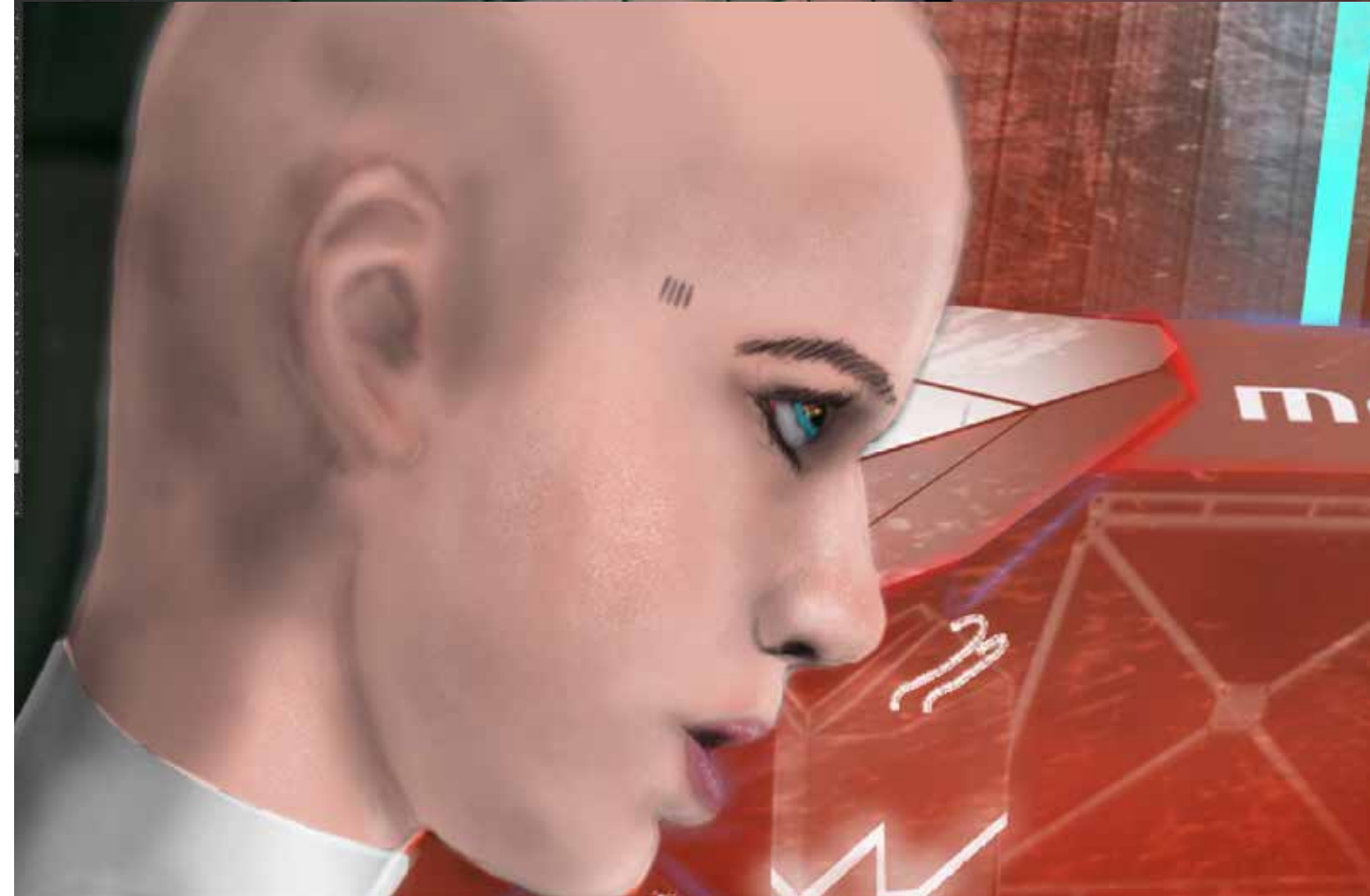


## COMPOSITION CONSTRUCTION FOREGROUND SCENE

**Similar techniques were employed with the refinement of the foreground scene.** Mostly digitally painted in Adobe Photoshop, there was difficulty in appropriately painting the difference in scale of the textured brushes when considering the scene's perspective lines. This was remedied by painting the wall segments as a flat texture on a separate canvas, which was then applied into the scene and mesh warped to fit the perspective. Addition of light and shadow was then painted in to create depth, taking note of how the light sources coming from the windows would play across the room. The light could not be fully painted at this stage however, as this would have to be done through animation in After Effects considering the hue and brightness of the various advertisements would change the light entering the interior.



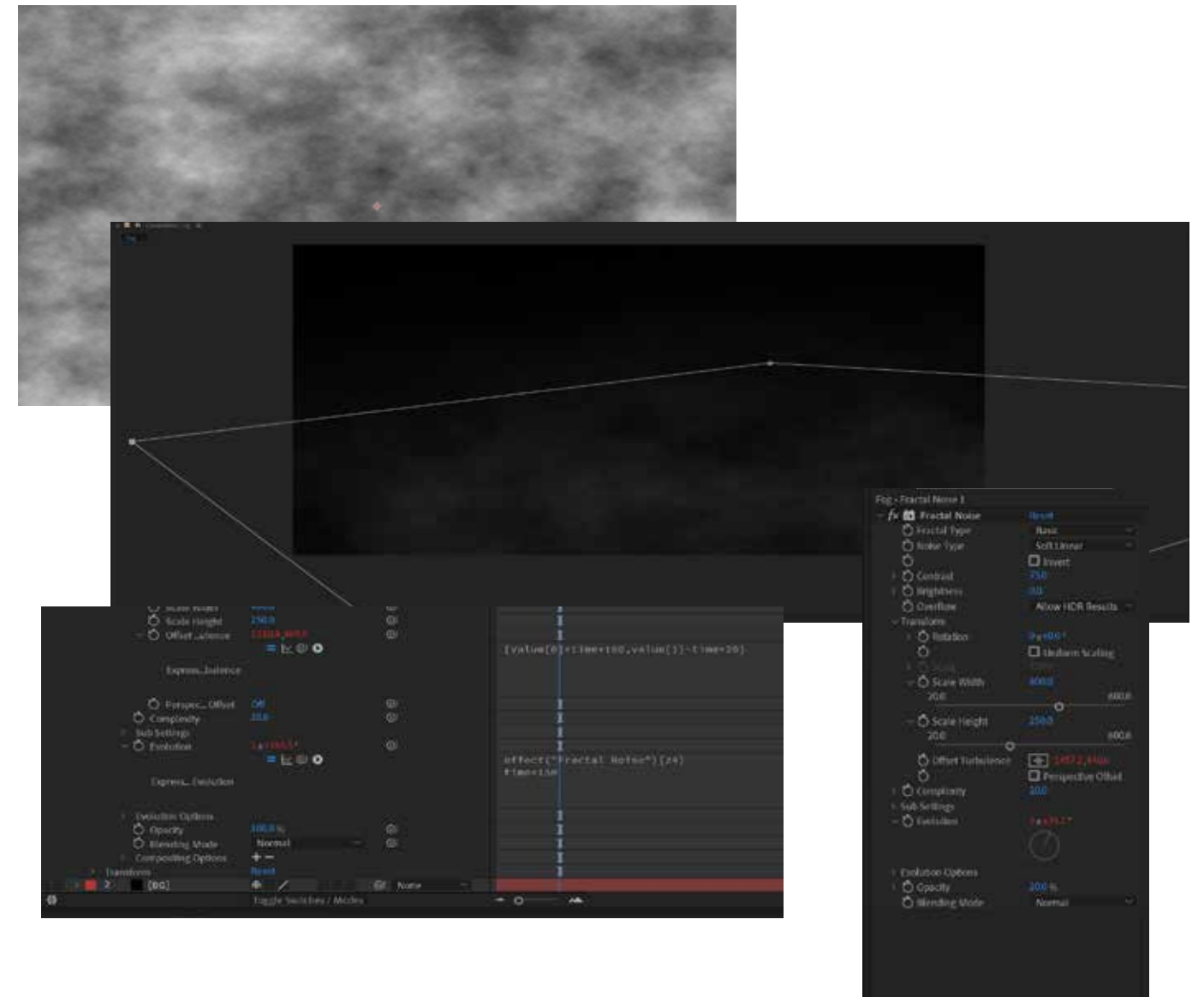
Based upon the logo design of Minerva, the main interface for the home artificial intelligence was sketched and painted into the scene, making the final design as closely resembling the logo as possible to ensure the visual connection. The windows were also an interesting element to paint, as they had to be transparent yet still textured enough to distinguish their presence as a solid object in the scene. By adding lighter smudges and scratches to play upon light reflection in combination with darker dirt and grime, the windows adopted a suitably themed appearance. Lastly, a woman was painted in the scene in the far left to serve as the resident of the apartment, with all the composition layers merged, separated into categories and polished in the same manner as the background scene.



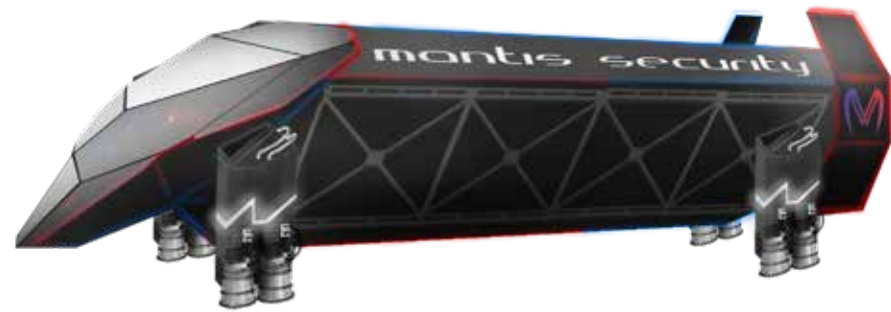


## COMPOSITION CONSTRUCTION ATMOSPHERICS & ANIMATION

The separate Photoshop documents for the background and foreground were imported into After Effects at this stage. Still in separate compositions, the background was assembled layer by layer into its own scene and detailed with the numerous imported advertisements previously rendered and mesh-warped to fit the building angles. The orange fog was also animated; created via fractal noise generated in a separate composition that was coloured and merged within the scene. The evolution of the fractal noise itself along with an offset was set to gradually change, creating the effect of rolling mist following a directional breeze.



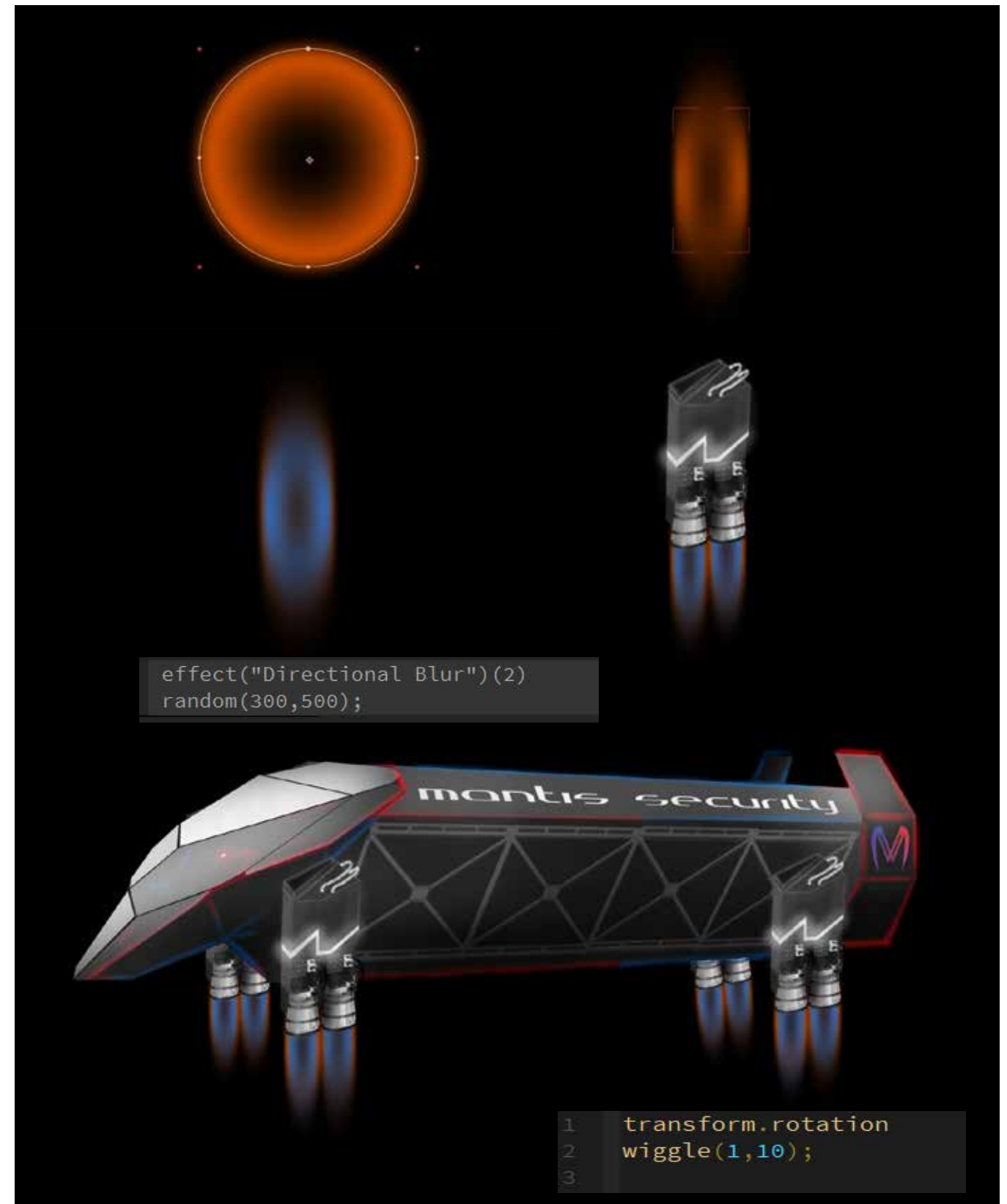




The last challenge of the background scene was animating the hovering vehicle painted earlier. Taking the vehicle into a separate composition, one of the vehicle engines was isolated in order to create an appropriate thruster effect similar to rocket engines. This was completed by creating a circular orange solid with a transparent feathered centre and outside edge. The orange solid was duplicated, recoloured blue, and transformed to be slightly larger than the initial orange solid. The pair then had a downward directional blur applied for the shape of the exhaust flames, as well as a glow effect to imitate the heat and light emitted. The After Effects *random* expression was coded into the blur length of the directional blur effect, creating the miniscule variations in flame length that a realistic rocketry-style thruster would appear to have.

This effect was applied one by one to each of the four thrusters on the hovering vehicle, with each engine utilising the *wiggle* expression to imitate the ever-changing angle of the thrusters to maintain appropriate lift and stability. This elaborate *composition within a composition* was placed within the background scene and animated to fly in, pause and then leave on a cycle, with a further *wiggle* expression placed upon the positional movement of the craft to appropriately simulate an imperfect hovering stance.

To avoid technical limitations of so many compositions taxing the rendering capabilities of the computer, the background scene was rendered separately at this stage and set aside as the background layer for the animation of the foreground scene. With the foreground now the focus, finishing touches of the *Minerva* screen were animated with theme-appropriate scanlines and distortions, paving the way for the foreground and background to be universally lighted and rendered as a unified piece.



## COMPOSITION CONSTRUCTION FINAL ITERATIONS

**On reflection and review of the completed scene, some final adjustments needed to be made to correct some thematic errors and oversights in regards to immersion.** The woman and the *Minerva* eyes were not sufficiently animated, looking far too lifeless compared to the dynamic exterior scene.

This was remedied via a transitioning glow effect for the red dots of the *Minerva* cameras that simulated activity, although the woman in the scene required far more work. She had an additional eyes-closed variant painted in Photoshop for importing into After Effects, animated via a strobe effect to imitate blinking. A transient bulge effect was added to her chest to simulate breathing, along with subtle variations in height created via the wiggle expression to represent the slight repositioning someone performs when standing for long periods of time.

Another issue was the colour warmth of the scene, which looked far too cheery for a dystopian feel. This was difficult to correct, as it risked eliminating the colour choices deliberately chosen for their respective psychological connotation. Fortunately a workaround was discovered by simply applying a cooling filter to the scene, preserving the majority of the colours as well as visually turning the scene far more sombre.

To complete the project, the final touches of chromatic aberration and film grain were implemented to the overall scene, further cementing the visual trope that the composition is supposed to represent.



# CHAPTER 4: VISUAL SOLUTION

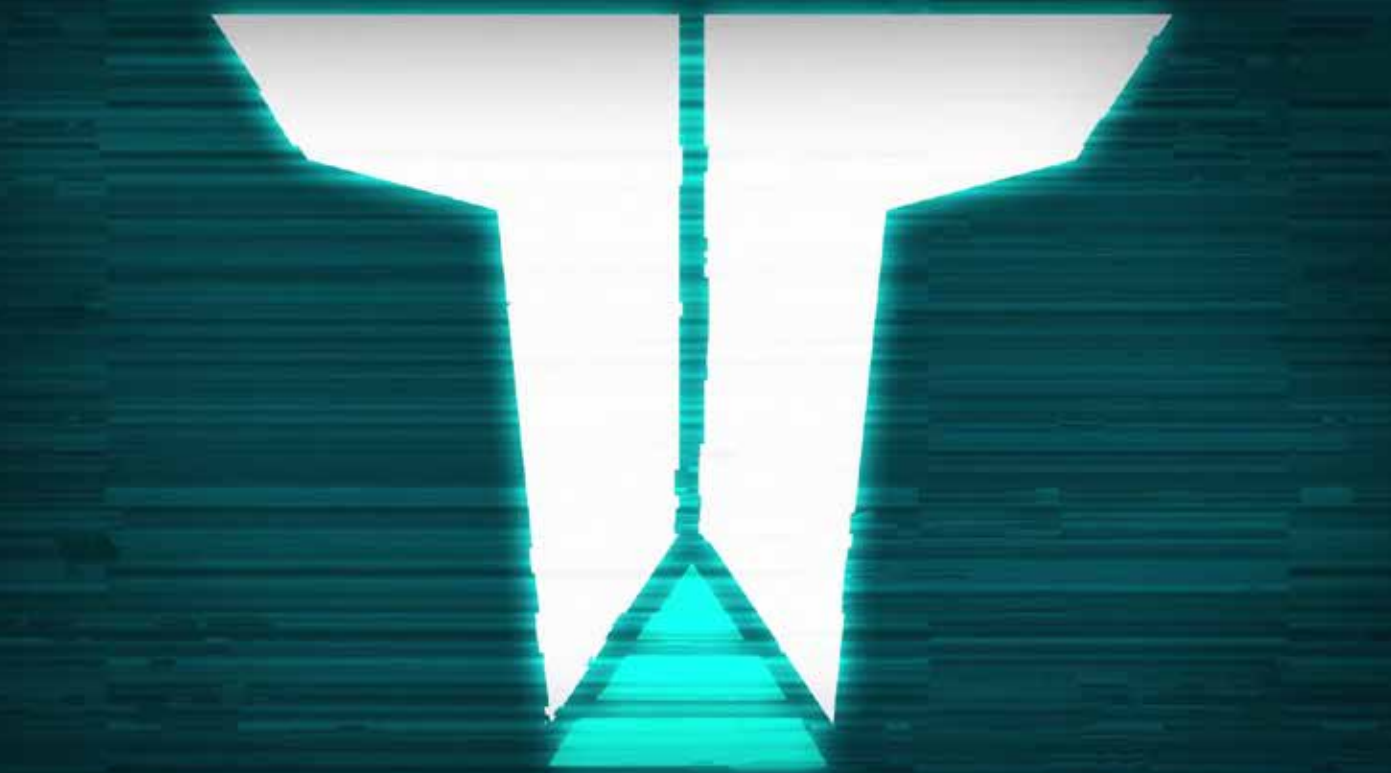
## FINAL SOLUTION INTRODUCTION

**As the final solution consists of multiple sub-projects assembled together in one larger scene, the defence of each design choice is separated into their individual components for analysis and justification. After this, the project as a whole is discussed.**

Considering the research conducted in Chapter 2 as the basis for the visual choices, all of the logo designs employ some degree of inferred semiotic meaning through their shape, contextual cues and use of colour. Collectively they work together to anchor the visuals into a cohesive visual world-building narrative in the full composition, drawing upon the concept of sticky ideas and visual communication theory to maintain audience engagement.

Beyond the semiotic considerations, the thematic tropes of the genre are also utilised and implemented, employing researched world-building techniques discussed earlier to ground the visuals in a believable and functional universe with links to myth and cultural experience. While the background written work to establish this fictional world (such as the history and backstory) is not directly part of the final imagery, the personal knowledge of this line of events ensures the visuals have a cohesive and logical identity with a personality that communicates the feel of their origin and ethos.

Alongside the defence of each design choice, each visual sub-project has a description of their lore-grounded purpose and identity included to demonstrate how the world-building techniques researched can influence and enhance the imagery in combination with effective visual communication.



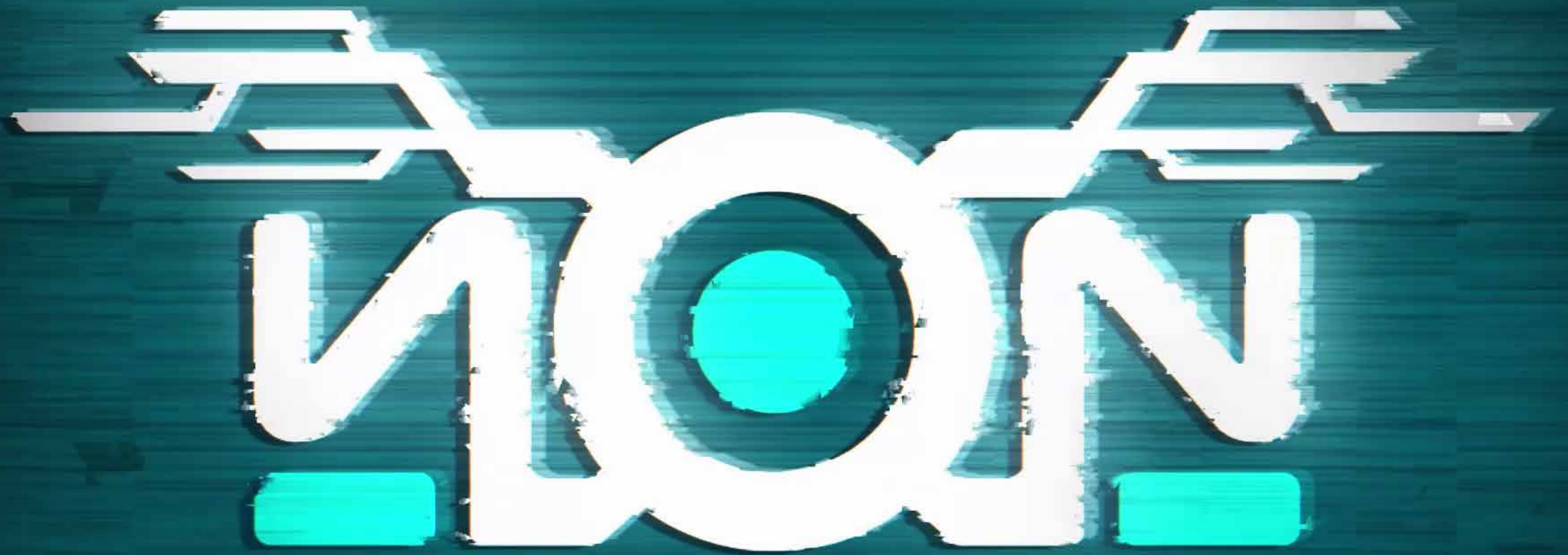


**Terragen Corporation (Combining the myth of Terra as the personification of Earth in Roman mythology and Genesis in the creation of the world; professing themselves as world-shapers) is the most dominant megacorporation featured in this visual world-building scenario. Initially purely a technology firm akin to Google, it has grown to influence and control almost every aspect of daily life. Its slogan "Your world, your hands" is intended to encourage embracing their technology (such as Minerva the personal AI assistant or the Neuronet brain implant) as a means to curate their own world. In truth, however, much as the technology shields the consumer in their own little bubble it creates a highly paternalistic state robbed of agency, with Terragen as the patriarchal figure and the various Minerva AI systems as the maternal enforcers of Terragen's ideology.**

The logo is predominantly defined by the imposing "T" resting upon a triple-tiered pyramid. The pyramid is a visual representation of hierarchical models extensively used to rank authority, social status or priority, with the letter symbolising Terragen situated above everything else. This ranking establishes Terragen as reigning supreme above any structure of society, government or commerce, with this dominant theme reinforced by the increasing width of the letter toward the top adding to the visual of an imposing weight of superiority, and the advertisement animation of the two halves of the "T" coming together like a clamp or vault door sealing over the pyramid.

There is further shape language reflected in the sharp points and italicised lettering, holding connotations of villainous intent disguised as cutting-edge technology and progressivism. The style is blocky to represent the imposing futuristic ethos of a sci-fi company, utilising negative space to reveal a key within the lettering to suggest Terragen holds both the answers and the control.

The primary colour of Terragen's branding is cerulean; the blue-green hue has a psychological influence with colour theory to encourage openness in communication (Bellantoni 83). This is especially useful for a corporation that wishes to know and control everything about the individual, with the mixture of blue (security, trustworthiness, honesty) as their intended image and green (danger, decay, poison) as the corrupting villainous true nature within the context of these presented visuals framed with the anchorage of the "Terra" in Terragen audibly reminiscent to "terror" (Bellantoni 83; Bellantoni 160; Bennett et al. 52).





Neuronet is an elaborate brain-computer interface implant designed to inject information straight into the neurons responsible for processing sensory stimuli. As a result, it acts similar to a built-in augmented reality device that overlays visuals and sounds on top of existing human perception. One of its services, Neuronet Shield, allows an individual to censor any sensory stimuli that is deemed upsetting or stressful to the user. Whilst most appreciate this utility in customising the world they perceive, it's easy to imagine the psychological and societal effects of such an ideologically isolating tool where the corporation could decide what to censor and nobody would be aware of it, because they couldn't even see or hear it.

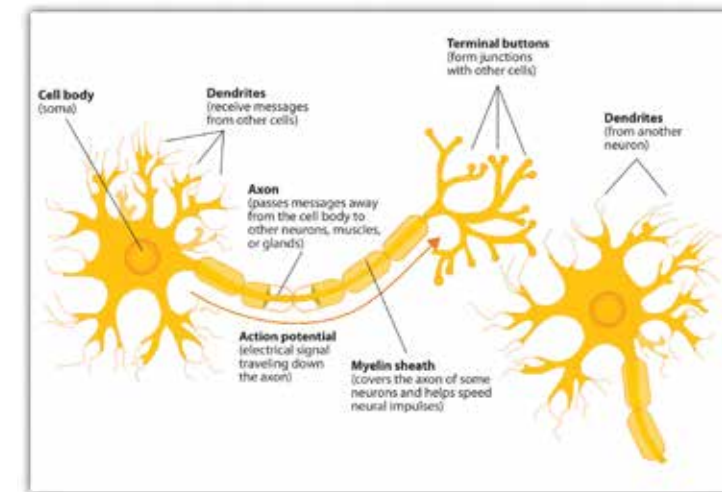


Fig. 10. Walinga, Jennifer. Diagram of basic neuron and components. 2014.



The overall design of the Neuronet logo visually signifies a neuron meshed with technology, with the segments of the myelin sheath represented by the teal rectangles beneath each letter and the central "O" design reminiscent of the cell body and nucleus (See Fig. 9.). The dendrites however are not organic, with sharp angles that connote circuitry. The colour choices have the same meanings as the primary Terragen branding, as this is their flagship product where opening an individual's mind entirely to this device is essential and encouraged. Additionally, the central dot has additional implications of surveillance much like a security camera or eye.

These design choices are linked to the study of semiotics, whereby "any object or sound that expresses meaning to the person who sees or hears it may be thought of as a sign" (Butler 343). By connecting the sign of a neuron to the logo, it imparts that association to the brand identity.





**Additional Neuronet products and services such as FIVR (Full Immersion Virtual Reality) and Neuronet Shield are represented by their own advertisements.**

FIVR's background utilises a grid warped by curvature and scanlines, signifying the wireframe constructs of virtual worlds with the anchorage (guiding a desired meaning with contextual cues) of a distorted cyberpunk style (Bennett et al. 52). The red and blue colour choices here are symbolic rather than psychological, referencing how many video games in popular culture divide the opposing sides into red team and blue team. This makes use of the research that suggests that contextual symbolism can override the basic universal meaning (Bennett et al. 35). Chromatic aberration is applied to further thematic associations, with the kerning of the typography overlapping as the merger of the five senses (Sight, Sound, Touch, Taste, Smell) that FIVR can simulate.


Neuronet Shield employs the symbolism of Roman-like soldiers with tall shields emblazoned with the Neuronet logo in a similarly Roman style, holding connotations of authority, security and a sense of safety against perceived threats. They form a shield wall or testudo, a tactic used by the Romans to protect an attacking force. In the effort of shielding users from "harmful" perceptions via the Neuronet implant, Terragen through this technology is the attacking force with a testudo against thoughts and ideas not approved by the governing powers.



 **IDOL NEWS**

**JOIN**   
**THE ONLY**  
**TRUTH**

 **THE KNOW**

**BE PART OF THE**  
 **CROWD**





**Idol News is the corporate-sponsored news source that taps straight into user Neuronet feeds as something akin to a false idol to obey and believe as given truth. Like any sensationalist media, the content it conveys is designed to perpetuate fear and distrust, in this case focusing on dissuading ideological concepts that embrace free discourse and instead endorsing authoritarian government paternalism as an ideal.**

As far as symbolism is concerned, the “IN” is enclosed in the confines of the circle, suggesting that “outside of the box” thinking is not the endorsed approach. Further, the lettering itself is tilted backwards rather than the expected forward slant in an effort to hint to the observer that this news organisation is regressive and its audience are passive. Within the typography itself the lettering is bold, sharp and dominant; this conveys authority and demands attention.

The colour connotations of Idol News are a worrying one, with the use of bold red, white and black infamous with associations to fascist ideology. Beyond the collective meaning, the individual purpose of red is to be bold, emotionally charged, eye-catching and pulling focus as necessary to impart broadcasted information (Bellantoni 2). In addition, red within British newspaper branding has associations to sensationalist tabloid reporting of sometimes dubious credibility. The placement of a circle of red also signifies the “on air” red light within the “O” of Idol.

**MINERVA**

knows best

MINERVA RVA - Reality Virtual Assistant

**MINERVA**

the only one who

**NURTURES**

**MINERVA**

the only one who

**CARES**

**MINERVA**

the only one who

**PROTECTS**



**Minerva is what's known in this world as an RVA (Reality Virtual Assistant). It functions similarly to a far more overbearing Amazon Alexa that acts like a maternal figure, guiding the user step-by-step through their day with spendable points awarded for completing tasks. It's appealing to many to not have to deal with the stress of personal responsibility, but RVAs like Minerva keep people dependent on the corporations that own them.**

"Myths concern shared beliefs and explanations; we are not particularly interested in whether these beliefs are true or false. Our culture supplies us with numerous myths to explain the world to us" (Bennett et al. 39).

The theme of recurrent myth to tap into the collective subconscious cultural awareness is also employed here in the naming of Minerva; the Roman goddess associated with maternal wisdom and knowledge. She is often associated with the owl, which is subtly referenced in the design of the Minerva logo via the large owl-like eyes and beak. This visual connotation has a quadruple-layered meaning beyond the mythological association, as the beak also represents a heart to signify the intent to convey maternal love and trust, whereas the large dilated eyes within the contextual cues of the world it is framed within suggests an instinctive discomfort and threatening ever-watching presence. The fourth meaning is through separation of the lettering in the design of the owl, breaking Minerva into "Mine" which alludes to the possessive, controlling nature of the AI assistant.

The colour choices in play with the Minerva design also has a duality of intent with links to popular myth. Assuming no ill-intent and perceived as such within the inhabitants of this fictional world, the gradient from red to green is reminiscent of early learning environments such as schools and its associations to childhood experiences in the form of an apple. The apple gradient also has the contextual meaning of health and vitality, though this is inverted when perceived through the lens of a dystopian world. Now the apple is no longer representing love (red) and health (green), instead it becomes danger (red) and toxicity (green). In western myth, the poison-apple conjures associations to the tale of Snow White and paints the AI Minerva as the evil manipulating queen, further implementing the use of mythological meaning ingrained without full lucidity (Wolf 50).

Lastly, there is also an element of this toxic duality within the shape language of the font design. The lettering is adorned with smooth curves rather than entirely straight lines to suggest friendliness, however this is juxtaposed in contrast with the sharp pointed edges which can represent hostility and villainous intent.





**Volkrane Industries is the largest industrial corporation in this visual world-building scenario. Their workhouses and construction projects are primarily coordinated by drones and robotic overseers, with dissidents and “free thinkers” sent to labour for Volkrane. With the fantastical escapism of the virtual world granted by Neuronet’s FIVR (Full Immersion Virtual Reality) and the real world heavily augmented and enhanced by the same technology, Volkrane can simply construct many buildings with a very utilitarian Brutalist approach.**

The dark muddy red, black and grey are employed as a group to suggest a utilitarian, militaristic approach with allusions for American audiences to the bleak and opposing ideology of the USSR. This is anchored by the Russian word “volk” (wolf) embedded in its name, using the previous research on semiotics to indicate that these connections are important to direct the visual meaning to the targeted conclusion (Bennett et al. 52; Wolf 52). As far as shape language and symbolism is concerned, the entirety of the logo design is sharp and geometric, holding associations to aggressive inorganic industrialism within the context of their role. The collective shapes also loosely resemble a wolf with the nose, long face and pointed ears, an animal which has long held cultural associations as a dangerous predator that preys on vulnerable sheep (in this case, the sheep are those who blindly follow the doctrine of the corporations).

Within the advertisement itself the Earth is seen held aloft by a crane, signifying that Volkrane Industries not only has the might to manipulate the planet with gigantic engineering projects but the ominous implication that the entire world can simply be seized by them. These corporations see the planet and its inhabitants as their property to mould and manipulate, and Volkrane as an industrial company that purely deals with other corporations has no illusion of its true intent to maintain.



WW  
GIDEIS  
SECURITY



**Mantis Security is the corporate police force designed to enforce laws and keep order in day-to-day life. They have frequent patrols outside of the habitation complexes, with a fast response time toward any individual who is deemed by RVAs like Minerva or sensors in the Neuronet implants to be divergent. They are in effect a private army paid for by the major corporations in the cabal such as Terragen and Volkrane, with the undercover operations and espionage left largely to in-house agencies such as Terragen's Department of Investigations.**

As an almost universally recognised colour combination within cultural awareness, the red and blue portrayed in the Mantis Security logo has strong associations with emergency services and law enforcement in particular. There is however a third colour in the transition between the two hues that holds meaning; purple in this context can imply that someone is about to die or be transformed (Bellantoni 190). Given the aggressive sharp-pointed shape language conveyed by the design form of Mantis Security, it seems likely that this organisation is aggressive and deadly when it deals with threats to the corporate status-quo.

The main "M" of the logo design has a dual cultural message implied by its design. The pincer shape is reminiscent of the mantis itself, famed for its predatory skill as well as the habit of eating its mate alive during coupling. With Mantis Security as the main police force, an organisation that can "eat" those it pretends to protect is an ominous use of foreshadowing, which engages the reader with tension building (Hickson 7). In addition to the mantis symbolism the design loosely likens itself to the helmet of Judge Dredd for fans of the dystopian sci-fi genre; a law enforcer capable of acting as judge, jury and executioner all wrapped into one. Much like Minerva's design, Mantis Security also has a dichotomy of sharp edges and smooth curves which further reinforce how quickly it could turn from protector to predator.





**L O O T . R U N T I M E**

**LOOT RUNTIME - ASSET ACQUISITION**

**LET US HANDLE YOUR CREDIT POINT  
PURCHASES FOR YOU!**

L ★ T  
★ T  
RUNTIME

L ★ T  
★ T  
RUNTIME

L ★ ★ T.R  
LOOT RUNTIME - ASSET ACQUISITION

L ★ ★ T.R  
LOOT RUNTIME - ASSET ACQUISITION

L ★ ★ T.R  
LOOT RUNTIME - ASSET ACQUISITION

With the top level currency entirely owned by the elite, most of the populace rely on the controlled bubble of the corporate point award system issued by completing assigned tasks. LOOT.R (Loot Runtime) is a programme that can be applied to their RVA (such as Minerva) on request that will manage their point spending and saving for the user. In a world where people are highly dependent on being guided through every step in life and discouraged from independent thought, software like LOOT.R are both appealing and necessary, stripping even more agency under the guise of paternalistic care.

Given that LOOT.R is essentially a computer programme at its core, the font choice was one reminiscent of older typefaces associated with archetypal computing and coding tropes. The stars serve as the double 'O's, the shape symbolism holding strong connotations to celebrities, prizes, ambitions and commercialism. This plays into the role of LOOT.R as selling its services with personal finances, encouraging the perception of glamour and fashionable rewards.

The prominent use of a bold yellow in the logo design is not only expected with the star shape and its associations to the glamour of Hollywood, but colour psychology suggests the frequent misinterpretation of yellow as positivity and happiness. This is appropriate given the visual world-building scenario presents many of these corporations and services as evil pretending to be good, as yellow can instead cause anxiety and obsession to further user dependency on corporate services (Bellantoni 42).





## FINAL SOLUTION FULL SCENE

In the full scene, every visual element is assembled together to create a strong and cohesive visual world-building exercise that warns of a potential future. A resident and employee of Terragen Corporation awaits her assigned breakfast in her apartment under the controlling gaze of Minerva as her Neuronet implant syncs with the network. Outside, the orange haze of a world akin to Blade Runner appears full of life, though everything is artificial and automated. A mantis security craft performs its morning patrol, ensuring no residents are displaying signs of unapproved behaviour.

To thoroughly explain and justify this animated scene in the still format of print, each element will be described in detail from the natural journey the eye takes across the screen and its connection to the visual narrative (McGeough 29).

“What or who a character looks at draws the eyes of the audience and they will want to see what they’re looking at or the reaction of the person they’re looking at” (Lancaster 110).

Whether or not the observer initially notices the intense staring digital eyes of Minerva or the woman at the corner of the frame, they both connect with each other as a duo of symbolism (Smith 379). The spacing between the woman and Minerva set at opposite sides creates tension and adversarial emotions (McGeough 24), with the higher angle looking up to Minerva collectively presenting the AI as the intimidating and dominating figure at direct odds to the qualities of humanity defined by the presence of the woman, playing upon the instinctual emotional cues we still experience from our ancient past (Smith 45).

The woman herself appears to have unstyled, largely basic hair and an open-mouthed droopy-lidded stare over to Minerva whilst waiting for her next command. This appearance and body language conveys the sense of dependency the individual has to Minerva and implies she would not be able to perform basic tasks on her own without this instruction. On Minerva’s display screen the dependency is reinforced by the very simple duties listed with point rewards for completion, treating the woman as if she were a child celebrated for tying their shoelaces. Her clothing is white in a suggestion of sterility and a blank canvas devoid of individualism, branded only by the Terragen logo and the glow of the Neuronet implant in their ownership of both her and her senses.



Outside, the neon edge of one of the buildings creates a precisely centre-point vertical line that divides Minerva and the woman, inducing further feelings of tension as separate yet conjoined concepts fundamentally at odds but chained together with the woman in unwitting servitude (McGeough 26). This trapped situation is complemented by both the dividing sections of the window frames and the padded squares on the wall, subtly referencing prison bars and the cushioned segments of a stereotypical psych ward respectively.

Minerva itself looks far more ominous compared to the friendly advertisements shown in its branding, showcasing how the positive perception of these corporate entities and their ideology is a dangerous illusion. The harsh glow of its red eyes not only connotes an adversarial, attention-grabbing threat within colour psychology, but it also calls to mind the rogue artificial intelligence HAL 9000 from 2001: A Space Odyssey as a trope enshrined in this genre of storytelling. The main metallic shell of Minerva is illuminated from beneath, referencing how underlighting has “suggested a rather sinister character in hundreds of horror and suspense television programs” (Butler 227).

Looking up from Minerva the logo of Terragen flashes frequently on display in a billboard just above the apartment. If Minerva’s height above the woman signifies its dominance over humans, then the corporate logo directly above Minerva represents how Terragen is at the top of the hierarchy in this dystopian world. Leading lines from this point take the eyes across one of the skyscraper walkways to catch a glimpse of the distant skyline in the orange haze, informing the viewer with familiar genre tropes and setting the scene of the endless urban expanse.

At the end of the walkway the viewer is met by the glowing emblem of a sword stabbed through a bleeding pen. The pommel is presented as an all-seeing digital eye, watching over the dominion on behalf of Terragen featured just below. Mantis Security’s logo forms the cross-guard, symbolising how it protects the interests of the corporations rather than that of the people. This is further evidenced by how the blade cast from Mantis Security is stabbed through the pen (the pen holding semiotic associations with free speech and expression in this context, dying as the ink bleeds away) in an upright position that isn’t toppled.



Leading lines guide the viewer from the tip of the pen toward the assembly of advertisements and Brutalist Volkrane Industries architecture adding their own symbolism to the visual world-building, occluded temporarily by the Mantis Security craft on patrol. The vehicle's thrusters and movement informs how it hovers in front of the window, with the branding on the side and the rear fins establishing its nature as law enforcement. The series of advertisements on the craft concludes with a hacked variety of the Terragen slogan changing to "Your world, our hands", at which point it zooms away as if attempting to conceal their true motives; making use of the "unexpectedness" trick of sticky ideas (Heath 16). Referencing the compound eyes of the mantis, the front window is a hybrid of insectoid segments and digitised geometric shapes, sharp in their hostile language.

The scene as a whole utilises the dominant orange and electric blues of the Blade Runner/Cyberpunk trope in conjunction with a blue cooling filter to change the context-free warming influence of orange into the dystopian, moody experience conveyed by the composition. Shadows are dark to compliment this feeling, contrasted by the harsh neon glow of the advertisements bleeding through the windows, intrusively demanding attention, devotion, and added drama to the scene (Lancaster 168). COVID-19's various lockdowns and isolation is a recent memory that many share at the time of this project, adding a real-world experience that this scene elicits familiar emotions.

Overall, this entire composition included countless elements inspired and informed by the research conducted, as evidenced by the use of concepts such as leading lines, spacing, perspective, emotional cues, lighting, colour psychology, shape language, element grouping, semiotics, parallels to existing tropes, and collective real-world cultural experiences to create an effective visual world-building demonstration.



# CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

## “YOUR WORLD, YOUR HANDS” WORLD-BUILDING WARNINGS

**Visual world-building is a deceptively tricky skill to master. While creativity and imagination do wonders for artistic expression, artists can still fall prey to multiple pitfalls and lapses of judgement that turns a visual narrative into merely a pretty drawing.**

Circumstantial considerations aside, the visual solution is a demonstration that proves employing all the semiotic and psychological cues at hand in combination with a cohesive world-building narrative can create an effective and powerful message. Animated elements are condensed with visual information in a way that maximises audience attention in an age of reduced attention spans and short-form content, leading them on a visual path to describe a story without any explanatory dialogue.

Circumstantial considerations at play, the success of such a piece if it were uploaded to the internet, displayed on a billboard or embellished by an animation studio is still at least partly up to timing, connections and creative talent. Addressing as many factors as possible like this visual solution should mitigate failure in artist world-building projects.

Not having a sticky idea formulated into a visual medium is perhaps the most critical element at play. If the visual concept doesn't stick in someone's mind, how can the world and its message be memorable? The tale the imagery tells is just as important as any written plot. For a visual world-builder to succeed in imparting a memorable message to an audience (such as a warning of a future societal path), they must be acutely aware of several important principles:

- **They must know the culture they are designing for, to have visual symbolism that connects appropriately.** The visual solution is aware of western culture and uses myths, references, and tropes connected with the sci-fi genre it's situated within without relying heavily on cliché.
- **They must know the psychology of shapes, colours and compositional positioning.** The visual solution employs shape language, colour psychology and positioning of elements across the entire composition to speak a message without words.
- **They must be able to guide the viewer from point to point much like an author separates a book into chapters to tell their story cohesively.** The visual solution uses leading lines and attraction to eyelines to guide the viewer accordingly.
- **The composition must be memorable, engaging, and hold a spreadable message.** The visual solution is memorable through the repetition of symbology like any learning exercise. It is engaging through the use of moving imagery, flashing lights and intrigue afforded by the visual world-building. Lastly, the message through the overbearing presence of Minerva and the corporations is one of a criticism toward government paternalism going unchecked.
- **The world they have translated into visuals must be believable, and encourage relation and comparison to real-world experiences and emotions as a result.** The recent COVID-19 pandemic at the time of this thesis certainly adds credibility to this visual solution, merging this potent real-world memory with the uncomfortable emotions that the composition creates.



## SPECIAL THANKS

To my best friend Kat, you have supported me through countless struggles both physically and mentally. Without you, none of this would have been possible.

To my thesis committee and the people of the United States, all of you have been so kind and supportive to me as an Englishman during this adventure, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II.

To myself, for completing this in a foreign country with a brain tumour!  
You are quite crazy.

In my personal observations through this project, it has been enlightening to discover the sheer depth of subconscious meaning that the human mind can process without even being aware it happened. This means that arbitrary choices I make in design are informed similarly by the mind's hidden messages it has learnt in the past. I frequently found myself slipping into the habit artists have of keeping to their style and following the feel of their creativity, prompting me to pause and review the research multiple times to make sure I was realigned to tell a cohesive message rather than showcase artistic expression. I could have abandoned the research altogether and produced a *Cyberpunk*-like animation in a fraction of the time with twice as much detail, but all the viewer would learn from that piece would be "oh, that looks very *Blade Runner*" and little else. Perhaps this is why some visuals can look very appealing and genre-appropriate and yet it still fails to remain in the public subconscious with a strong message?

I have always been instructed that research is essential for good art and design, though the true intricacies of visuals are so complex that sociology, biology, politics and more constitute a gigantic web linking all the way down to every future project I create. Sometimes despite our best attempts someone can walk away from a picture seeing a duck on the wall instead of our intended rabbit.

This thesis now makes ducks far less likely.



## APPENDIX PERMISSIONS

**AlexAntropov86 et al. *Collection of artworks*. Pixabay, 2022.**

The Pixabay license allows free use for commercial and non-commercial purposes including use and print, providing any sale or distribution adds value or additional properties to the original works.

**Jackson, Peter. *The Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring*. New Line, 2001.**

**Jackson, Peter. *The Lord of The Rings: The Return of the King*. New Line, 2003.**

**Jackson, Peter. *The Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers*. New Line, 2002.**

These stills have been removed to comply with copyright.

**Lynch, David. *Dune*. Universal Pictures, 1984.**

These stills have been removed to comply with copyright.

**Scott, Ridley. *Blade Runner*. Warner Bros., 1982.**

**Villeneuve, Denis. *Blade Runner 2049*. Warner Bros., 2017.**

These stills have been removed to comply with copyright.

**Villeneuve, Denis. *Dune: Part One*. Legendary Pictures, 2021.**

These stills have been removed to comply with copyright.

**Walinga, Jennifer. *Diagram of basic neuron and components*. 2014.**

This image is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license, which grants permission for use and print. No changes were made.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

AlexAntropov86 et al. *Collection of artworks*. Pixabay, 2022.

Bellantoni, Patti. *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die: the Power of Color in Visual Storytelling*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2005.

Bennett, Peter, Sarah C. Benyahia, and Jerry Slater. *A Level Media Studies: The Essential Introduction*. Routledge, London; New York;, 2019.

Brooker, Will. *The Blade Runner Experience: The Legacy of a Science Fiction Classic*. Edited by Will Brooker. Wallflower, London; New York, 2005; 2006; 2012, doi:10.7312/broo476431.

Bogstad, Janice M., and Philip E. Kaveny. *Picturing Tolkien: Essays on Peter Jackson's the Lord of the Rings Film Trilogy*. McFarland & Co, Jefferson, N.C, 2011.

Bukatman, Scott. *Blade Runner*. 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan on behalf of the British Film Institute, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781838712303>.

Butler, Jeremy G. *Television: Visual Storytelling and Screen Culture*. Taylor and Francis, 2018, doi:10.4324/9781315181295.

Ebert, Roger. "Dune Movie Review & Film Summary (1984) | Roger Ebert". Rogerebert.Com, 1984, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/dune-1984>.

Grill, Kalle, and Hanna, Jason. *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Paternalism*. Edited by Kalle Grill, et al. Routledge, New York, 2018, doi:10.4324/9781315657080.

Heath, Chip, and Heath, Dan. *Made to Stick*. Random House Publishing Group, 2007. Kindle Edition.

Hickson, Timothy. *On Writing And Worldbuilding*. Amazon, 2019. Print.

IMDB. "Dune - Box Office Mojo". Box Office Mojo, 2021, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl3629024769/>.

IMDB. "Dune: Part One - Box Office Mojo". Box Office Mojo, 2021, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt1160419/>.

IMDB. "The Lord Of The Rings: The Fellowship Of The Ring - Box Office Mojo". Box Office Mojo, 2021, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0120737/>.

IMDB. "The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King - Box Office Mojo". Box Office Mojo, 2021, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl4251026945/>.

IMDB. "The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers - Box Office Mojo". Box Office Mojo, 2021, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl4032923137/>.

Jackson, Peter. The Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring. New Line, 2001.

Jackson, Peter. The Lord of The Rings: The Return of the King. New Line, 2003.

Jackson, Peter. The Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers. New Line, 2002.

Lancaster, Kurt. Basic Cinematography: A Creative Guide to Visual Storytelling. Routledge, London; New York, 2019.

Le Grand, Julian, and Bill New. Government Paternalism: Nanny State Or Helpful Friend? Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2015.

Lynch, David. Dune. Universal Pictures, 1984.

Kodama, Mitsuru. Ma Theory and the Creative Management of Innovation. Palgrave, Macmillan US, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5107905>.

McGeough, Ryan. The Essential Guide to Visual Communication. Bedford/Saint Martin's, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6642131>.

Nelson, Mark A., and Todd Lockwood. Fantasy World-Building: A Guide to Developing Mythic Worlds and Legendary Creatures. Dover Publications, Inc, Mineola, New York, 2019.

Scherman, Jess. "What Is Visual Storytelling? The Growing Trend In Multimedia Design | Rasmussen University". Rasmussen.Edu, 2021, <https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/design/blog/visual-story-telling/>.

Scott, Ridley. Blade Runner. Warner Bros., 1982.

Slater, Tom. Unsafe Space: The Crisis of Free Speech on Campus. Edited by Tom Slater. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016, doi:10.1007/978-1-137-58786-2.

Smith, Ken. Handbook of Visual Communication : Theory, Methods, and Media. Routledge, 2005. EBSCOhost, <search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=124582&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

Thompson, Kristin. The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood. University of California Press, Berkeley, 2007.

Trevena, Angeline. How To Destroy The World: An Author's Guide To Writing Dystopia And Post-Apocalypse. Amazon, 2020. Print.

TV Tropes. "TV Tropes". TV Tropes, 2021, <https://tvtropes.org/>.

Villeneuve, Denis. Blade Runner 2049. Warner Bros., 2017.

Villeneuve, Denis. Dune: Part One. Legendary Pictures, 2021.

Walinga, Jennifer. Diagram of basic neuron and components. 2014.

Whittington, Keith E. Speak Freely: Why Universities must Defend Free Speech. vol. 63, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2019;2018.

Wolf, Mark J. P. Exploring Imaginary Worlds : Essays on Media, Structure, and Subcreation. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021. Print.

Wolf, Mark J. P. The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, doi:10.4324/9781315637525.