

BRING THE LULZ

Die Antwoord Profile

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Male rats the size of human feet with shocking pink testicles writhe, frolic and teabag the forehead of the tiny, translucent South African towhead sporting a monk's tonsure and overgrown mullet. To the woman's right, a vertiginous Vanilla Ice type melts in the torpid heat of a Brooklyn warehouse-cum-restaurant. He stands erect for a photographer against a white backdrop clad in nothing but cotton underpants, espadrilles and an artillery fire of ersatz prison-yard tattoos, including a crude drawing of Casper the Friendly Ghost sporting a massive erection. It bears the insignia of this virally infamous duo's target demographic: EVIL BOY.

The second coming of G.G. Allin, performance art ruse, or perhaps a little bit of both? Tellingly, the tall creature known simply as Ninja covers his massive *Lord of the Rings*-style faerie-forest tattoo with concealer prior to the photo shoot. It's been rumored on the Internet, where this duo was born and will inevitably evanesce, that Ninja plans to have the forest tat removed via laser surgery. What remains, among many others, includes the laughably badass slogan, "If you don't like funerals, don't kick sand on a Ninja's face." Ninja recently had his penis tattooed and wasted little time waving the appendage at American journalists. It reads "Wat kyk jy" — Afrikaans for "What are you looking at?"

The Filthiest People Alive right now (and two of the funniest, even if it is tongue-in-cheek performance art) are the white-trash rave-rap gangstas known as Ninja and Yo-landi Vi\$\$er of the South African trio Die Antwoord — translation: "The Answer." This global pop act has spread, gonorrhoea-like, via a series of infectious homegrown music videos including "Enter the Ninja" and "Zef Side (Beat Boy)," which catapulted the maybe-married couple — with their masked laptop turntablist DJ Hi-Tek — from their Cape Town homes into ours earlier this year. Real-world stops along the way included Coachella in April for their live US debut; Interscope Records in Los Angeles, which signed the colorful act to a multi-territory deal; and New York in the heat of the summer, wowing the hipster hordes with a Milk Studios appearance in late June. They also eclipsed a disgraced M.I.A. with a powerful set during the HARD electronic music festival on Governors Island off Manhattan in July, followed by a cramped Williamsburg club performance the following night that was agro minus the quotation marks. Even if Die Antwoord isn't "real," they are real now. Indeed, it's the tension between real and fake that makes Ninja and Yo-landi pop, globally — it can be no coincidence that *The Ten\$ion* is the name of their next Interscope album. That pop factor is what made David Fincher attempt to cast Vi\$\$er as the bisexual computer hacker Lisbeth Salander, opposite Daniel Craig, in the American studio remake of *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, an offer Vi\$\$er waved away like a pesky housefly.

While it took six scant months to reach world domination, Ninja and Vi\$\$er did not emerge from thin air. They have been watching and waiting, trying and failing, plotting, planning and

priming under myriad incarnations since 1994. The following factors made the world safe for Die Antwoord: gangsta hip-hop in its descendant phase combined with rave culture in resurgence; Ali G-style meta pranks trickling down into viral video; cyberbullying teen trolls, a.k.a. “b-tards,” hooked on the “lulz,” or cheap thrills, of the anonymous 4chan on-line bulletin board; pop inauthenticity à la Gaga via *Gummo* (ugly is the new loud); anime, *Avatar* and tard chic — Die Antwoord’s unofficial fourth member is the art-world progeria icon Leon Botha, a.k.a. DJ Solarize; Next Level gaming culture, where teenage boys learn empowerment; dick-slanging, pussy popping and the Peaches-pilfered sissy-bounce bangers that fuel both underground viral dance crazes — deftly parodied by Ninja and Vi\$\$er in their videos and live performances; the self-mythologizing *maybe-they-are-or-maybe-they-aren’t* mystery chic of The White Stripes and a slew of other factors that have helped these self-proclaimed South African “national embarrassments” become global superstars virtually overnight. Vi\$\$er freely confesses from the makeup chair during the shoot that band members look the way they do “so that we can be drawn like cartoons.”

Ninja was born Watkin “Waddy” Tudor Jones in 1964, the year the Beatles broke big — that is, according to the Encyclopedia Dramatica; Wikipedia claims his birth year as 1974. Previous stints in the South African hip-hop scene include membership in the Original Evergreens, of which little is known, and MaxNormal.tv (R.I.P. 2002) in which Waddy’s MC avatar — the first of many — was a *Max Headroom*-like impresario whose gospel unfurled in the fist-waving format of a corporate motivational speaker, and whose personal assistant was then maybe-girlfriend Yolandi Visser, before she one-upped Too \$hort and Ke\$ha with multiple dollar signs in her surname. Then it was on to “underground supergroup” the Constructus Corporation (2002-2003), which begat a Gorillaz-style concept album and an 88-page coffee-table book called *The Ziggurat* (itself a mythical, futuristic floating shopping mall in the feverish imagination of its art-school educated creator) housed inside a hot-pink hardcover featuring hand drawings by Waddy and sinister, sing-along playground chants courtesy of one Annica the Snuffling, a.k.a. Yo-landi, who, during this phase of her career, allegedly published three romance novels and gave birth to a baby girl named Sixteen with Waddy. Somewhere in between emerged a line of Waddy-designed, Sanrio-inspired stuffed animals called *Fantastic Kill*, including the Back-to-Front Bum Demon — a tiny pink creature with a puckering anus for a face and a face for a bum.

Thus seeds were planted for Die Antwoord’s ambitious rap-rave assault, erupting in late 2009 with viral videos introducing the group’s entrancing bouillabaisse-style formula to the masses — *Gummo* and gangsta rap hybridized, transplanted to the culturally ascending South African suburbs, rebroadcast back to the Web via technology-trending site Boing Boing and finally YouTube. The group’s sudden fame reached a fever pitch even before the Coachella invite arrived. But in a brief chat during the shoot, the MC famous for dick-slanging in *Dark Side of the Moon* underpants, feigns awareness his Fame Monsterhood. “I don’t even watch YouTube,” the MC demurs. “I don’t know that much about it, except that the pictures are so small. I mean, we knew we needed to make videos and put music and some photographs on our website. But then the site crashed, so we put everything on YouTube.”

Through Boing Boing, we learned Ninja’s predilection for sloganeering in Afrikaans, one of twelve South African dialects, and the one most frequently spoken by rich conservative types. Die Antwoord tracks are punctuated with copious “vet klanks” and “wat poms” and both members repeat the same lock-step jargon in interviews, rarely straying from the established

script. Ninja: “Zef style is a higher state of being where you feel ‘full flex’; it’s ‘the next level,’ like when you play a video game.” Vi\$\$er: “Everybody has, like, an inner Zef. It’s like a zone where you’re on full flex, it’s, like, eye-level.” Ninja, sounding not unlike Russell Brand’s Aldous Snow character in those Hollywood comedies: “All of our music is personal, it’s just our lives presented in a nice general way.”

For teenage boys, who can’t distinguish between their Xbox and that *other* mysterious box, this is manna from heaven — indeed, the vagina plays a prominent role in the furiously popular Die Antwoord song “Jou Ma Se Poes,” which translates as “your mother’s pussy stuffed into a fish-paste jar.” Imagine 5,000 fans chanting this in pidgin Afrikaans, with hoodie-clad Ninja and Vi\$\$er egging them on from the lip of the stage, and you’ve gleaned the lightning in the bottle that is Die Antwoord. A hip-hop Connie and Raymond Marble from John Waters’ *Pink Flamingos* angling for the title of the Filthiest People Alive — and winning. Predictably, the cover art for the “Jou Ma Se Poes” single one-ups even death metal in the bad taste sweepstakes with its photographic depiction of a gaping female vagina suspended in formaldehyde and stuffed inside a glass specimen jar.

The Governors Island performance in New York was incendiary even after Internet postings from 4chan b-tards exposed Die Antwoord as a cultivated sham in the Wikipedia parody known as Encyclopedia Dramatica. On this night, Die Antwoord were seasoned pros in full command of their power to control and manipulate a large festival audience like rodents in a lab: they administer a shock, we jump in the air. After M.I.A.’s spectacular flameout in June — when she was unmasked in *The New York Times* as a faux-revolutionary turned Real Housewife of Beverly Hills — the second-billed Die Antwoord hijacked her thunder with their foul-mouthed taunts in gangsta mufti that enchanted and unleashed the rap-rave set, leaving the disgraced headliner to content with sound problems, sudden thundershowers and a mass exodus of concertgoers scrambling for Manhattan ferries. It was enough to force a beleaguered M.I.A. to abandon ship after a handful of songs, making it obvious who the true stars of the HARD Festival were. Twitter and Facebook status updates instantly took care of that.

The following afternoon, hours before Die Antwoord’s raucous Williamsburg debut, Ninja unleashes his roiling id in the form of black paint onto the bare walls of an industrial Bushwick garage. An annex of the tasteful brick-oven artisan pizzeria Roberta’s, packed to the brim with seersucker-clad Sunday brunch snobs and their over-accessorized toddlers, it’s the last place you’d expect to see Brooklyn gentry and their artisan pies a mere stone’s throw from giant rats crawling over the Filthiest People Alive. Hot as hell inside the garage, the cool professionalism of Ninja and Yo-landi nonetheless prevails during the photo shoot. It’s as though they have planned this moment for years. Specific to a fault, defiantly on-message and in character (many of the slogans on the walls come from his own tattoos) Ninja eschews wearing a prominent footwear brand, opting instead for self-curated items plucked from his own suitcase, including the *Dark Side of the Moon* underpants made famous by YouTube. A pair of male stylists in harem pants and tunics text and gab about Gaga near a rack of avant-garde fashions that go untouched during the shoot. Near the end of the day Ninja begrudgingly dons a medieval-style hood at the behest of another stylist. Vi\$\$er remains in the background for much of the day, doing as told until she is needed for a shot, a hair stylist rattling out her copious white mullet while an interviewer probes her on her rodent obsession back home, and why she didn’t want to be Lisbeth Salander.

“I knew that shit was fuckin’ fake,” an NME reader tweeted earlier that day on the Web. Word had been leaking out for weeks that maybe Die Antwoord’s street cred wasn’t as “real” as everyone surmised back in February, before the South Africans went Boing Boing all over YouTube. “New Yorkers don’t fall for that shit,” the tweet insisted. Except that they have, in a big way. And so will you, if you haven’t already succumbed. Die Antwoord’s black paint was all over the world in a matter of seconds, not unlike an oil spill or a juicy piece of Britney Spears gossip. For a group of white rappers from Cape Town, it’s an indelible reminder that anything can change in an instant now, no matter where you’re from or who you pertain to be — or better still, who you were before. How long you stick around is the hard part, but just sticking to the wall these days is enough. Something that calls itself “The Answer” implies a question — which in turn leads us back to one of Ninja’s many tattoos. What *are* you looking at? ■

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