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# ***DIE ANTWOORD GOOI ZEF LIMINALITY: OF MONSTERS, CARNIVALS AND AFFECTS***

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## **Abstract**

Traditionally considered to be the breeding ground of the monstrous, the limen is the non-place where hybrids congeal and mutate into extraordinary amalgamations. The latest cultural phenomenon of *zef* as embodied in the rap rave band *Die Antwoord* reveals precisely such a monstrous hybridity. *Zef* – a term describing white (predominantly Afrikaans) trash – automatically situates *Die Antwoord* as liminal outsiders and interlopers. In many ways, *Die Antwoord* resembles a circus troupe of freaks: front man Ninja is golem-like with his tattooed torso, Yo-landi Vi\$\$er resembles an acidic nymph and DJ High Tek plods along in the flanks.

My analysis builds and expands on recognised correspondences between the monstrous, the liminal and the carnival. I show how liminal aspects (both monstrous and carnivalesque) are cleverly co-opted by *Die Antwoord* into a monstrous carnivalesque extravaganza, whereby the liminal is converted into a suspended moment of consumption. The extent to which liminality is suspended and advanced as a consumable entity by *Die Antwoord* forms the primary focus of this investigation, after which the possibility of understanding the liminal in terms of affects is briefly explored. I argue that even that which is supposedly outside consumerist instrumentality, namely the limen, with its life-altering and transformative possibilities, can, to some degree, be aligned and made subservient to consumerist ideals.

By its very nature, the popular music industry thrives on a constant flow of novelty and the spectacular, with performers often resorting to obnoxious and offensive tactics in the hope of shocking audiences, thereby securing the promise of fame via disrepute. In this almost endless supply of “what is trendy” and “what is hot right now”, it is only the rare and extremely odd that can still claim fifteen seconds of fame. The South African rap rave ensemble,<sup>1</sup> *Die Antwoord* (*The Answer*) (Figure 1), might be considered to be such a rare instance on the fame radar given that they have been invading global screens and stages with a unique brand of debased consumer culture. Their outlandish appearance, unsavoury performances, controversial lyrics and provocative music videos capitalise unashamedly on being as offensive, vulgar, obnoxious, and distasteful as possible. This unbridled shock technique is unmistakably captured in the recent photograph of the female lead of the outfit, vocalist Yo-landi Vi\$\$er, mooning the crowd during the 2011 RAMfest rock festival held in Rawsonville in the Western Cape. *Die Antwoord* seems to knowingly defy being likeable or approved by its audiences in any straightforward manner: as revealed in innumerable discussions and comments on blogs and web pages, the ensemble is typically regarded as either as “awesome” or “loathsome”. In this article, I explore *Die Antwoord*’s deliberate venture into the liminal, closely examining the monstrous, and what I argue to be the carnivalesque spaces into which they lure their audiences.



Figure 1: *Die Antwoord*, 2009-2010. Photograph by Sean Metelerkamp. Courtesy of the artist.

To link the monstrous with the liminal is by no means a new undertaking, nor is connecting liminality with the carnival. In fact, the monstrous has been consistently unpacked in terms of its liminal ambiguity by several scholars, including Georges Canguilhem (1962), Donna Haraway (1991), Rosi Braidotti (2002) and Margaret Shildrick (2002).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, carnival and liminality have been correlated, for instance, by the anthropologist Edmund Leach (1961), who shows how the three-fold movement of ritualistic liminality corresponds to carnival. In this three-fold movement, the pre-liminal corresponds to masquerade, the liminal to inversion, and post-liminality to formality (Leach cited by Ladurie 1981:54).<sup>3</sup> In a related yet different context, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984 [1936]) interprets the Medieval and Renaissance folk tradition of the carnival through the works of Francois Rabelais, noting that carnival and the grotesque (or monstrous, for my purposes) share pertinent resemblances. Thus, the link between the

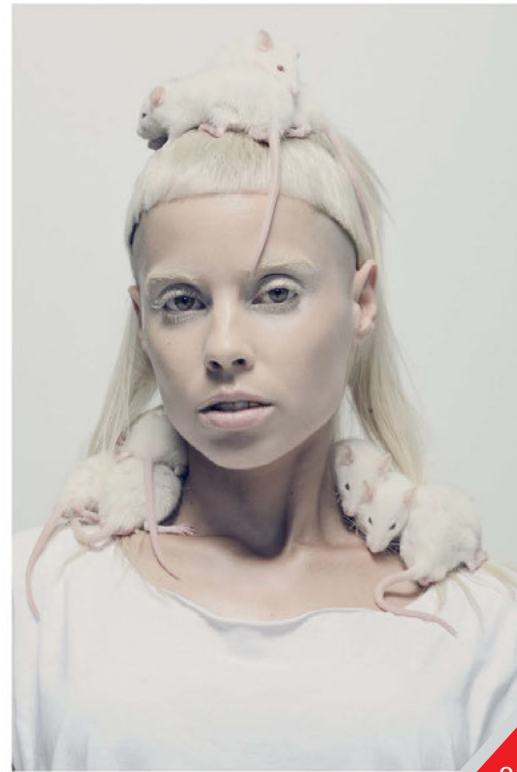
monstrous and carnival has already been historically established.

My analysis, therefore, builds on and expands these recognised correspondences between the monstrous, the liminal and the carnival. I show how these liminal aspects (both monstrous and carnivalesque) have been cleverly co-opted by *Die Antwoord* into a monstrous carnivalesque extravaganza, whereby the liminal is converted into a suspended moment of consumption. Indeed, the extent to which *Die Antwoord* advance a so-called 'suspended liminality' (Barrett 1998:478) as a consumable entity, forms the primary focus of this investigation, after which the possibility of understanding the liminal in terms of affects is briefly explored. It could accordingly be argued that even that which is supposedly outside consumerist instrumentality, namely the limen, with its life-altering and transformative possibilities, can, to some degree, be aligned and made subservient to consumerist ideals.



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**Figure 2:** Ninja, 2010.  
Photograph by © Ross Garrett.



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**Figure 3:** Yo-landi Vi\$\$er, 2010.  
Photograph by © Ross Garrett.

## The answer to what? *Watookal*<sup>4</sup>

*Die Antwoord* consists of front man Ninja, whose real name is Watkin (“Waddy”) Tudor Jones, previously known, amongst other things, for his *Max Normal* conceptual art projects. As Ninja (Figure 2), he mostly poses and performs shirtless, a tactic clearly not used to parade his toned, muscular torso but rather to show off his sinewy body adorned with (inauthentic) prison *tjappies* (stamps or tattoos) while ‘sporting his trademark pair of Pink Floyd shorts’ (Walker 2010). His look is completed by a block-cut hairstyle and ‘ersatz gold teeth’ (Poplak 2010), which may be interpreted as denoting the backlash of what has become a marginalised and abject white masculinity. Sean Brayton (2007:69) notes that

abject white masculinity has been popularised in films such as *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999) and *Jackass: The Movie* (Tremaine 2002), which represent a self-effacing masculinity, produced as ‘a spectacle of emasculation that is also a reassertion of the masculine ... An ironic white masculinity is produced, one that is self-marginalising and therefore implausibly victimised’.<sup>5</sup> Ninja thus represents a parody of white heterosexual masculinity, while simultaneously affirming what may be perceived as a repressed abject white masculinity. Through a double movement of effacement and affirmation, Ninja confronts his audience with a peculiar, yet gritty, masculinity.

Yo-landi Vi\$\$er (*aka Rich Bitch*) (Figure 3) can be described as an acidic nymph, a Tank Girl with an Afrikaans accent and a severe she-mullet (allegedly the ugliest



Figure 4: *Die Antwoord*, 2009-2010. Photograph by Sean Metelerkamp. Courtesy of the artist.

hairstyle a woman can wear (Urban Dictionary 2011). When on stage she ‘jumps around ... like a deranged Boer chipmunk, shouting Afrikaans obscenities into the mike’ (Walker 2010). It is difficult to decide whether Yo-landi is beautiful or scary. Her appearance veers between traditional categories of submissive female beauty (she is a diminutive blonde, at times innocent and child-like, dressed in schoolgirl attire, who sings sweet, charming vocals such as ‘I’m your butterfly’ (*Enter the Ninja*, *Die Antwoord* 2010), and overwhelming female prowess (she exudes dangerous sexuality, uses foul language, cohabits with rodents, and signals danger through her energetic behaviour). Thus, in accordance with Ninja’s abject masculinity, Yo-landi’s femininity also departs from stereotypical binaries typically taken up by female entertainers, namely the virgin or the whore. She warns her audience in advance of her trickery: ‘[a]g shame if

Yo-landi Vi\$\$er’s fuckin wif your brain/don’t think about it too much you’ll pop a fuckin vein’ (*In your face*, *Die Antwoord* 2010). Yo-landi is clearly in a league of her own.

Together, Ninja and Yo-landi form a yin/yang coupling of sorts (coincidentally, Ninja has a yin/yang tattoo on his back) – he a wasted anti-hero and she an imprudent goddess. The third member of the ensemble is DJ Hi Tek, a podgy and apparently mute *handlanger*<sup>6</sup> trailing along in the flanks to complete the absurd trio. They often collaborate with other peculiar artists such as the late Leon Botha,<sup>7</sup> who was one of South Africa’s longest surviving Progeria sufferers, and the Belville *voorstoep*<sup>8</sup> wonder boy Jack Parow.<sup>9</sup> *Die Antwoord* forms a clan of misfits or “freaks” in the circus tradition, who embrace their freakishness with such gusto that they raise it

to a level of adoration (Figure 4). In the following section, I argue that it is *Die Antwoord's* particular embodiment of 'the zen of zef' (Bloom 2010) that drives their audiences to grasp their unique blend of liminality.

## Zef liminality

Never seen zef so fre\$  
(*Enter the Ninja, Die Antwoord* 2010).

In the South African vernacular, *zef* denotes being "common" or "kitsch", and *zef* style 'is stereotypically associated with South African Caucasians of low-middle social-economic status' (Urban Dictionary 2011). Although the online Urban Dictionary states that, 'it is not necessarily a derogatory term', *zef* typically refers to "white trash" ("red necks") and has never been considered a reputable appellation until *Die Antwoord* and Jack Parow transformed it into a "cool" disposition. As noted by Chris Lee (2010) in the *Los Angeles Times*: 'Zef is indisputably the group's X-factor: the key to its fizzy menace, its otherworldliness and ribald sex rhymes'.

Historically, *zef* refers to the Ford Zephyr during the 1950s and 1960s, a car which was extremely popular amongst 'a particular group of South Africans'? the same grouping who 'also often wore a comb in their socks' (Urban Dictionary 2011). Coincidentally, the Ford Zephyr also became emblematic of the new era of mass consumption in the United States of America (USA) during the late 1950s and early 1960s, and was central to the arsenal of many American Pop artists of the time. Notably, the tailfin of automobiles (including the Ford Zephyr, amongst others) and jet planes were elevated to the status of Pop icons by artists such as James Rosenquist and Roy Lichtenstein.

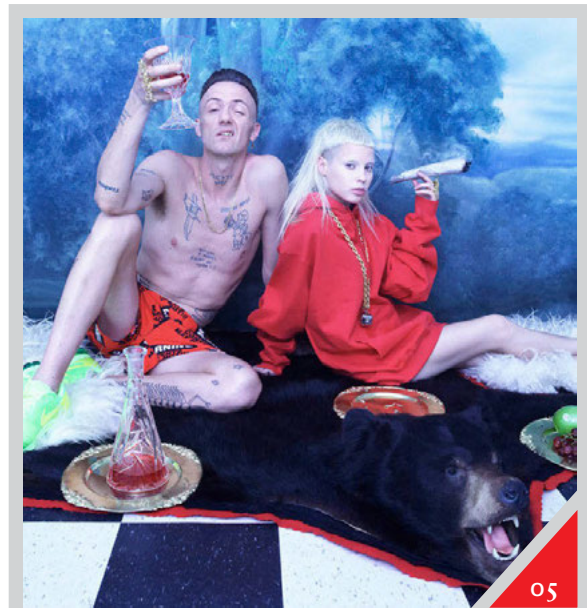


Figure 5: *Die Antwoord*, 2010.  
Photographs by Clayton Cubitt.©

In a South African context, the transformation of the Ford Zephyr into *zef* also deals with the rising popularity of the biker subculture during the same period. Bikers were commonly known for their raucous behaviour and ducktail haircuts, whereby the back of their hair was greased to form the shape of a duck's tail.<sup>10</sup>

In South Africa, other *zef* signifiers are identified as 'fur on the dashboard, tight mom jeans pulled up too high' and mullet hairstyles (Dombal 2010). In *Die Antwoord's* case, *zef* is aggressively cultivated into a transgression. Notably, Ninja's silk "Pink Floyd" pants (barely containing his genitals), the half-jack bottle of rum in his hand, the cell-phone tucked into his underpants, the *pantoffels* (slippers), the excessive gold adornment (bling) and the favouring of cheap materials and fake fur are all dead give-away *zef* signifiers (Figure 5). In what appears to be a deliberate attempt to obfuscate more than he would reveal, Ninja (cited by Nagel 2010) reflects on *Die Antwoord's zef* rap style: '[it is] the

ultimate style ... It's a full flex [to put up a fake front] ... It's an African style. It's not something you can really explain ... It's something you experience; like a video game when you reach the next level, that's basically zef. Zef is the next level'.

Here the impurity of *zef* appears to be invoked as an exalted hybridity. The language used by *Die Antwoord* is a cross between English and Afrikaans – although mostly a befouled Afrikaans (once a bastion of “purity” and “fastidiousness”) – that is now an underclass, joyously debased, *mélange* of Cape Coloured lingo as particularly embodied in the Cape Flats. Afrikaans is reduced to profanities and utilised for its so-called swearing abilities: ‘[e]n vat ‘n kans to rap in Afrikaans’ ... ‘ek rappie nou in Engels nie want eksie fokken lussie!’ (In your face, *Die Antwoord* 2010). Further, as Nederveen Pieterse (2001:220) points out, ‘hybridity problematizes boundaries’ and indeed, hardly any boundaries remain intact and unproblematised by *Die Antwoord's zef* performativity. They accurately describe themselves as ‘a lovable, mongrel-like entity made in South Africa, the love-child of many diverse cultures, black, white, coloured and alien, all pumped into one wild and crazy journey down the crooked path to enlightenment’ (*Watkykjy* 2011).

Clearly, *Die Antwoord* morphs *zef* into a hybrid masquerade, a play acting of trashiness, miming the original meaning with such over-compliance that a possible third position or ‘the next level’ of being (*zef*) is reached. It is also through creating a potential outside/external otherness to *zef* that *Die Antwoord* enters the liminal. Interpreted through Leach’s (1961) anthropological lens, the masquerade (which he associates with the pre-liminal) opens up the possibility for entering the liminal which is a ‘marginal state, a kind of “suspended animation” when the forward flow of ordinary social time has ceased’ (Merrell 1976:32). This inverted or ‘sacred time’

also allows the individual to assume ‘a role which is the direct antithesis of his [sic] normal role in society’ (Merrell 1976:32). It can be argued that the staged *zef* masqueraded by *Die Antwoord* creates a marginal and suspended dynamism that operates in opposition to the flow of conventional time, thus connoting the liminal.

The concept of liminality is well-theorised, especially in anthropological investigations into rites of passages in so-called traditional societies (see van Gennep 1960 [1909]; Turner 1969), whereas in contemporary reflections, liminality has become a ‘cross-disciplinary trope that means a disordered place of engagement with the unexpected and surprising’ (Herman 2005:471). Victor Turner (1969:95, 129), for instance, argues that,

[t]he attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the networks of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial .... [M]en are released from structure ... only to return to structure revitalized by their experience.

Evidently the transgressor of boundaries (or liminal persona) takes an ambiguous position in terms of societal structures, and the symbols associated with this transgression may be dark, wild and even evil. This might explain *Die Antwoord's* affinity not only for profanities, such as, ‘[h]ul ma se etterige poesse in vis paste jar’ (their mother’s septic vaginas [they keep] in fish paste jar[s]) (In your face, *Die Antwoord* 2010), but similarly for mythical demon creatures such as the *tokaloshi* as introduced in *Evil Boy*: ‘[r]oll through the club like a *tokaloshi*/little hairy African demon man with horse penis’ (*Evil Boy*, *Die Antwoord* 2010).<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 6:** Ninja donning monster claw, still from music video *Evil Boy*, 2010. Directed by Ninja and Rob Malpage. Screen capture by the author.

What becomes clear is that *Die Antwoord* works through their self-proclaimed mongrel and dubious origins in order to create the liminal space from where 'turbo boosted ill' (*Evil Boy*, *Die Antwoord* 2010) is launched.

However, entering liminality remains a heinous endeavour, as Stewart Motha (2010:300) explains in his analysis of Antjie Krog's *Begging to be black* (2009): '[it] is hazardous, the site of risk, exposure – but also opening the possibility of sharing, being-with, refusing the safety of clear positions and certain outcomes'. Jessica Brophy (2010:940, emphasis in the original) similarly confirms the incendiary nature of liminality: '[it] is the *experience of torsion* – the performative act of crossing (permeating) a *threshold*, a *transitional act*'. What thresholds are crossed in *Die Antwoord's* performative acts? Are racial thresholds traversed? Ninja (cited by Poplak 2010) proudly embraces his inter-racial state: 'I represent

South African culture. In this place, you get a lot of different things ... Blacks. Whites. Coloureds. English. Afrikaans. Xhosa. Zulu. Watookal. I'm like all these different people, fucked into one person'.

On the track *Evil Boy* (*Die Antwoord* 2010), Ninja performs with the Xhosa rapper Wangam, and addresses the culturally sensitive issue of remaining outsiders to traditional rites (Figure 7). The choice not to undergo ritualised circumcision, which, according to Xhosa tradition, turns a boy into a man, but rather to remain outside (in the liminal), refusing to re-enter societal space, is addressed graphically in the lyrics and music video. Staged in a dark setting of back street alleys, penis totems, with a hairy *tokaloshi* scurrying in the shadows, the dramatic rite is performed. Wangam belts: '[a]ndifuni ukuyaehlatini! (I don't want to go to the bush with you!)/ Sukubamba incanca yam! (Don't touch my penis!) [...] //incanca yam yeyamantobi! (This penis is for the girls!) (*Evil Boy*, *Die Antwoord* 2010). Considered from a traditional Xhosa perspective, the uncircumcised men are threshold people, fixed in-between two worlds? boyhood and manhood. Thus the track *Evil Boy* (*Die Antwoord* 2010), captures the liminal state in which the uncircumcised are suspended: '[n]diyinkwekwwe enkulu! (I am a big boy!)/ Angi funi ukuba yeendota! (I don't want to be a man!)/ Evil boy 4 life! Yebo!' (*Evil Boy*, *Die Antwoord* 2010). This state of suspension is, however, associated with a modality of evil, as conventionally structured social time is not accessed again.

It is however, from this outpost ('a mysterious force from the dark, dangerous depths of Africa' (Ninja cited by Dombal 2010)) that the initiated has to return to revitalise acknowledged societal formations. In other words, ritualised liminality presupposes a return to "normality", so that the wisdom gained from the liminal experience is put to broader use in society again.



**Figure 7:** Wanga performing, still from music video *Evil Boy*, 2010. Directed by Ninja and Rob Malpage. Screen capture by the author.

This concurs with Arnold van Gennep's understanding of the ritualised process, as explained by Gustavo Pérez Firmat (1986:xiii), namely that, 'liminality is a phase, a fleeting, ephemeral moment destined for supersession'. But as Pérez Firmat (1986:xiii) notes, it was, however, Turner who added a synchronic dimension to the concept and accordingly viewed liminality 'not only as a transition between states but as a state in itself'. This indicates that, '[w]hile for van Gennep the limen is always a threshold, for Turner it can also be a place of habitation' (Pérez Firmat 1986:xiv). However, in later years, Turner (1978:286) retracted his initial optimism about the liminal state, saying, '[i]t is true that I have ... stressed the potentially subversive character of liminality in tribal initiations ... but this potentiality never did have any hope of realization outside a ritual sphere hedged in by strong taboos'. Turner (1978:286) thus concedes that liminality is best restricted to ritualised rites and that any application of the term outside the ritualised realm would remain a mere metaphor. The

liminal is thus not thought of as a space to inhabit or to linger in, but a threshold to be passed through on the way to social reintegration.

The relevance of the above analysis of *Die Antwoord's* zef liminality lies in the possibility that this is indeed a case of being stuck in the limen. If their performance brings into being a dimension of suspended liminality, how can their work be interpreted? The only other reference to suspended liminality that I can identify is located within the discourse of schizophrenia,<sup>12</sup> which is an unstable terrain to negotiate. Is the liminal, as evoked by *Die Antwoord*, an endless suspended moment of consumable possibility? Have they become 'threshold people' in the truest sense of the word? In order to grapple with these questions, I relate *Die Antwoord* to the monstrous (freakish, grotesque), and thereafter identify the carnivalesque elements in their performances.



## A troupe of freaks?

Ninjas hung like a fokken horse/yeah girl! I'm a freak of nature

(*Evil Boy*, *Die Antwoord* 2010).

Whilst it is a slippery undertaking to use the label “freak” or “curiosity” without providing the necessary substantiation, I nevertheless propose that *Die Antwoord* can be likened to a playful troupe of freaks. Conventionally exhibited at fairs and circuses in a ritualised ‘ex-territorial space outside the official hierarchy’ (Carmeli 1992:71), freaks formed part of the outer space clearly demarcated from the safety of the inner-city sanctum. *Die Antwoord* appears to have fashioned their freakishness along similar lines: as self-styled Cape Flats impersonators, *Die Antwoord* invaded the ex-territorial space of the “interweb” with their *Zef side* semi-documentary (NINJA & Meterlerkamp 2010), and *Enter the Ninja* videos (NINJA & Malpage 2010), on *BoingBoing* and *YouTube* in 2010.<sup>13</sup>

In the style of banished freaks, they have conducted an onslaught on the inner-city gates through the viral (read un-official) networks of the Internet and have not followed the more “official” record label route typically pursued by musicians. Engaging with the growing channels of digital culture, the changing structures of the media industries, as well as media and technological convergence, *Die Antwoord* have mobilised cyberculture modalities to their own commercial ends. In so doing, they may be said to have invaded “official” urban spaces through unofficial means with their self-released \$O\$ mp3 album (*Die Antwoord* 2010), and their online videos, which attracted millions of hits in February 2010 alone. ‘Die Antwoord’s reputation has travelled fast by Internet; they fully lived up to it’ (Pareles 2010) reported *The New York Times* after the band’s successful performance at Coachella, Los

Angeles (a prestige festival for alternative bands). The members of *Die Antwoord* have acquired Internet celebrity status and attained internet stardom through their ingenious viral attacks, which in the digital age of social media has become a new, and highly effective, measure of stardom and success.

*Die Antwoord’s* viral freakishness can be said to be more of a self-made or self-proclaimed nature, in contrast to those born with ‘evident or congenital physical differences’ (Stephens 2006:492). This means the ‘physical oddities acquired’ by *Die Antwoord* are solely ‘for the purposes of exhibition’ (Bogdan 1988:234) and, one may add, for the purpose of shock, consumption and the spectacle. Robert Bogdan (1988:234) identifies ‘exaggeration and exoticization as the two most important techniques by which bodies are transformed into freaks’. Clearly this corresponds with Ninja’s ideas regarding his appearance when he states that, ‘I’m just engaging my inner zef, which everybody has. It’s not a persona; it’s an extension of myself, an exaggerated version of myself (Ninja cited by Nagel 2010).

Interestingly, this resonates with Bakhtin’s (1984:306 [1936]) view whereby ‘the exaggeration of the inappropriate to incredible and monstrous dimensions is ... the basic nature of the grotesque’. The grotesque, enacted through ‘exaggeration, hyperbolism, and excessiveness’ (Bakhtin 1984:303) is manifest in what Bakhtin (1984:317) terms the ‘drama’ of the ‘grotesque body’. How does *Die Antwoord* embody this drama of the grotesque body? By being more emaciated than fleshy; more disgusting than inviting. It is not surprising then that Ninja shows a pertinent likeness to Frankenstein’s monster, for both wear a block-cut hairstyle and put on miserable facial expressions. In the *Evil Boy* video (NINJA & Malpage 2010), he poses with a monster’s claw replacing his one forearm (Figure 6), reminiscent of the unfortunate protagonist Wikus van

der Merwe in the film *District 9* (Blomkamp 2009), who is transformed into a monstrous “Prawn” following biotechnological contamination by an extraterrestrial species. In a number of interviews, Ninja pledges his allegiance to Blomkamp’s dystopian depiction of South African differences ‘all fucked together’, to rephrase Ninja. Yo-landi in turn, squeals like the rodents she so adores, playing and petting them incessantly while suspending them upside down from their tails. Her monstrous aspects are most prevalent in the *Evil Boy* video (NINJA & Malpage 2010), in which she wears contact lenses that transform her into an albino-ghost and who alternately dons a jester-demon and rat suit.

It is therefore through strategies of exaggeration that *Die Antwoord* creates a grotesque masquerade of ‘non-normative corporealities’ (Stephens 2006:493), located beyond established westernised notions of acceptable aesthetic standards and attractiveness. Theirs is a push-pull attraction, a *fort/da* oscillation between pain and pleasure. In other words, their performances are conducted in the register of the monstrous or grotesque, and in this register, *Die Antwoord* captivate their audiences through awe and amazement. Following Margrit Shildrick (2002:17), the double bind of the monstrous is activated through,

the figure of the monster, like that of the freak, destabilizes and problematizes attempts to separate the category of the normal from the monstrous, the self from the other: “time and again the monstrous cannot be defined to the place of the other; it is not simply alien, but always arouses the contradictory responses of denial and recognition, disgust and empathy, exclusion and identification”.

The monstrous is thus a destabilising category that arouses contradictory responses and converging differences whilst resisting easy pairings. Furthermore, it may be argued that the monstrous liminal induced

by *Die Antwoord*’s rousing performances and guises also fall under the rubric of what may be identified as the contemporary carnival.

## The carnival is back in town

The Medieval and Renaissance carnival, as illuminated by Bakhtin, formed part of a larger whole or cosmology. The carnival occurred at a specific time and space set aside for the levelling of hierarchies, where peasants and priests could participate in the same festivity, reminding all of their indebtedness to mother earth and their frail mortality. It was Bakhtin’s aim to reintegrate ‘social life that official culture had destroyed’ (Yates 1997:22) through the revitalisation of the carnival tradition. Darren Webb (2005:122) notes that, ‘during carnival there is a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers’ so that, ‘all were considered equal’ (Bakhtin 1984:10, 15). Importantly, during the carnival, the ‘norms and prohibitions of usual life’ are suspended so that an ‘atmosphere of freedom, frankness and familiarity’ (Bakhtin 1984:15, 16) reigns. Carnival thus creates a space that resonates with liminality where hierarchies, boundaries and normal social time flow are inverted. As I have already suggested, carnival is also a time when the grotesque body ‘discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order’ (Bakhtin 1984:40).

The grotesque and the body accordingly form the most significant signifiers of carnival, although ‘the grotesque body should never be thought of as something complete, but rather as something becoming and dying, as part of a never-ending process’ (Lachman 1988-1989:150). In terms of the grotesque body in particular, ‘[t]he orifices of the body’ become important, the ‘ear, nose, mouth, vagina, anus’; ‘bod[ily] processes of eating, spitting, sucking, pissing, and copulating are all

lifted up', while 'body parts are juxtaposed and connected, defying easy recognition and levelling any sense of one part as private or public, good or bad, repulsive or attractive' (Yates 1997:23). Historically, the cultural capital of the carnival has been on the wane from the mid-seventeenth-century, maintained solely in the realm of literature (Webb 2005:123). However, in the late-twentieth-century, the carnival regained a register through which it can speak of equality, overthrow hierarchy and rejoice in the beauty of the lower bodily stratum, namely through rock and roll (Kohl 1993: 146). In this contemporary carnival of rock and roll, 'the high is degraded [and] the images of grotesque realism in rock and roll are associated with the lower bodily stratum and the exaggeration of the human body' (Halnon 2004:156). Within the framework of rock and roll, it does not take much imagination to link the zef rap-rave space fashioned by *Die Antwoord* with carnivalesque elements: for instance, their lyrics demonstrate an obsessive preoccupation with orifices (*poes, gwarra, piel, penis, poephol, arse, bum*), secretions and excretions (*spoeg; kak, shit, man-botter, slym-konyn*) and bodily processes (fucking, *honde-naaiers*).

Karen Halnon (2006:33) is clearly confident about the carnivalesque possibilities of rock and roll and in particular, of heavy metal, as a buffer against 'the dis-authenticating abilities of commercialism'. Following her four-year concert fieldwork, she claims that,

[h]eavy metal carnival breaks through the noise of commercial culture by raising the transgression ante to the extreme and challenging nearly every conceivable social rule governing taste, authority, morality, propriety, the sacred, and, some might say, civility itself. For fans, the freaky, bizarre, outrageous, and otherwise extreme aspects of the performance are important indicators of a band's dedication to the music and rejection of the forces of commercialism

(even sometimes amid commercial success) Halnon (2006:34).

Thus, Halnon interprets heavy metal as effectively carnivalesque in its resistance to commercialisation, complemented by its ability to create a community in which fans can be actively participant. This brings to mind Bakhtin's (1984:7) understanding whereby "[c]arnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates ...". Excluding these participatory elements, the extent to which the carnival evoked by *Die Antwoord* is mere spectacle requires some clarification. There is no doubt that during *Die Antwoord's* live performances they incite their fans to participate in the inverted time flow of carnival. A refusal of, or resistance to, commercial success is however not perceptible in their performances; indeed, they often refer to, and flaunt, their new found fame and fortune. It thus appears that in *Die Antwoord's* case, the concept of carnival is remobilised in the interests of commodification and commercial success. This calls for an examination of their performances as spectacle in a different register.

In a related sense, Lauren Langman's (2008) account of the carnival's contemporary revival reveals another significant social aspect. According to Langman, the contemporary revival of the carnival unbuttons another character than the feudalistic one. As Langman and Maureen Ryan (2009:477, 479) argue, 'we are witnessing the rebirth of the carnival, albeit as commodity, and with it, the emergence of a new social type, the "carnival character", which forms part of a "privatized hedonism"'. Whereas the medieval carnival acted as a 'safety valve' for societal resistance, 'carnivalization today ... also serves to contain some of the angers and frustration of contemporary life' (Langman 2008:660). A seminal difference, according to Langman (2008:660),

is however, 'that in late capitalist society, critique and resistance become incorporated within the society ...' and that 'carnivalization is the process by which various expressions of transgression and an esthetic of the grotesque are provided as commodities that keep in check the anger and discontent of a commodified, capitalist political economy in its global moment'. In other words, the concept of the carnival as a form of cultural resistance and 'an instrument of action toward some possible social progress' (Ladurie 1981:58) has diminished, and is more usefully understood as a commoditised/commercialised mode of cultural production and consumption that will at all times fold in on itself.

Following Guy Debord's (1995:26 [1967]) account of the spectacle here is insightful: 'the world of the spectacle ... is the world of commodity ruling over all lived experience'. Furthermore, he notes that, '[t]he commodity's mechanical accumulation unleashes a *limitless artificiality* in the face of which all living desire is disarmed. The cumulative power of this autonomous realm of artifice necessarily everywhere entails a *falsification of life*' (Debord 1995:44, 45, emphasis in the original) and even 'dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity as soon as the economics of affluence finds a way of applying its production methods to this particular raw material' (Debord 1995:38). This suggests that although carnival conveyed the promise of a new social order, the concept has been co-opted into the world of commodity; even as it converges with, and neutralises, it numbs all modes of resistance. Here I ask whether there is another way of moving beyond this modality of commodity determinism? Could the liminal and carnivalesque elements in *Die Antwoord's* performances be seen to operate, even as they fail dismally, through the avenue of hegemonic resistance as well as working through the drama of the grotesque body, namely its affects?

## Affected: the potential of liminality

Crush! Kill! Destroy! Gooi!/car-crash rap style!  
(*Evil Boy, Die Antwoord*, 2010).

According to Scott Lash (2010:4, 5, emphasis added), there are two major movements in global information societies, namely the ever expanding extensive drive of homogenisation and universalisation of multinational corporations, and the opposing movement of 'intensive culture' driven by the sheer pace of life, sexual relations, intense experiences with technologies, and shorter but intensive networks of work-groups. The politics of intensive culture hinges on notions such as post-hegemony (see Lash 2007), the so-called "ontological turn" and the subsequent "affective turn". Affects are pre-personal bodily experiences (not to be confused with emotions) that pierce the social through their intensity; they signify the body's capacity to interrupt social logic. Affects foreground the unpredictable autonomy of the body's encounter with the event, its shattering ability to go its own way. Brian Massumi (1995:88) explains the importance of the affective as follows: '[t]here seems to be a growing feeling within media and literary and art theory that affect is central to an understanding of our information- and image-based late-capitalist culture, in which so-called master narratives are perceived to have foundered'.

In an attempt to link Massumi's perception with Lash's concept of intensive culture (at the risk of rendering a highly complex discourse into caricature), I posit that politics are currently understood to flow through affects – those pre-personal experiences that order people's lives before they start making sense of them epistemologically or start resisting them through the politics of hegemony. According to Lash (2010:139), people no longer display resistance through hegemonic structures,

but rather, drift along, embedded in the ontological flow of intensities; power no longer works from the outside in (potestas) but rather, 'power enters into us and constitutes us from the inside' (*potentia*). To actualise resistance, to voice resistance, is perceived as hegemonic in its own right: it is therefore more effective to 'slip out' through the strategy of movement and the flow of potentialities (Lash 2010:146).

With regard to *Die Antwoord*, which speaks from a bastard threshold, what post-hegemonic potential do they bear? The post-hegemonic potential of *Die Antwoord* emerges from the carnivalesque affects they have on their audiences. *Die Antwoord* affects the audience before it can start making sense of their 'intoxicating', 'yet extreme otherness' (Dombal 2010). Perhaps this is exactly what Ninja (cited by Nagel 2010) tries to communicate when he remarks:

[y]ou wanna get deep? People try and dissect this s\*\*\*. Well this is getting deep: I'm only interested in the art that children make, that retarded people make and that criminals make. You see you have a subconscious function and a conscious function and between these two mental functions is a filter. In a child the filter is undeveloped and the stream of consciousness is unrestricted between the subconscious and the conscious. In a mental person the filter is either retarded or damaged. In a criminal that filter is not fully functional, so there's an unrestricted flow of information from the subconscious to the conscious. The most exciting thing in my life is to make art based on these ideas.

Without the filter, without the interference of the epistemological frame, one is opened up to the unrestricted flow of affects. In so many words, *Die Antwoord* (cited by Bloom 2010) says: '[t]he excitement that we transfer into the art that we make, the music and the visuals, translates into the excitement that people are experiencing worldwide. It's a mood transferral, really'.

Affectively speaking, *Die Antwoord stirs*, evokes, upsets and often shames. They transfer our mood. It is perhaps fitting to conclude with Yo-Landi's contribution on the matter when she (cited by Bloom 2010) muses: 'I think our style of music is like ... we make car-crash music. Like when there's a car-crash, everyone looks'. *Die Antwoord* launches a monstrous onslaught on our senses, they are affectively hazardous and about as thrilling as a car crash.

## Notes

- 1 According to the Urban Dictionary (2011:[s.p.]), rap rave is an 'Afrikaans style hip-hop music' that draws 'strongly from UK rave and grime culture'. The phenomenon is 'led by South African super group *Die Antwoord*'. In other words, rap rave is uniquely South African.
- 2 The use of the word "monstrous" here aligns with dominant readings of the term referring to the extraordinary in the sense of what is strange or unnatural, but also describes the disruptive and uncivil ways in which an object can be put to use.
- 3 Leach (cited by Ladurie 1981:54) does indicate, however, that the movement can also occur or start from the other side, namely starting with formality moving to liminality and then through masquerade to the post-liminal.
- 4 This is quoted from an interview with *Die Antwoord* as documented in the *Zef side* video (NINJA & Meterlerkamp 2010), where the narrator enquires about the meaning of the name of the group and asks Ninja: '[t]he answer to what?' and he quips, '[w]atookal. Fok'.

- 5 The discussion here does not pursue the trajectory of *Die Antwoord* and whiteness, but for an analysis on the topic, consult H Marx and VC Milton (2011).
- 6 *Handlanger* is the Afrikaans term for a sidekick or accomplice, literally meaning to extend the hand or make the hand longer through assisting.
- 7 Leon Botha (1985-2011) was an artist and music performer (aka as DJ Solarize), who exhibited photographs on hip-hop culture and collaborated with Gordon Clark on a photographic exhibition entitled, *Who Am I? ... Transgressions* (2009). He collaborated with *Die Antwood* and is very visible in the *Enter the Ninja* music video. Botha was diagnosed with Progeria (a rare genetic disease that causes early aging) at the age of four and was one of the oldest survivors of the disease when he died on 5 June 2011.
- 8 The *voorstoep* is the Afrikaans term for a front porch or veranda.
- 9 Jack Parow (real name Zander Tyler) originates from Bellville in the Western Cape – an area that has become a breeding ground for many new voices in the Afrikaans music industry. He has become famous in South Africa and elsewhere (especially the Dutch speaking parts of Europe) for his unique Afrikaans style of rap and, in particular, for the track *Cooler as Ekke* (Parow 2010). He often co-operates with other South African bands such as *Die Heuwels Fantasties* and *Fokofpolisiekar*.
- 10 The subculture of bikers probably originated from the United Kingdom, where the “duck tails” became notoriously legendary for their skirmishes with other subcultures such as The Mods at the “Second Battle of Hastings” in 1964, for instance. For a concise description of the infamous clash between The Mods and the Rockers, see Stanley Cohen (1972).
- 11 Apparently from Xhosa origin, the *tokaloshi* is a dwarf-like zombie who is enticed by witches and witchdoctors to undertake devious chores. *Die Antwood* also made a documentary on the *tokaloshi* entitled *Die Antwood investigate the African demon Tokoloshe* (2010) for VBS Television.
- 12 See Robert J Barret (1998) for an analysis of schizophrenia and suspended liminality. Barret (1998:478-479) explains the problems associated to an open-ended understanding of liminality particularly when linked to the treatment of schizophrenia:
- [f]or patients who have a diagnosis of schizophrenia, a striking feature of the trajectory is that it is indeterminate, open ended. It has no point of closure. ... But there is no corresponding official process that brings the trajectory to an end, nothing to ceremonially mark the person’s transformation back into health. ... they remain out there, suspended indefinitely – “chronics”.
- 13 Their *Zef side* video (NINJA & Meterlerkamp 2010), became part of an exhibit entitled *You Tube Play*, shown at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in October 2010.

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