Thematising the ugly side of sublime technological development: Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006) as an inadvertent critique of the 'technocentrism' of postmodernity

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This article employs certain of the theoretical insights of Jean-François Lyotard and Julia Kristeva to identify the covert, and largely inadvertent, subversive aspects of the mainstream cinematic text Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006), namely its thematisation of both the autonomous nature of 'capitalist techno-science', and the latter's detrimental impact upon the subject. In short, this article is principally concerned with demonstrating the value of, and fostering an increased engagement in, the *critical appropriation* of potentially subversive mainstream cinematic texts, in the interests both of problematising the assumption, propagated via contemporary cultural 'products' such as mainstream film, that there is no need to revolt against the dehumanisation that proceeds from the 'technocentrism' of postmodernity, and in so doing, of shedding light on the ugly side of sublime technological development.
Key words: capitalist technoscience; dehumanisation; technocentrism

Die tematisering van die lelike kant van sublieme tegnologiese ontwikkeling: Sonzero se *Pulse* (2006) as onbedoelde kritiek op die 'tegnosentrisme' van die postmoderniteit
Hierdie artikel maak gebruik van bepaalde insigte van Jean-François Lyotard en Julia Kristeva om die bedekte, en grotendeels onbedoelde, subversiewe aspekte van die hoofstroom-filmteks, Sonzero se *Pulse* (2006), te identifiseer, naamlik die tematisering daarin van beide die outonome aard van die 'kapitalistiese tegnowetenskap', en die nadelige impak van laasgenoemde op die subjek. Kortom, hierdie artikel is prinsipieel daarmee gemoeid om die waarde te demonstreer van, en verhoogde betrokkenheid te bevorder by, die *kritiese toe-eiening* van potensieel subversiewe hoofstroom-filmtekste, ten einde (a) die aanname te problematiseer wat via kontemporêre kulturele 'produkte' soos die hoofstroomfilm gepropageer word dat dit onnodig is om in opstand te kom teen die verontmensliking wat spruit uit die 'tegnosentrisme' van die postmoderniteit, en (b) sodoende lig te werp op die lelike kant van sublieme tegnologiese ontwikkeling.
Sleutelwoorde: kapitalistiese tegnowetenskap; verontmensliking; tegnosentrisme

Lyotard and Kristeva: The 'technocentricism' of postmodernity and its negative impact upon the subject[1]

Lyotard's definition of the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard 1984a: xxiv) is generally understood as advancing the idea that, in the contemporary era, there has occurred a discrediting of the grand narratives of modernity,[2] which previously organised knowledge in the interest of the future attainment of either the universal emancipation of humanity, in the case of the 'grand narrative of emancipation', or, absolute knowledge, in the case of the 'speculative grand narrative'; that is, for Lyotard, these grand narratives have been discredited through certain 'signs of history' that have undermined the rationale upon which they were founded. For example, in the light of such momentous (and horrific) historical occurrences as 'Auschwitz',[3] Lyotard argues that "the project of modernity (the realization of universality) has not been forsaken or forgotten, but [rather] destroyed, [or] 'liquidated'" (Lyotard 1984b: 18).

However, importantly, Lyotard *also* attributes the 'incredulity toward metanarratives' that pervades postmodernity to the spread of capitalism and the concomitant development of technoscience, because of the way in which both have severed traditional social bonds that, during modernity, had enjoined humanity in grand narratives of progress. That is, the ideas of 'justice' and 'truth' – the respective goals of the two central grand narratives of modernity – no longer hold currency in the postmodern world, because, in this period, in "matters of social justice and scientific truth alike, the legitimation of…power is based on its [capacity

to] optimis[e]…the *system's* performance" [my italics](Lyotard 1984b: xxiv) in terms of *efficiency* or *profit*.[4] Therefore, for Lyotard, 'capitalist technoscience' "destroy[s]…the project of modernity while giving the *impression* of completing it[, since t]he subject's mastery over the objects generated by contemporary science and technology does not bring greater freedom…or greater wealth more evenly distributed[, but rather brings]…an increased reliance on facts" [my italics](Lyotard 1984a: 18), along with an emphasis on the vague criterion of 'success'.

On these grounds, Lyotard arrives at an important conclusion, namely that technoscientific development, far from benefiting humanity, actually

> deepens [its]…malaise[, such that it]…is no longer possible to call development *progress*. It seems to proceed *of its own accord*, with…an *autonomous* motoricity that is *independent of us*. It does not answer to demands issuing from *human* needs. *On the contrary*, human entities – whether social or individual – always seem *destabilized* by the results and implications of development. [my italics](Lyotard 1985: 78)

That is, for Lyotard, firstly, technoscience has become 'autonomous', with the result that it is no longer in the service of humanity, insofar as it now functions as an 'inhuman' organising framework for society,[5] as attested to by "the massive subordination of cognitive statements to the finality of the best possible performance – which is a *technical* criterion" [my italics](Lyotard 1982: 9). Secondly, as a consequence of this, 'capitalist technoscience' effects the reduction of the *human* being to a *technical* product, insofar as this "vanguard machine drags humanity after it, dehumanising it in the drive for ultimate efficiency" (Lyotard 1984b: 63). Thirdly, in addition, any residual resistance to this process is dissolved, because, as Lyotard states in his 'Answer to the Question, What is the Postmodern?' (1982), *cinema*, amongst other mainstream cultural 'products', placates individuals and concomitantly bolsters the status quo by co-opting them. That is, for Lyotard, mainstream cinema operates to

> protect…consciousness from doubt[, insofar as it stabilises]…the referent,…ordering it from a point of view that would give it recognizable meaning, of repeating a syntax and lexicon that would allow addressees to decode images and sequences rapidly, and make it easy for them to become conscious both of their own identities and of the approval they thereby receive from others – since *the structures in these images and sequences form a code of communication among them all*. [my italics](Lyotard 1982: 5-6)

To a large extent, Kristeva's criticism of the 'automated' nature of contemporary society, and its negative effects on the subject, echoes Lyotard's above-mentioned lament. That is, firstly, Kristeva follows Guy Debord's similar argument that the "spectacle *subjugates living men to itself* to the extent that the economy has *totally* subjugated them[, which]…is no more than *the economy developing for itself*" [my italics](Debord 1983: 16).[6] Secondly, like Lyotard, she advances that, in postmodernity, we "are expected to be *performing entities*[, a]t best…asked to *work well*" [my italics](Kristeva 2002: 101). Thirdly, Kristeva, although again following Debord, also echoes Lyotard when she argues that films, advertisements and other forms of mainstream entertainment, bolster the socio-economic status quo by placating and co-opting individuals. Yet, arguably, in comparison to Lyotard, Kristeva provides a far more insightful account of what exactly may underpin the individual's *incapacity* to resist his/her subjugation and dehumanisation at the hands of capitalism and its accomplice, 'technoscience', via her exploration of the 'micro-politics' of the subject, especially in relation to the gradual decline of the subject's psychic life and revolutionary potential.[7]

That is, while Kristeva *does* echo Lyotard when she advances that the "Society of the Spectacle tells us not to worry: [that our capitalist and 'technocentric' social organisation]…*is* the revolutionary product, [and that one will]…become a consumer and arrive at a resolution" (Kristeva 2002: 104), she also argues that, in our "automated…world[, the]…whole problematic of interrogation, of the *return to the self*, the questioning and the conflicts that are *sources of human freedom* have become obliterated, rejected or even destroyed parameters" [my

italics](Kristeva 2002: 101-102). Kristeva's latter account, concerning both the subject's inability to lead a fulfilling psychic life, and his/her consequent incapacity to 'revolt', is underpinned by her belief that "revolt[, although in part conceptual, is, ultimately,]…a very deep movement of discontent, *anxiety* and *anguish*" [my italics](Kristeva 2002: 99), and is thus to a large extent predicated on the agency of a 'semiotic' mode of signification. In brief, Kristeva argues that, while the 'symbolic' mode of signification "depends on language as a sign system complete with its grammar and syntax[, the 'semiotic' mode constitutes]…the *extra-verbal* way in which [the subject's] bodily *energy* and *affects* make their way into language" [my italics](McAfee 2004: 17), and she advances that contemporary subjects have become *anaesthetised* to the 'semiotic' by being bombarded with mediated images. The result of this is that humans, "instead of experiencing the shallowness and meaninglessness of capitalist society,…experience [those mediated]…images [that bolster the socio-economic status quo]…as real" (McAfee 2004: 109); in short, in our 'technocentric' society, the individual has been

> swept away by insignificant and valueless objects that offer a perverse pleasure, but no satisfaction[, and has become an]…amphibian[,]…a being of boundaries, a borderline, or a 'false self' – *a body that acts, often without even the joys of such performative drunkenness*[. Thus, for Kristeva,]…man is *losing his soul*, but he does not know it, for the psychic apparatus[, which]…registers representations and their meaningful values for the subject[,]…needs repair. [my italics](Kristeva 1995: 8-9)

A 'critical appropriation' of Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006)

The above theoretical observations, concerning the autonomous nature of 'capitalist technoscience' and its dehumanising, and 'semiotically ruinous', effects on the subject, manifest themselves clearly in the cinematic narrative of Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006), the inescapable irony that the film's creators were apparently unaware of the critical aspects of the cinematic narrative, notwithstanding. That is, despite the film's representation of those problems, identified by Lyotard and Kristeva as inherent in the *contemporary* 'technocentric' milieu, Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006), for all intents and purposes, constitutes a typically 'mainstream' cinematic product that operates to bolster the socio-economic status quo by 'protecting consciousness from doubt'; this is because, if the film is approached from an uncritical perspective, its radically subversive potential remains 'dormant' because of the way in which the problems represented in its narrative are perceived as *fictitious*. That is, through publicity descriptions of Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006), those detrimental aspects of technoscientific development represented in the cinematic narrative, are characterised as figments of the *imagination* and attributed to the agency of 'ghosts' from another dimension, who have gained access to the human world via technological devices:

> Imagine our wireless technologies made a connection to a world beyond our own. Imagine that world used that technology as a doorway into ours. Now, imagine the connection we made can't be shut down. When you turn on your cell phone or log on to your e-mail, they'll get in, you'll be infected and they'll be able to take from you what they don't have…– life. [my italics](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0454919/plotsummary)

However, in a manner that echoes the three above-mentioned criticisms on the part of Lyotard and Kristeva, namely those concerning the autonomous nature of 'capitalist technoscience', and its negative effects on, and co-option of, individuals, the narrative of Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006) involves an 'imagined' scenario in which technoscience has, firstly, 'exceeded' the human sphere of control to such a degree that it has become utterly autonomous, secondly, begun to impact negatively on the 'human' world, insofar as it has dehumanised every individual and destroyed social bonds, and thirdly, endeavoured to maximise its own power by seizing the individual's 'life', particularly at a psychic level. Albeit in hindsight, by 'salvaging' these inadvertently critical aspects of the cinematic narrative of Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006) through thematising their consonance with Lyotard's and Kristeva's criticisms, this article aims to demonstrate the value

of, and to foster an increased engagement in, the 'critical appropriation' of potentially subversive mainstream cinematic texts.

The central crisis of the narrative of Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006) derives from the unexpectedly horrific results of the development of a telecom project, on the part of the character of Douglas Zieglar (Kel O'Neill) and his team of experts. That is, in the film, Zieglar (Kel O'Neill) states that while working on this project, he and his team "found frequencies [that they]…didn't even know existed[, and that 'ghosts']…came through [who, e]very time [attempts were made]…to monitor them,…would stop or…would change frequencies"; furthermore, Zieglar (Kel O'Neill) argues that these 'ghosts', subsequently, "crawled the entire regional network, *everywhere* [–] cell phones, PDAs…[– with the result that he was powerless to]…stop them." Significantly, the creators of this film are quite explicit in their identification of the discursive underpinnings of this crisis in the narrative, insofar as, in the documentary *Pulse and the Paranormal* (2007), which was released with the DVD version of Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006), an overt link is made between the film's theme and the phenomenon of "ITC[, or,]…Instrumental Trans-Communication[, which constitutes]…a method by which one peers into alternate realities or other dimensions by way of ordinary video equipment." In short, the experts interviewed in this documentary draw explicit parallels between the cinematic narrative's thematisation of the ghosts' inexorable invasion of the human realm via a plethora of technological devices, and current speculations concerning the viewing of paranormal phenomena through such means as "computer monitors and the like." However, as aforementioned, in *opposition* to this 'intended' couching of the cinematic narrative in terms of the 'paranormal' phenomena that constitute the central focus of discussions of 'ITC', this article aims to 'critically appropriate' Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006) by interpreting the 'paranormal' phenomena, and certain other elements, represented in the cinematic narrative, from a *symbolic* point of view. In short, if perceived in this manner, the 'paranormal' phenomena and certain other elements in the film, albeit inadvertently, appositely symbolise the autonomous nature of 'capitalist technoscience', and its negative effects on, and co-option of, individuals, to corroborate Lyotard's and Kristeva's criticisms concerning the 'technocentric' predicament of postmodernity.

Firstly, from such a critical perspective, the admissions on the part of the character, Zieglar (Kel O'Neill), namely that the development of the telecom project had unexpected *repercussions*, and that he has no *control* over the 'ghosts' that subsequently emerged, are easily made sense of in terms of Lyotard's criticisms concerning the development of, and, ultimately, the *autonomy* of, 'capitalist technoscience'. That is, while Zieglar's (Kel O'Neill's) former comment corroborates Lyotard's argument that humans are detrimentally affected by the "*results* and *implications* of [technological] development" [my italics](Lyotard 1985: 78), his latter comment reflects Lyotard's conception that technology "seems to proceed *of its own accord*, with…an *autonomous* motoricity that is *independent of us*" [my italics](Lyotard 1985: 78). Moreover, amongst other things, the film focuses on personal computers processing information in the absence of their human 'users', or preventing their 'users' from stopping or inhibiting their 'autonomous' processes, as attested to, firstly, by the central character, Mattie Webber (Kristen Bell), who demands that Dexter McCarthy (Ian Somerhalder) erase a computer's hard drive, to which Dexter (Ian Somerhalder) replies: "I tried; *it won't let me*", and, secondly, by Dexter (Ian Somerhalder), who, at a later stage, tells Mattie (Kristen Bell) that he believes that he "can still shut the system down", to which Mattie (Kristen Bell) responds, exasperated: "Don't you get it? There's no system to *shut down*. *They* [i.e. the 'ghosts'] *are* the system." As such, if one regards the 'ghosts' that, in the film, take control of all technological devices and 'debilitate' any humans that attempt to stop them, as *symbolic* of the autonomous power of 'capitalist technoscience' itself, the constant thematisation, in the narrative, of the characters' utter lack of control over technology, arguably, involves an immense cautionary sentiment.

Secondly, when 'appropriated' in this critical manner, Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006), again, far from bolstering the 'technocentric' socio-economic status quo, appears to thematise Lyotard's argument that technological development "does not answer to demands issuing from *human needs*[, and that]...human entities – whether social or individual – always seem *destabilized* by the results and implications of development [my italics](Lyotard 1985: 78).[8] The most striking reflection, in the cinematic narrative, of such criticism *à propos* of the effects of 'capitalist technoscience' on human life, derives from an aged man's (Joseph Gatt's) hypothesis concerning a spate of suicides and 'vaporisations' that, as will be discussed shortly,[9] run concomitant with what the film overtly represents as the ghosts' encroachment on technological devices:

> 'It [i.e. the spate of suicides and 'vaporisations'] makes all the sense in the world. Do you have *any* idea of the *amount of data* that's floating out there? The *amount of information* we just beam into the air? We broadcast to *everyone* where we are, and we think we're *safe*? The whole…city is going *insane*, and we're *acting like its nothing*. Well, it's *not* nothing. It's something we *don't understand*, and it is coming for *us*…'

That is, what this man's (Joseph Gatt's) assertions bring into conspicuity, is that the 'results and implications' of technoscientific development *do*, as Lyotard advanced, render our human situation essentially unstable, both at an individual, as well as at a social, level.[10] In fact, the legitimacy of the man's (Joseph Gatt's) criticisms is bolstered by other elements in Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006) that point to the manner whereby the omnipresence of information technology and the proliferation of technological devices have impacted negatively on social bonds. That is, while numerous characters have 'personal websites' where they, unthinkingly, disseminate their private information,[11] both the university grounds and the dance clubs represented in the film, are no longer spaces devoted to socialising, but have rather become 'zones' where students, although in close physical proximity to one another, nevertheless exist in psychological *isolation* from each other, insofar as they busy themselves with their latest cell phones, laptop computers, or PDAs. In addition, the detrimental effect of the encroachment of technology on intimate relationships is hinted at, firstly, when, in a dance club, Tim Steinberg (Samm Levine), although sitting at the same table as his friend, instead of asking her to dance, rather sends her the text message, "Wanna dance?", and, secondly, when the character Mattie (Kristen Bell), declares that her "relationship [with her boyfriend, Josh (Jonathan Tucker),] has been reduced to text messaging."

Thirdly, if approached from the critical perspective encouraged by this article, the cinematic narrative of Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006) manifests other elements that corroborate not only Lyotard's, but also, more importantly, Kristeva's, conceptions concerning the deteriorating effect that 'spectacles' such as films, and other mainstream cultural 'products' occasioned by technological development, have on the subject's psychic life and on his/her capacity to resist complete dehumanisation at the hands of capitalism and its accomplice, 'technoscience'. As aforementioned, Kristeva was markedly influenced by Debord, who, like Lyotard, advanced that the spectacle "*subjugate[s]…living men* to itself to the extent that the economy has totally subjugated them" [my italics](Debord 1983: 16); in her turn, Kristeva argues that, in our 'automated' world, a 'return to the self' and "the questioning and the conflicts that are *sources of human freedom*[,] have become obliterated…or even destroyed parameters" [my italics](Kristeva 2002: 101-102). That is, as discussed earlier, Kristeva advances that "revolt[, which] is a very deep movement of discontent, anxiety and anguish" (Kristeva 2002: 99), is contingent upon the existence of a 'semiotic' mode of signification, or, "the extra-verbal way in which [the subject's] bodily energy and affects make their way into language" (McAfee 2004: 17), but that contemporary subjects have become *anaesthetised* to the 'semiotic' by being bombarded with mediated images, and that they are psychically drained through their 'enslavement' to technology, all of which enfeebles their capacity to 'revolt'. As such, for Kristeva, the subject has been

swept away by insignificant and valueless objects that offer a perverse pleasure, but no satisfaction[, and has become]…a 'false self' – *a body that acts, often without even the joys of such performative drunkenness*[, who]… is *losing his soul* [unknowingly, because his]…psychic apparatus[, which]…registers representations and their meaningful values for the subject[,]…needs repair. [my italics](Kristeva 1995: 8-9)

In short, in the light of Kristeva's conceptions, and provided that, as suggested earlier, one perceives the 'ghosts' that infiltrate the technological devices in Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006) as *symbolic* of the autonomous nature and dehumanising power of 'capitalist technoscience', it is possible to make sense of the suicides and 'vaporisations' that proceed from the characters' encounters with these 'ghosts', in a manner that does not unequivocally relegate these incidents to the domain of *fiction*. That is, if one approaches these suicides and 'vaporisations' with Kristeva's argument in mind, the ghosts' effect on their victims could be regarded as analogous to the negative impact that 'capitalist technoscience' and its handmaiden, information technology, exercise upon the subject's psychic life, because, once a character in the cinematic narrative has come into contact with a 'ghost' through utilising a *technological* device, their body begins to atrophy and their will to live begins to wane,[12] which, arguably, symbolise both the depletion of their 'semiotic' energy and the degeneration of their psychic life. In fact, the legitimacy of this article's manifestly 'symbolic' interpretation of the suicides and 'vaporisations' represented in the cinematic narrative, is considerably augmented by Ziegler's (Kel O'Neill's) and Josh's (Jonathan Tucker's) accounts concerning the ghosts' effect on their victims, because these characters' explanations appear to comport with Kristeva's descriptions of the subject's loss of the 'semiotic', and of the decline of the subject's psychic life, both of which cause the subject to become "a 'false self'[, or,]…*a body that acts, often without even the joys of such performative drunkenness*[, who]…is *losing his soul*" [my italics](Kristeva 1995: 8-9). That is, while Ziegler (Kel O'Neill) warns: "The last thing you…ever want is for them to get to you[, because]…when they grab…hold, they *take your will to live. Everything that made you you is gone*. You don't want to *talk*, you don't want to *move*. You're a *shell*", Josh (Jonathan Tucker), the computer hacker who is the first character to encounter one of these 'ghosts', similarly states: "Something's wrong with me[,]…I can still feel it, like it reached inside of me, like it *took something out of me*…my *life*; it's *breaking me down*, I feel like there's nothing left of me. I can't *think*, I can't *move*, I can't take the pain. I just can't…*I'm not even me anymore*. It's all *gone*, I can't go on." Ultimately, the striking *affinity* between, on the one hand, Kristeva's critique of the destructive impact of our 'automated' world upon the subject, and, on the other hand, these cinematic characters' descriptions of the effect that the 'ghosts' (or, perceived symbolically, the encroachment of technology), have on subjectivity, can only be fully appreciated in the light of McAfee's lucid account of Kristeva's theorisations concerning the decline of the subject's psychic life, and the atrophying of their 'semiotic' capacity, both of which are crucial to 'revolt':

Without the threat of revolt against the symbolic order, the psyche *loses* its energy. It loses [its]…*life-enhancing* force…The self becomes *more of an automaton than a human being.* [Such]…people become closed off. Instead of being in love and alive, they are in *isolation. No living being can thrive this way*. [my italics](McAfee 2004: 106)[13]

Conclusion

Over and above the affinity between, on the one hand, Lyotard's and Kristeva's criticisms concerning the autonomous nature of 'capitalist technoscience', and its negative effects on, and co-option of, individuals, and, on the other hand, the events that occur, and the sentiments that are expressed, in the cinematic narrative of Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006), certain *other* 'symbols' in the film further augment the legitimacy of this article's 'critical appropriation' of this mainstream cinematic text. That is, firstly, one of the characters, Isabell Fuentes (Christina

Milian), declares shortly before her demise that "dying tastes like…*metal*", a statement that could, quite plausibly, constitute a reference to the *matériel* of the majority of technological devices. Secondly, another character who has encountered the 'ghosts', hangs himself with a *telephone* cord, and, thirdly, the character Stone (Rick Gonzalez), once 'infected' by the ghosts, feels impelled to "leav[e his]…*computer* alone." Furthermore, in the denouement of the film, when Mattie (Kristen Bell) and Dexter (Ian Somerhalder) are escaping their deserted city by car, arguably, the dangers inherent in unabated technoscientific development are again alluded to, insofar as, during a radio broadcast, a United States military official announces that the army has "established 'safe zones' in locations *without* wireless or cell phone coverage[, and that c]ell phones, computers and PDAs are all caught in the spreading invasion[, with the consequence that survivors must] *dispose* of *all technology* before proceeding to these locations." In sum, despite these symbols' inadvertence, (owing to their being couched in a debate surrounding the 'paranormal', rather than in one that considers the possibility that technology *itself* poses a threat to subjects' psychic and 'semiotic' wellbeing), the subversive value inherent in these symbols, as well as in the film's other covertly critical elements examined earlier, should not be underestimated – hence this article's 'critical appropriation' of this mainstream cinematic text. By demonstrating such a 'critical appropriation', this article hopes to have brought to light the possible 'political' value of identifying, and thus activating, the dormant critical potentialities that reside in other mainstream cultural 'products', in the interest of challenging, amongst other things, the prevailing contemporary assumption that there is *always* a 'technological' solution to every problem, through exposing the ugly side of sublime technological development. Ultimately, if such 'critical appropriative' endeavours are undertaken, they stand to inaugurate something akin to 'guerrilla warfare' against what Lyotard perceived as mainstream cinema's *modus operandi*, namely, the bolstering of the status quo by "protecting consciousness from doubt" (Lyotard 1982: 5).

Notes

1   It is, from the outset, crucial to note that this article embraces the poststructuralists' perspective that "the subject is both 'spoken by' language, and simultaneously able to (re-)position him- or herself in language or with regard to the desire-invested galaxy of media icons" (Olivier 2007, *in press*).

2   The advent of 'modernity' has been identified with any one of a number of 'momentous' historical events, such as, amongst others, "the transformation of European culture during the renaissance[, and]…the French Revolution that forged modern notions of the state" (Malpas 2003: 9). However, for the sake of clarity, this article follows Olivier, who, firstly, defines 'premodernity' as the period that preceded 'modernity' and that was underpinned by "pervasive…superstitio[n]" (Olivier 2007, *in press*), and, secondly, interprets 'modernity' as the era, following 'premodernity', in which superstition was rejected in favour of reason and a concomitant reliance on future-orientated grand narratives promising 'universal' human progress or emancipation. In turn, 'postmodernity', or, postmodern culture,

entails a rejection of "the validity of attempts to universalize about nature and society[, and, furthermore, involves the move of]…technology…into the stage of electronically mediated information and communication" (Olivier 2007, *in press*).

3   Lyotard cites 'Auschwitz' as one such 'sign of history' because, although it was informed by the speculative doctrine, "'All that is real is rational, all that is rational is real'[, it, in effect, constituted a]…crime, which was real, [but]… *not* rational" [my italics](Lyotard 1989: 318).

4   This assertion finds support in Olivier's argument that "science no longer sets the agenda for technology, as it did at the dawn of the historical emergence of western modernity[, because]…the relation has been reversed, [insofar as]…what operates at *all levels*, including that of communication, in society, is 'technoscience' – which, it just so happens, is also the driving force behind information technology and 'informatization' as the *determining mode of economic production* in contemporary culture and society" [my italics](Olivier 2007, *in press*).

5   This article accepts the conception, underpinned by Heidegger's perspective concerning the power of technology, that "technology cannot be seen merely as a 'tool'…, but essentially as 'enframing'…which fundamentally directs the way in which people think and act in the present era, in the same manner that the middle ages were properly called 'theocentric'" (Olivier 2007: 450); cf. note 4.

6   In fact, many of Kristeva's conceptions are informed by those of Guy Debord, the author of *Society of the Spectacle* (1983), who, like Lyotard, problematises the way in which 'spectacles' such as films and other forms of mainstream entertainment – all of which are facilitated by technological development – operate to buttress the socio-economic status quo by 'pacifying' individuals.

7   Admittedly, when Kristeva speaks of 'revolt' from the mid-1970s onwards, she privileges the 'micro-politics' of the subject over the 'macro-politics' of society. However, it is of *crucial* importance to note that, "unlike most theorists of political revolution, Kristeva points to the *fundamental necessity of psychological revolt* – revolt against identity, homogenization, the spectacle, and the law[, and argues that, i]f we do not keep alive an inner zone, a secret garden, a life of the mind,…there is *little possibility for any meaningful political revolt*" [my italics](McAfee 2004: 118).

8   This conception resembles the critical perspective of Hardt and Negri, who "remind one [that]…the distinctive feature of postmodern culture is…'informatization' – the fact that *all facets of social life are subjected to ubiquitous information technology*, which supersedes all previously decisive features of modern culture, such as industrialization and the primacy of science" [my italics](Olivier 2007, *in press*).

9   The author has chosen the term, 'vaporisation', to account for the manner in which the ghosts'

victims come to grief, because, once a character has encountered the 'ghosts', the character's body begins to atrophy, to the point where either he/she commits suicide, or his/her body reaches such a state of atrophy that it implodes, and then 'vaporises'.

10   The legitimacy of this article's argument that Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006), if it is not 'appropriated' critically, constitutes a typically 'mainstream' cinematic product that bolsters the socio-economic status quo by 'protecting consciousness from doubt', is considerably augmented by the fact that the credibility of this man's (Joseph Gatt's) criticisms, concerning the dangers inherent in the 'technocentrism' of contemporary society, is overtly negated by the character of a young woman (Christine Barger), who attributes the man's distressed outburst to "the booze in [his]…coffee."

11   The phenomenon of 'Facebook', which has recently taken South Africa by storm, constitutes a good example of this trend, on the part of contemporary youths, of 'advertising' the details of their private lives on the World Wide Web; cf. note 8.

12   Cf. note 9.

13   The correspondence between McAfee's Kristevan account of the subject's loss of the 'semiotic', and the 'atrophying' of the victims in Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006), is underscored by the fact that, in relation to the death of her best friend Isabell Fuentes (Christina Milian), the character, Mattie Webber (Kristen Bell), states: "She was just standing there – *empty*. Like she *wanted* to die." Furthermore, McAfee's description of the behaviour of the 'semiotically depleted' subject appositely reflects the bearing of the victims in Sonzero's *Pulse* (2006), insofar as the latter, once 'infected', similarly isolate themselves from their peers.

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