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From Kitsch and Carnivalesque to Cultural Appropriations: Liminal Representations of Post-Apartheid White Identity in Die Antwoord's Music Videos

ABSTRACT

Through their multi-dimensional artistic performances—manifesting in music, lyrics and videos—the South African rap-rave hip-hop duo Die Antwoord expresses the ethos of "Zef," a white working-class Afrikaner post-apartheid culture. Zef is associated with a specific style of vulgar aesthetics, language and humour which portrays its subjects in a derogatory manner, by presenting their appearance and behaviour as crudely ill-bred and vainly tasteless. This paper discusses discursive and visual strategies employed in selected Die Antwoord music videos, demonstrating how their use of kitsch aesthetics and carnivalesque elements allows them to render the liminality of contemporary white Afrikaans experience. It also examines the way in which the appropriation of cultural signifiers in the band's work undermines myths of authenticity, represents the fragmentariness of subjectivity, and emphasizes the rhizomatic qualities of post-apartheid identity. The primary example will concern the band's adaptation of Roger Ballen's photographic work. Absorbing Ballen's aesthetics is shown to be part of a broader artistic strategy of appropriation adopted by Die Antwoord with the view of attacking established social categories and destabilizing normativity. As the paper postulates, the band's music videos employ liminal and carnivalesque artistic modes, combined with intertextual appropriations, in order to interrogate post-apartheid South African identity.

Keywords: Die Antwoord, music videos, Zef, Roger Ballen, appropriation, intertextuality, kitsch, carnivalesque.

With the release and immediate YouTube success of their two limited-budget music videos, "Enter the Ninja" and "Zef Side," the South African rap-rave hip-hop duo Die Antwoord entered the hall of international fame in 2009—not with a whimper, but with a bang. Their creative pursuit equally combines music and visual arts: it was mostly their music videos, virally dispersing through the Internet, that account for their popularity and significant critical acclaim, as well as abundant unfavourable opinions. The band members, Watkin Tudor Jones, a.k.a. "Ninja," and Anri du Toit, a.k.a. "Yo-Landi Vi$$er," pay significant attention to the visual aspects of Die Antwoord, both in their music videos (many self-directed) and in their meticulously stylized public image, complete with peculiar outfits and flagrant tattoos. The ideological dimension of their public persona is their claim to express the ethos of "Zef," a white working-class Afrikaner post-apartheid counterculture movement. The band's defiance manifests, among other things, in persistently rejecting cooperation with large record labels: their debut album *O* was self-released (and available as a free download); the subsequent four albums were released by their own independent label, Zef Records. An apt illustration of their self-ironical and subversive attitude is the self-presentation in the spoken prequel to an early video: when the interviewer observes that the name of the band means "the answer" in Afrikaans, he asks "The answer to what?", at which Ninja scoffs and says "Whatever, man" ("Zef Side").

The socio-cultural reality of early 21st-century South Africa is marked with many inescapable dissonances; hence, the articulation of attitudes and identities requires an innovative approach to cultural codes and signs. "Authenticity" is established in destabilization and hybridization. As it happens, Die Antwoord are virtuosos of hybridity. This paper shows how their flagrant use of kitsch aesthetics, carnivalesque obscenities, cheap parody and intertextual appropriation allows them to render the liminal experience of white Afrikaans post-apartheid youth and to represent their fractured and fragmentary subjectivity. It also discusses discursive and visual strategies employed in selected Die Antwoord music videos, demonstrating how the appropriation of cultural signifiers and their use as *objets trouvés* can be used to undermine the myths of authenticity and emphasize the rhizomatic qualities of post-apartheid identity. The primary example will concern the band's adaptation of Roger Ballen's photographic work. The analyzed material embraces selected videos from Die Antwoord's first four albums, *O* (2009), *Ten$ion* (2012), *Donker Mag* (2014), and *Mount Ninji and da Nice Time Kid* (2016).

The South African "Zef" identity, emerging among young Afrikaners in the early 2000s, is deeply rooted in the country's specific post-apartheid socio-cultural landscape. The transfer of political power from

the (white-controlled) National Party to the (black-controlled) African National Congress, which took place after the first democratic elections in 1994, effectively meant that South Africans had to reconstruct their social relations and re-establish their identities. The name often used for the new political project, the "Rainbow Nation," coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was supposed to represent the idea of a multicultural and ethnically unbiased post-apartheid order. The first and foremost aim of this socio-political trajectory was to eradicate racial segregation and prejudice, securing human rights and adequate democratic representation for each ethnic group. This obviously meant that whites had to yield their privileged position, sharing political power with blacks and coloureds (as these terms were defined in the 1950 Population Registration Act); they mostly experienced the democratic transition as "ushering in vulnerability" (Steyn 10). In effect, as de Klerk phrases it, in post-apartheid South Africa "whiteness as privileged and privileging signifier seems to have gone into hiding" (41). The loss of a highly advantaged status and, especially, the decline of the economic situation, has occurred in the first years of the new century, most acutely among South African people of Afrikaans origins. When they no longer maintained previously enjoyed state protection, they became much more likely to become unemployed and impoverished. Statistics show rising levels of joblessness and destitution among working-class Afrikaners, leading to social phenomena unprecedented in this ethnic group, such as begging, squatting and homelessness (Wood). As Anton Krueger notes, "[t]he transition to democracy in 1994 implied, for many white Afrikaners, defeat, failure, guilt, and self-abnegation" (401).

The dynamic processes of post-apartheid social destabilization, which transferred white Afrikaans identity into "a liminal space" and demanded that it be "challenged, renegotiated and possibly reconfigured" (Marx and Milton 727), led to the formation of Zef subculture in the early 21st century. The term itself was conceived in the late 1950s, and its name derived from the Ford Zephyr car, a cult motor classic in South Africa at the time. For several decades Zef was used as an unfavourable term to label poor working-class or unemployed white Afrikaners, but in post-apartheid years it acquired a "new designation" which started to "impl[y] an attitude of resilience" (Krueger 402). Zef certainly still evokes associations with crude aesthetics, vulgar taste and primitive obscenity, but the coarseness of "white trash" is now worn with self-ironic pride, and Zef's "impurity . . . appears to be invoked as an exalted hybridity" (Du Preez 107). This new, post-apartheid Zef style is utterly self-conscious, "staged and performed" (Van der Watt 411) and it entails, as Krueger puts it, "presenting a persona in a *purposefully* degrading way, *exaggerating* one's appearance and mannerisms as low class, ill bred, and boorish" (400, emphasis mine).

The features of Zef style are self-consciously displayed by Yo-Landi and Ninja in Die Antwoord's music videos.[1] Their looks are a pastiche of unrefined kitsch aesthetics. Ninja usually performs bare-chested, in boxer shorts, exposing his clumsy amateurish tattoos (the most articulate one is the self-mocking caption "PRETTY WISE," lettered below his Adam's apple). His demeanour of gaudy elegance includes heavy fake gold jewellery, gold-capped teeth and, occasionally, a painstakingly trimmed moustache. Posing as a would-be gangster, he often waves guns and wads of money. Yo-Landi is distinguished by her peculiar mullet hair, looking quite incompetently trimmed. She also sports superfluous artificial gold adornments and her clothes are overly pretentious, either in terms of bad-taste sumptuousness, like extravagant fake furs, or pretended childishness, like pink plush slippers or a Pokémon onesie. Their language, both in the lyrics and in the interviews, is also a caricature of rough unsophisticated discourse, splattered with swear words, often dumbed down and trivialized, e.g.: "Yeah girl, I'm a freak of nature / Sign my name on your boob, fuck a piece of paper" ("Evil Boy"). The duo often perform in highly contrasted voices: Ninja's dynamic rapping in a clear tenor, and Yo-landi's sugary "baby voice," a squeaky mezzosoprano produced in the head register. A well-known example is "Enter the Ninja," where Yo-landi, posing as a teenage girl, pleads in a high-pitched voice: "I am your butterfly / I need your protection / Be my samurai," to which her partner manly replies: "I'm a ninja, yo / My life is like a video game / . . . No fucking around I'm cutting down anyone in my path."

The flagrancy with which Die Antwoord display tawdry aesthetics in the image of their artistic persona as well as in their music videos relates to what Barragán and Ryynänen identify as the rise in cultural status that kitsch has enjoyed in recent decades. Identifying the sources of its ascent both in the eclecticism of postmodernist aesthetics and in the neoliberalist transformation of markets which brought demand for "global, efficient, homogenized, colorful, predictable, good-looking, and affirmative" products (22), and for "artists that produce easygoing, simple, and . . . spectacular artworks that flatter the eyes without needing any art historical knowledge" (23), the critics contend that presently "kitsch not only reflects our sensitive *zeitgeist*," but, what is more, that "the art world has been the *trendsetter* for many a kitsch in modern and contemporary culture" (19). Likewise, Lipovetsky and Serroy discern

[1] Die Antwoord's exhibition of Zef traits is generally part of their artistic persona, also performed on stage, in interviews and in other public acts, but my analysis focuses on music videos and does not cover these areas. References to those elements of their image will consequently be sparse.

the elevation of kitsch aesthetics status: while formerly it was correlated with "heaviness, heaping, and excess," now it denotes "relaxing laughter and ironic lightness" and "expresses less contempt for the popular than a desire for the cheerful and distanced lightness" (74). While in the past it evoked "the conformism of imitation and the negation of autonomous individualism" (78), presently kitsch can be artistically employed as "a way of affirming individual subjectivity, making fun of the norms of legitimate culture, escaping taste's conformism, stereotypes of 'seriousness,' and 'respectable' appearances" (77). In this context, it can be assumed that the shocking spectacles of kitsch artistic inadequacy and commercial, eye-catching triviality employed by Die Antwoord can serve a creative and political purpose.

Vulgar and gaudy imagery projected by the band in their looks, behaviour and lyrics also evokes associations with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque. This has been frequently noted by critics, who connect Die Antwoord's "monstrous carnivalesque extravaganza" (Du Preez 103) with the Zef aesthetics propagated by their artistic persona, especially through music videos. For Krueger, the Zef identity in general can be "closely linked to carnivalesque aspects of the festival experience, such as excess, pleasure, performing youth identities, and experimenting with sexuality" (404). Likewise, Bekker and Levon note that Die Antwoord construct the Zef aesthetic "as a form of carnivalesque performance," which is particularly seen in "the prevalence of grotesque realism, or a focus on depicting the materiality of bodily existence and the debasement of more noble concepts" (136). Bakhtin's idea of the carnival, as the time which "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order [and] marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 10), directly corresponds to the liminal position of post-apartheid "white trash" Afrikaans identity, distrustful both of the former hegemonic colonial authority and of the new "Rainbow nation" idealism. This subversion and disrespect are realized through the employment of the grotesque, which relies, for Bakhtin, on "exaggeration, hyperbolism [and] excessiveness" (303). In my view, the carnivalesque strategies employed by Die Antwoord in their music videos can be classified into four categories. The first one, *monstrosity and ugliness*, consists in using repulsive and loathsome images, such as scorpions and spiders crawling over Ninja's head and naked torso, or bugs writhing in his open mouth in "Fok Julle Naaiers," or blood smeared over Yo-landi's barely clad body in "Pitbull Terrier." The second, *disrespect and blasphemy*, entails openly derisive portrayals of famous personages, such as celebrities (e.g., Lady Gaga in "Fatty Boom Boom," or Oscar Pistorius in "Banana Brain"), as well as profane insults of religious symbols, for instance, an

almost naked woman twerking against a cross painted on the wall ("Fat Faded Fuck Face"), or a picture of Jesus hanging next to one of a nude woman on the wall of a suburban family house ("Baby's On Fire"). The third category, *obscenity and sexuality*, manifests in unreserved displays of sexualized bodies, both male and female (e.g., breasts in "Evil Boy" or "Rich Bitch," penises in "Evil Boy"), as well as in the arrangement of the bodies suggestive of a sexual act (as in "Fat Faded Fuck Face" or "Cookie Thumper"). The final category, of *kitsch and vulgarity*, is explicit throughout Die Antwoord's lyrics and presents itself also in brazen expressions of bad taste, observed not only in the abovementioned gaudy stylization of their artistic persona, but additionally in narrative details, such as Yo-landi's gold toilet seat ("Rich Bitch") or Ninja lighting up his cigarette with a burning dollar banknote ("Ugly Boy"). In one of their most emblematic music videos, "I Fink U Freeky," which features most of the characteristics of their grotesque insurgence, Die Antwoord's lyrics self-consciously—and self-ironically—announce their devotion to weirdness through the repeated verse "I fink you freeky and I like you a lot." Observing Yo-landi's vicious mockery and Ninja's evil grin, we clearly see that "carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter" (Bakhtin 8).

Another point of controversy around Die Antwoord's artistic project is situated around the band's appropriation, or, as some would have it, misappropriation, of the signifiers of sexuality, class, culture and race. In their attempts to represent marginalized South African post-apartheid identities, Yo-landi and Ninja employ an amalgam of various cultural borrowings. The obvious fact that the band draws from rap and hip-hop (musically, but also in terms of dress aesthetics), which are genres universally associated with black artists, is seen by some as a highly contentious, or even unethical, artistic strategy. For instance, Marx and Milton maintain that "the appropriation of the language and style of black-identified music forms and their attendant (sub)cultures by white musicians and audiences represents a form of cultural piracy" (740). Lanisa Kitchiner, in turn, claiming that hip-hop and rap should be regarded as a phenomena of black popular culture that voices the experiences of black communities, proposes that Die Antwoord's use of gangsta rap is only meant "to transmit longstanding codes of Black inferiority" (66). Likewise, the band have also been dismissed as modern "blackface minstrels," who evoke the image of white American popular culture performers producing racist black caricatures: Adam Haupt argues that Die Antwoord do not enter into dialogue with the hegemonic discourse, and, in consequence, their blackface acts only uphold "conservative racial . . . politics" (467). Other scholars, however, believe that the band "consciously deploys blackface as part of a strategic racial project," making a "shift from an understanding of race as essential to race as contingent" (Schmidt 134,

138). Furthermore, the advocates of Die Antwoord's postmodern project note that "through the appropriation of racial signifiers of other race groups, they are able to render their white identity ironic" (Scott 755). Indeed, the heavy dose of self-irony, which appears to elude some of the critics, is one of the hallmarks of the band's artistic persona that permeates their music video appearances. I would like to claim that, just as they use kitsch to articulate political statements with "ironic lightness" and employ carnivalesque obscenities to question authorities, Die Antwoord appropriate artistic and non-artistic *objets trouvés* with the view of representing present-day fractured South African identity. Despite the disapproving opinions of some critics, who, like Kitchiner and Haupt, blame Yo-landi and Ninja for unwarranted cultural appropriation—or even racism and misogyny—the audiences can find in their scandalizing artistic work acute political themes seasoned with blatant irony.

In the spoken introduction to Die Antwoord's first video, "Enter the Ninja," Ninja introduces himself wryly: "I represent South African culture. In this place you get a lot of different things: Blacks, Whites, Coloured, English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, watookal [*whatever*]. I'm like all these different things, all these different people, fucked into one person." In this way, he situates himself not as a privileged white person, but as "a mongrel gutter dog, both embracing and parodying a syncretic fusion of the many different cultures and races of South Africa, celebrating as well as subverting the rainbow nation discourse" (Krueger 400). Through their eclecticism and mimicry of various styles, cultures and traditions Die Antwoord represent the hybridity of South African identity. Their songs flaunt this hybridity through their mixture of various musical genres as well as languages in the lyrics, which combine mostly English and Afrikaans, but also include words borrowed from African indigenous languages, or from Cape Town gangster slang. Also Ninja's appearance, with his gold-capped teeth, apparently hand-drawn, prison-style tattoos, and ubiquitous guns, evoke Cape Flats gang culture. Apart from appropriated music genres, languages and elements of subculture, the identity concoction brewed by Die Antwoord relies significantly on their use of popular culture products. These are present in the music—for instance, "Enter the Ninja" includes fragments of Smile. dk's song "Butterfly," while "Zef Side" recycles Bronski Beat's "Hit That Perfect Beat"—as well as in the visuals: for instance, the video for "Baby's On Fire" features shots which directly reference well-known Hollywood blockbusters *Back to the Future* and *Terminator*, while in "Evil Boy" Ninja's hand is shown transformed into an alien "claw," just as with the protagonist of Neil Blomkamp's *District 9*, a film popular not only in South Africa.

Die Antwoord's ironical approach towards South African identity issues is often accomplished through their intertextual references to the works

of Anton Kannemeyer. Kannemeyer, a comics artist born in Cape Town, is recognized for referring critically to the South African early 21st century social and political climate: using irony, dark humour and subversive satire, he portrays post-apartheid social relations and stereotypes concerning South African culture. His 2010 book, *Pappa in Afrika*, a pastiche of Hergé's Tintin comics which sarcastically comments on racial and colonial issues, is openly invoked in Die Antwoord's "Fatty Boom Boom."[2] The video presents a woman dressed up as Lady Gaga, who—like Tintin in *Pappa in Afrika*—takes a tour through an "exotic" country in a shabby van driven by a grinning, excessively servile black guide. The exoticization and stereotypical representation of South Africa is spoofed in the narrative, which shows Lady Gaga in a concrete jungle of rundown, destitute Johannesburg streets, where hyenas scavenge on rubbish and local vendors keep a black panther and a lion as pets. The most transparent reference is the shot in "Fatty Boom Boom" whose composition directly copies Kannemeyer's picture "Black Gynaecologist."[3] Kannemeyer's works also correspond to Die Antwoord's music videos through their display of carnivalesque qualities: for instance, some of his works, such as "White Nightmare: Black Dicks,"[4] are an absurdist commentary on stereotypical portrayals of the virility of black race as a threat to white colonizers. A corresponding grotesque phallic imagery is present, for example, in the "Evil Boy" music video.

Yet the artist whose work is the most important intertextual basis for Die Antwoord's music videos is unquestionably Roger Ballen. Ballen is a photographer born in 1950 in the United States. He settled in Johannesburg in the 1980s and gained international recognition for *Platteland* (1994), a collection where he "exposed the myth of apartheid white supremacy in his portraits of poor, disabled and psychologically unstable sitters" (Barnard 45). His portrait work, continued in *Outland* (2001), employs a strategy of "penetrating facial masks to comprehend the psychological makeup of a person" (Gaule 48). Two of his notable photographs, "Dresie and Casie, Twins, Western Transvaal" and "Sergeant F de Bruin, Department of Prisons Employee, Orange Free State,"[5]

[2] The cover of *Pappa in Afrika*, showing some elements of the book's censure of racism and irony towards stereotypical representations of Africa, can be seen at the website of Michael Stevenson's gallery: https://www.stevenson.info/publication/anton-kannemeyer/pappa-in-afrika

[3] See https://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/kannemeyer/gynaecologist.htm

[4] See https://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/summer2007/kannemeyer1.htm

[5] Both pictures can be viewed on Tate Gallery's website: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ballen-dresie-and-casie-twins-western-transvaal-p20477, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ballen-sergeant-f-de-bruin-department-of-prisons-employee-orange-free-state-p20473

display the characteristic approach to their subjects: they "are not of ordinary human forms, but rather the governing image is of physical imperfection and deformity. They possess coarse exaggerated features, and appear unusual and bizarre," while the arrangement of the frame and lighting "magnifies details, highlighting flaws and imperfections" (Gaule 52). The portraits are pervaded with a sense of the subjects' isolation and despondency, as well as a more general aura of anxiety. Ballen himself points out that his subjects seem "ultimately powerless, trapped and inert, unable to change their destiny" and their eyes reflect a "state of existential despair" (81). At the same time, though, Ballen's models can sometimes be seen as displaying more agency and disquieting, stubborn resistance. Instead of accepting their vulnerability in passive anxiety, they seem to return the examining gaze of the camera and evoke distress in the onlooker.

These "prehensile portraits of the unprivileged" (Ballen 8), almost always white and lower class, are an important source of inspiration for Die Antwoord in their examination of Zef identity. The band's music videos also feature portraits, introduced in a manner highly unusual for this form: as static shots of single people, usually taken from their waist up, standing against a studio background and looking into the camera. They are filmed in black-and-white, just like Ballen's photographs. Some of them are portraits of Yo-landi and Ninja: the artists are not lip-syncing, but stand immobile in their poses, sometimes displaying unusual, disquieting facial expressions. Even more unconventional for the music video genre are static portraits of people other than band members, whose presence is not motivated by the narratives of particular videos, either. A particularly remarkable example is the introductory sequence of "Fok Julle Naaiers": over forty opening seconds of the video consist solely of such portrait shots of several people, each a few seconds long, fading in and out one after another. Similar portraits appear in other music videos, as well, e.g., in "I Fink U Freeky," where they substantially contribute to the eerily disturbing character of the video. Robert J. C. Young's description of Ballen's portraits in the introduction of the photographer's retrospective album—"the images have an in-your-face quality, too close for comfort which means that the portrait grasps at you, seizes you and holds you fast. It is not so much we who are looking at them, but rather they who are looking at us, compelling us to respond and submit to their gaze" (Ballen 8)—closely fits the portraits appearing in Die Antwoord's videos, too.

An important feature of Ballen's portraiture, also accountable for its specific, grim nature, is the setting. His subjects are pictured in their living quarters and these interiors—coarse, austere and unattractive—

are a crucial element constructing their identity. As Gaule notes, "the depiction of bare cement and earth floors, sparsely furnished interiors, unadorned walls and car seats supported by bricks create the impression of a temporary existence within these interiors" (55). The portraits of poor, plain white people in their shabby, disquieting houses—like "Cookie with his wife Tillie, Orange Free State"[6] or "Man Turtle"[7]—reveal not only the photographer's keen eye for social detail, but his utmost empathy. Ballen himself deems "ignorance, dejection, apathy and a lack of ambition" (77) responsible for the misery and hopelessness of his subjects, which are reflected by their living conditions. In some of his photographs, the subjects are absent: only the interiors speak of their residents, metonymically describing their disadvantaged status. A good example is "Bedroom of a Railway Worker, De Aar,"[8] with its web of disjointed wires representing precariousness and disorder of brittle existence, its collapsed symmetry denoting an absence of certainties, and its dismal crudeness implying quotidian banality. The bleak and lowly houses from Ballen's photographs parallel the stark suburban Cape Town neighbourhoods depicted in Die Antwoord's music videos such as "Zef Side," "Baby's On Fire," or "Pitbull Terrier."

Yet the most conspicuous element of Die Antwoord's music videos to be inspired by Ballen's work is wall drawings forming the background. Ballen, who initially used simple, whitewashed backgrounds of his subjects' house walls, was inspired to employ drawings after "photographing subjects against walls in homes saturated with their lines, marks and drawings" (151). In the early 2000s, drawing was gradually integrated into his portraiture, which, in time, gave way to symbolic still life photography. For his *Shadow Chamber* project (released in 2005), the key part of the artist's imagery was formed by "walls covered in scribbles, smudges, drawings and cut-outs, as well as broken frames, masks and wires of all kinds" (149). Good examples are "Funeral Rites,"[9] juxtaposing tall, ghostly domineering figures with small anxious human faces, or "Boarding House,"[10] a nightmarish residence with broken toys (some pinned to the wall), rather repulsive wall paintings, dilapidated furniture and two

[6] See https://www.artnet.com/artists/roger-ballen/cookie-with-wife-tillie-orange-free-state-Q0lyRfPycWWJuTZDhLQh3A2

[7] See https://flashbak.com/outland-roger-ballens-portraits-of-life-on-the-edge-of-reincarnation-40580/031-man-turtle/

[8] See https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ballen-bedroom-of-a-railway-worker-de-aar-p81269

[9] See https://www.artnet.com/artists/roger-ballen/funeral-rites-_3Id5KtBMykZ4IxtDMmuMw2

[10] See https://www.artspace.com/roger_ballen/boarding-house-2008

peripheral figures, a child and a dog. Ballen's uncanny, unsettling aesthetics attracted Die Antwoord, who used his graphics in their "Enter the Ninja" video and then sought his direct collaboration, first for a photo shoot, then for co-directing "I Fink U Freeky." The video was filmed on sets constructed on the basis of his photographs, with "a series of installations . . . that reflected [his] aesthetic" (Ballen 158). In their subsequent music videos, such as "Evil Boy," "Fatty Boom Boom" or "Fat Faded Fuck Face," the band use Ballenesque drawings on background walls, costumes, or body painting. The aesthetics of the drawings reflects the psychological tension and sinister unease of the band's artistic project. The paintings usually depict distorted or exaggerated figures, primitive human faces, animalistic masks, intricate abstract patterns, and ambiguous, enigmatic symbols. They are always monochromatic, raw and simple, their crudeness situating them close to tribal art, graffiti and children's pictures.

Ballen's art, which in the mid-2000s "started to incorporate aspects of both art brut and surrealism" (Ballen 158), is a piercing visual element of Die Antwoord's music videos, accentuating the otherworldly qualities of liminal spaces they wish to depict. Both his graphics, used by the band in various contexts, and his portrait photography, shaping some characters in the videos, are an important inspiration for the distinctive visual style, which fascinates many of their followers. Yet, as has been demonstrated above, absorbing Ballen's aesthetics is part of a broader artistic strategy of appropriation adopted by Yo-landi and Ninja in their attempt to "draw attention to the continued racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism in the postapartheid era" of what was proudly called the Rainbow Nation (Obbard and Cork 426).

Die Antwoord's artistic project cannot be dismissed as an exercise in potentially racist and misogynist commercial banality and iconoclastic controversy. Through their portrayals of exaggerated white trash "Zef" identity, they attack established social categories and fixed roles, and "celebrate social transgression and cultural contamination" (Chruszczewska 69), successfully utilizing "parody to destabilise white normativity as defined under apartheid" (Milton and Marx 25). Kitsch aesthetics and carnivalesque imagery, which the band unreservedly employ, become effective (and affective) tools to interrogate the rhizomatic qualities of South African identity. The strategy of a densely intertextual use of various cultural and artistic appropriations, visual and musical *objets trouvés*, emphasizes the fractured and fragmentary character of present-day postmodern, post-colonial, post-apartheid identity of South Africans: it is a provisional amalgam, formed with incongruous bits and pieces coming from various spheres and cultures, not all of them entirely authentic and independently original. By interspersing elements of kitsch with moments

of liminal angst, Die Antwoord show the true face of Zef: it blends the gold-capped-teeth smile of Ninja lighting a cigarette with an American banknote and the stern gaze of Sergeant F de Bruin, which poignantly emanates from an aestheticized black-and-white photograph.

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